Dr Faustus and Renaissance Learning

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Source: *The Modern Language Review*, Jan., 1956, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Jan., 1956), pp. 6-16

Published by: Modern Humanities Research Association

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3718255

# DR FAUSTUS AND RENAISSANCE LEARNING

'The knowledge of all Sciences, is so difficult (I will not say impossible) that all mans life will faile, before one small iote of learning maie perfitely be founde out.'[1] In spite of this assertion by Cornelius Agrippa, whose knowledge an Elizabethan translator compared with that of Socrates, the temptation to consider Marlowe's Dr Faustus a man of exceptional learning has been almost irresistible. John Bakeless, for instance, insists that 'he has mastered all the traditional "four faculties" of the early universities, any one of which was a lifework for anybody except the hero of a Marlowe play'. He concludes, therefore, that 'Faustus has thus exhausted all legitimate learning' and, because of his insatiable curiosity, must turn to the black arts.[2] To accept this view is to neglect ideas of knowledge and wisdom held by Renaissance humanists, who required, beyond mere learning, an assimilation of its ethical objectives. This neglect has been furthered by some critics who, following a traditional concept of Marlowe, examine the conduct of Faustus more to assess its revelation of the author's opinions than to account for the remarkably dramatic force of the play itself. Questioning this view of Marlowe as a subjective dramatist, I shall examine Faustus as a dramatic figure, consciously presented, who brings tragedy upon himself because of his limited and defective knowledge. This is not to say that his revolt is presented entirely without sympathy, since a questioning attitude towards the pedantries of contemporary ethical thought cannot be denied. Marlowe's dualism seems to be a distrust of extremes, whether in conventional ethics or empirical revolt. And whether Faustus attacks the one or indulges the other, he commands the sympathy of spectators because his struggle with the two is his tragic conflict.

It is to be admitted that this study itself started from a prejudice against that approach to Marlowe's writings which would see his heroes as an expression of his own rebellious attitude towards a traditional ethical pattern. Yet, a re-examination of the play will, I believe, show that Marlowe's first concern was to present a morally unsound character whose life is movingly tragic.

Whatever unconventional ideas were entertained by men like Raleigh and Chapman, their writings evinced a conscious respect for the aims of contemporary learning. Likewise, Marlowe portrayed Faustus in relation to these aims, emphasizing their significance through his failure to understand and live by them. Through the conduct of Faustus, he presented sloth as the well-spring of intellectual and spiritual blindness, and, as Lily B. Campbell has shown,[3] maintained the powerful intensity of the action through the inclination of Faustus to despair of God's mercy. He is, indeed, limited in the wisdom, achieved through study and experience, which should govern his daily life. When his claim to mastery sounds most impressive, it only emphasizes the pride against which learning was to fortify man. According to William Kempe, study was

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[1] *Of the Vanitie and Vncertaintie of Artes and Sciences*, tr. James Sanford (London, 1596), p. 4. For a more extended statement of this idea, see William Fulbeck's *A Direction or Preparation to the study of the Lawe* (London, 1600), p. 12.

[2] *Christopher Marlowe: the Man in His Time* (New York, 1937), pp. 129–30.

[3] 'Dr Faustus: a Case of Conscience', *PMLA*, LXVII (1952), 219–39.

to keep the mind therefore from sluggishnes the mother of all vice, to make it expert in wisdome & vertue by cõtinual exercise, to beate downe the pride thereof in manifesting by experience that it is not able to attaine to the full perfection of knowledge.[1]

Faustus is afflicted with this pride when the play opens and is dissatisfied because of a surfeit induced by ill-digested gleanings from his reading; yet the more he inveighs against traditional studies, the more he betrays the limitation of his understanding. No wonder he turns to the black arts; from all his store of information he can draw no temporal guidance or spiritual consolation.

A few noteworthy principles governed the Elizabethan concept of learning, and these were thought to embrace everything that would contribute to happy living. These principles included the pursuit of self-knowledge, faith in man's spiritual destiny, the acceptance of responsibilities to society, and proof of wisdom in conduct. In brief, the end of learning was to prepare individuals for better service to both God and the state. This sentiment is fundamental, as may be judged from its recurrence in a variety of writings, such as books on courtesy, law, religion, medicine, rhetoric, and education.

'Know thyself' is an imperative which the Renaissance inherited from the ancients, who looked upon self-knowledge as the basis of all wisdom:

As touching this point the example of *Socrates* is verie memorable, and to be imitated, who being demanded what the world was, answered, that since he had any iudgement he gaue himselfe to seeke out the true knowledge of himselfe, which yet he could neuer finde. But so soone as he attained thereunto, then would he seeke for other things.[2]

Joseph Hall characterized the Wise Man as one who is not opposed to learning anything, but who desires first to know his own strength and weakness, and to reduce his knowledge to practice rather than mere discourse.[3] Without adequate self-knowledge, a man has insufficient ability either to govern himself, or to interpret and use other knowledge wisely, a point of view which obtains throughout Sir John Davies' *Nosce Teipsum*.

Further, the pursuit of knowledge was intimately related to man's spiritual destiny, as can be seen in Fulke Greville's 'A Treatise of Humane Learning'. Not heeding this objective, men maintain erroneous opinions, become guilty of impieties, and destroy themselves, because they have no adequate knowledge of the end of their lives or of the divine will by which they live. They fail to see that

> . . . learning's truth makes all life's vain war cease;
> It making peace with God, and joins to God.
> . . .
> Besides, from perfect Learning you can never
> Wisdom with her fair reign of passion sever.[4]

Renaissance philosophy, both political and social, was inseparable from theology; hence continued insistence upon the Biblical idea that the fear and knowledge of God is the beginning and perfection of all wisdom. The aim of this philosophy was sound morality characterized by temperance and orderly living.

[1] *The Education of children in learning* (London, 1584), H2.
[2] Peter de la Primaudaye, *The French Academie*, tr. T.B. (London, 1586), pp. 161–2.
[3] *Heaven Upon Earth and Characters of Vertues and Vices*, ed. Rudolf Kirk (New Brunswick, 1948), p. 147.
[4] 'The Tears of Peace', *The Works of George Chapman: Poems and Minor Translations*, ed. A. C. Swinburne (London, 1875), p. 117.

Thomas Hill linked the foregoing aims of study with an understanding of social responsibility: 'It is true (gentle Reader) that the first and principalist poynt of wisedome is to knowe God, the second to knowe our selves, and the thirde to knowe our duties towardes our neighbours.'[1] These writers noted further that one kind of knowledge without the others can never be sincere or perfect. This view merged the wisdom of ancient Greece with the practical advice of Christ, who insisted that a regard for the welfare of others is a necessary part of the good life.

All of the foregoing aims must be proved in conduct. Sir Philip Sidney insisted that to be wise and profitable, all studies should have a foundation in 'the knowledge of man's selfe, in the Ethike and politique considerations, with the end of well doing, and not of well knowing onely... the ending end of all earthly learninge being vertuous action'.[2] And Thomas Lodge introduced Seneca 'To the Courteous Reader' with this reminder:

> It is lost labour in most men now-a-dayes whatsoeuer they haue studied, except their actions testifie that readings haue amended the ruines of their sicke and intemperate thoughts: and too pregnant a proofe is it, of an age and time ill spent, when as after a man hath summed vp the account of his dayes that are past, hee findeth the remainder of his profits, he should haue gotten in life, to be eyther ambition vnsatisfied,... or vain vnderstanding boulstered by pride.[3]

Following a medieval interpretation of idleness,[4] Renaissance writers related sloth to both inadequate knowledge and ultimate despair. A man of sloth is known by the delight he takes in evil, by his failure to know what is truly good, by his deficient insight into wisdom that is needful and his proneness to dispraise it, and by his neglect of repentance till faint-hearted under the burden of sin he despairs of God's grace.[5] Under the general heading of sloth, *Two Guides to a good Life* emphasizes particularly a delay in the acquisition of proper wisdom and the pursuit of salvation.[6] Such delay fosters an inclination to despair, and arises from irresolution, from time misspent at unimportant study or other activity, from 'Bad feare' which imagines that difficulty or pain is greater than it is. After treating these aspects of sloth, the author adds an observation which is particularly applicable to Faustus:

> Omission is a kinde of sloth, whereby we let slippe the knowledge of such thinges as we ought to knowe, or the prosecution of such thinges as we ought to doe, and this is the faulte of those that being cõmaunded to watch and pray, ouerpasse that duety by the means of being imploied about worldly vanities, or of such as know that god is the gracious giuer of all those benefites which they enioy, and yet forget to giue him thanks for the same, or resoluing upon some good worke to the aduauncement of gods glory and the profite of the common wealth, are carried away through the streame of their owne affections and so leaue it vnfinished.[7]

[1] *The Contemplation of Mankind* (London, 1571), 'The Preface to the Reader'.
[2] 'The Defense of Poesie', *The Complete Works of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. A. Feuillerat (Cambridge, 1923), III, 11–12.
[3] The preface to Lodge's translation of *The Workes of Lucius Annaeus Seneca* (London, 1614).
[4] See Robert of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne*, ed. F. J. Furnivall; E.E.T.S., o.s. no. 119 (London, 1901), part I, pp. 143 ff. Manning gives wide scope to 'accyde', the deadly sin of sloth. His illustrative tale of the English squire who put off repentance is an excellent example of sloth hardening a man in the neglect of spiritual wisdom and faith until despair overtakes him and he is carried off to hell.
[5] *The kalẽder of shepherdes* [tr. R. Copland] (London, 1528), F 4 ff.
[6] *Two Guides to a good Life* [sometimes attributed to Bishop Hall] (London, 1604), G 8 ff.
[7] Ibid. H 6$^{v}$–H 7.

Even though very active, a man may be the victim of sloth thus defined; and, no matter how much information he may gather, he remains deficient in a mastery of ethical principles needed to guide his life and sustain his faith.

By such criteria was measured the erudition of the Renaissance man, and we may profitably apply the same to Dr Faustus. He has not, indeed, mastered any of the aims of learning sufficiently to make it a guiding principle of his life. Though he protests against traditional studies, his actions prove their worth negatively in spite of all the arguments he can offer. Both his words and actions show that his tragedy results from culpable ignorance, and not from any superior attainments that set him at odds with conventional thinkers. Moreover, the feverish intensity of his misdirected activities conforms ironically to the traditional pattern of sloth outlined above.

The prologue describes Faustus' profits in divinity as an unusual ability to dispute. This comment on men 'whose wit and virtue is in their tongues, hot disputers, busy talkers, taunters, and fault-finders with others, rather than menders of themselves',[1] is an apt description of the Faustus introduced in Act I. That his disputations 'In the heavenly matters of theology' do not represent true learning is apparent in the lines which evaluate his accomplishments. He has disputed,

> Till swoln with cunning, of a self-conceit,
> His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
> And, melting, heavens conspir'd his over-throw.[2]

This statement suggests both the pride and false assumptions against which William Kempe wished to direct education; furthermore, it is a branch of sloth condemned in those found 'Labouring to cōfoūde others by force of language, For to be called wyse'.[3]

The initial comment by Faustus himself announces his intention to be merely 'a divine in show' (I, i, 3). Immediately rationalizing his contempt for traditional studies, he states half-truths as if they were the sum of wisdom. For instance, he quotes parts of two important Biblical texts as a basis for his subsequent arguments and actions. 'The reward of sin is death' (I, i, 38), he declares, suppressing, 'but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord' (Rom. vi. 23). He continues with, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us' (l. 40). Again he omits a consoling promise which could allay his doubts: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (I John i. 8–9). Elizabethan spectators would have been able to complete his quotations and thereby to discern his sophistry. Thus corrupting the use of reason to undermine the basis of his faith, Faustus offers proof of Milton's assertion that 'a wise man will make better use of an idle pamphlet than a fool will do of sacred Scripture'.[4]

His treatment of Aristotle and logic is comparable to his abuse of theology. Now

[1] *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer*, ed. J. E. Cox; Parker Society, XVI (Cambridge, 1848), p. 14.

[2] 'Prologue.' The edition used for all references to the play is 'The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus', ed. F. S. Boas in *The Works and Life of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. R. H. Case (London, 1932), vol. v.

[3] *The kalēder of shepherdes*, G 2.

[4] 'Areopagitica', *The Works of John Milton*, ed. F. A. Patterson, *et al.* (New York, 1931), IV, 315.

weary of disputations which he cannot liberate from the dominance of scholastic principles, Faustus discards philosophy with this self-revealing statement:

> Is, to dispute well, logic's chiefest end?
> Affords this art no greater miracle?
> Then read no more; thou hast attain'd that end. (I, i, 8–10)

If, indeed, disputation were the sole end of logic, he would be right, but herein he betrays his limitations: he cannot see truth as the end and logic as a mere tool. He is like scholastics described by Agrippa, men who made logic 'nothing but a skilfulnes of contention and darknesse, by the which al other sciences are made more obscure, and harder to learne'.[1] Cloyed with this method which he has confused with philosophy itself, Faustus can neither achieve independence of investigation nor absorb the wisdom contained in his reading. Unlike Raleigh and Bacon, who questioned current methods of study and yet clung to fundamentals of theology and philosophy,[2] he rejects both studies as worthless. He is a false logician, they were learned men.

With the inconsistency of a shallow mind, Faustus resurrects the logic he has just buried to discard both medicine and law: the one, because it cannot sustain life indefinitely or enable him to raise the dead; the other, because he considers it fit only for a mercenary drudge. His argument brings to mind Agrippa's comment on sophistry as an exercise in which

> vniuersally at this daie well neare all the companie of Scholers, beinge occupied in a miserable and damnable studie, seeme to doe nothing more than to learne to erre, and with vnceasing contention, either to make the truth more obscure, or vtterly to loose it.[3]

True to this medieval sophistry, Faustus refuses the salutary parts of medicine and the social benefits of law, because neither science lends itself to the fulfilment of his impossible aspirations. His attitude towards ordinary studies amounts to scorn for common humanity, including its needs and potentialities. Burdened with this attitude, he fails to understand himself as an ordinary man and sloughs off his social responsibilities and sympathies.

That he has amassed a great deal of information cannot be denied, and with such methods it is no wonder that he can impress others under his tutelage, or 'make [their] schools ring with *sic probo*' (I, ii, 2). His own words also provide evidence of a superficial grasp of the studies about which he talks; however, he speaks of their limitations only and the knowledge he displays is negative. He complains of a surfeit because, like those who earlier ran aground in the shallows of scholasticism, he has confounded the methods and ends of study in a depressing jumble. The result is his extreme discontent, a state of mind abhorred during the Renaissance because of the evil which it provoked.[4] There is no evidence that he is interested in truth, which, even though it was admittedly impossible of attainment, was the chief incentive behind humanistic quests for knowledge.[5] His quest has become

[1] Agrippa, *op. cit.* p. 21.

[2] See E. A. Strathman, *Sir Walter Raleigh: a Study in Elizabethan Skepticism* (New York, 1951), ch. 7; and F. H. Anderson, *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (Chicago, 1948), ch. 16.

[3] Agrippa, *op. cit.* p. 23.

[4] In 'Christs Teares ouer Ierusalem', *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. R. B. McKerrow (London, 1904), II, 130, Nashe declares that 'Nothing so much prouoketh God to iudgement as discontent. . . . Nothing in this life reuengeth he so much as it.'

[5] See M. Palingenius, *The Zodiacke of life*, tr. B. Googe (London, 1588), p. 96; and Milton, 'Areopagitica', pp. 338–9.

a craze for power, yet his predicament betrays a want of intellectual honesty and prudence needed to control whatever power he may attain. Characteristic of his study is a habit of culling from his readings whatever details strike his fancy. His inward conflict is the result of this erroneous approach to learning, and his boasted wisdom is nothing more than his own delusion.

He aspires to command 'All things that move between the quiet poles' (I, i, 57). His pride will brook nothing less than the state of a demi-god. Determined to tire his 'brains to gain a deity' (l. 64), he attempts to circumvent his limitations as a man. Of necessity, therefore, he rejects the wisdom of studies which record human thought and experience. He refuses the warning of the Good Angel to 'lay that damned book aside' (l. 71), for he does not detect in such reading the deadly sin of sloth, 'the fault of such as break their braine aboute the studie of mischiefe'.[1] More enticing to him is the voice of evil:

> Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art
> Wherein all Nature's treasure is contain'd:
> Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,
> Lord and commander of these elements. (ll. 75–8)

He is 'glutted with conceit of this' (l. 79) and meditates the errands of spirits who will 'Resolve [him] of all ambiguities' (l. 81). In this vain hope he turns to magic and the devil.

Yet his trial of magical arts again exposes his false assumptions about the mastery of knowledge. Praising the virtues of magic, he proclaims arrogantly,

> Now, Faustus, thou art conjuror laureat,
> That canst command great Mephistophilis. (I, iii, 34–5)

Mephistophilis does come, but in answer to the question, 'Did not my conjuring speeches raise thee? ', he replies:

> That was the cause, but yet *per accidens*;
> For, when we hear one rack the name of God,
> Abjure the Scriptures and his Saviour Christ,
> We fly, in hope to get his glorious soul;
> Nor will we come, unless he use such means
> Whereby he is in danger to be damn'd.
> Therefore the shortest cut for conjuring
> Is stoutly to abjure the Trinity,
> And pray devoutly to the prince of hell. (ll. 47ff.)

This situation is ironic. Any man can blaspheme and thereby exchange obedience to God for subservience to devils, though he possess no magic whatever. This part of the action symbolizes a deep spiritual truth, for the devil, in the insubstantial guise of evil and temptation, will accompany any man who abjures the Holy Trinity.

Faustus is still at liberty to decide how far he will pursue this dangerous course. Even a limited understanding of spiritual wisdom would enable him to make a wise choice, for in reply to his questions, Mephistophilis gives answers which could be taken as moving arguments against self-damnation. He states that Lucifer, the angel most loved of God, was damned because of his aspiring pride and insolence. Lucifer is, in effect, a mirror in which Faustus could see himself. But he is so blind

[1] *Two Guides to a good Life*, H 5.

that he is not even moved by the involuntary outburst of Mephistophilis, who for the moment is forgetful of his devilish mission:

> Why this is hell, nor am I out of it:
> Think'st thou that I, that saw the face of God,
> And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
> Am not tormented with ten thousand hells,
> In being depriv'd of everlasting bliss? (ll. 78–82)

This is an agonized cry from the darkness of hell, the astonishing passion of which would pierce the understanding of any but the most benighted soul. That Mephistophilis has no intention to tutor Faustus does not lessen the persuasive force of his eloquence. For this reason Faustus the more deeply shocks spectators with his insensitive reply:

> What, is great Mephistophilis so passionate
> For being deprived of the joys of heaven?
> Learn thou of Faustus manly fortitude,
> And scorn those joys thou never shalt possess. (ll. 85–8)

'Irresolution [or] a hanging of the minde between two opinions'[1] is another phase of sloth which attacks Faustus while he debates whether to sign the bond. This he settles by choosing (without much thought) to despair of God's mercy, but here the absence of intensity implies that his toying with this idea is little more than his habitual rationalization to justify whatever he wishes to do:

> Now, Faustus, must
> Thou needs be damn'd, and canst thou not be sav'd.
> What boots it, then, to think on God or heaven?
> Away with such vain fancies, and despair;
> Despair in God, and trust in Belzebub. (II, i, 1–5)

When the angels next enter to vie for his soul, he gives more proof of his small insight into salvation: 'Contrition, prayer, repentance—what of these?' (II, i, 17). To him they signify nothing, neither the means to bring him to heaven nor the fruits of lunacy. Excited by wealth which the Bad Angel suggests, his thoughts are too material to probe deeply into knowledge either good or evil. Moreover, as a magician he will be more concerned with power than with the mastery of an art, because, for him, necromancy is only a means to the impossible material ends he desires. Yet, before signing the bond, he must again indulge his idle curiosity to no purpose. He asks questions to which Mephistophilis gives more significant replies: devils tempt men to enlarge their kingdom because misery loves company; the pains of hell are more intense than any human suffering known on earth. Even if this testimony is inadequate, Faustus, who has awaited miracles, could be impressed by the revolt of his blood against signing a pact with Lucifer. Instead, he thaws his blood with fire provided by a devil and concludes the pact with '*Consummatum est*' (II, i, 74), a blatantly irreverent use of words spoken at the climax of Christ's passion. He even ignores the significance of '*Homo fuge*' (l. 77) written on his arm, because he is without the wisdom to read these signs aright.

He hands Mephistophilis the bond to his soul, adding to the horror of his act this flippant reply, 'Ay, take it, and the devil give thee good on't' (l. 113). Both his attitude and his behaviour are the more shocking because he can hardly imagine his subsequent anguish when there is time to think of their probable consequence.

[1] *Two Guides to a good Life*, H4.

Equally disturbing is his light-hearted opinion of hell, which he chooses to think a fable; and the reply of Mephistophilis is ironically prophetic: 'Ay, think so, till experience change thy mind' (l. 129).

If it were certain that Faustus could and would follow only a path that leads to the destruction of his soul, his subsequent career would not inspire the tragic emotion and sympathy for which the play is memorable. He would, instead, be remembered merely as a creature of monstrous opinions and actions dashing through a series of melodramatic episodes. The effect produced by his role is different because, in spite of his evident folly and evil, his spiritual welfare remains in doubt till the final scene of the play. It is not his pact with Lucifer that constitutes his unpardonable sin, and, though he has already thought of despair, there is nothing inescapable about the hold it as yet exerts upon him; hence the exciting rhythm of his alternating moods which establish and maintain the pattern of his inner tragedy.

This pattern of alternating moods becomes apparent in the next scene, when, dissatisfied with his bargain, he wishes to repent but shifts the blame for his evil from himself to Mephistophilis. This refusal to admit his own responsibility is another argument that he has not absorbed sufficient knowledge of spiritual principles. His obviously sincere desire to inherit heaven is, therefore, inadequate as an atonement for his sins. To the spectator who is familiar with the theological issue involved, it is obvious that to save himself Faustus must bow before God in humility. He must offer sincere penance rather than evasive rationalization, but only adequate knowledge of himself as a sinful man, as well as of Christ the merciful redeemer of erring man, can rescue Faustus from his dilemma.

When the Good Angel reminds him that he may still call upon God and be saved, the Bad Angel cannot deny this hope, though he does interject, 'Ay, but Faustus never shall repent' (II, ii, 17). Blind to this opportunity and his responsibility for his salvation, he thinks again of despair, even of suicide (ll. 18 ff.). Soon, however, he casts off his penitent mood by foolish defiance:

> Why should I die, then, or basely despair?
> I am resolv'd; Faustus shall not repent. (ll. 31–2)

This is the outburst of an egoist who would be independent of both man and God, but who will suffer his greatest agony when at last aware that he wants, above all things, the fellowship of both. His further abandonment to temporary pleasure, frustrated by periodic regrets, brings to mind Chapman's comment in 'To Young Imaginaries in Knowledge':

> True learning's act
> And special object is, so to compact
> The will, and every active power in man,
> That more than men illiterate, he can
> Keep all his actions in the narrow way
> To God and goodness, and there force their stay,
> As in charm'd circles. Termes, tongues, reading, all
> That can within a man, call'd learned, fall;
> Whose life is led yet like an ignorant man's;
> Are but as tools to gouty artisans
> That cannot use them.[1]

[1] *Works*, pp. 158–9.

While spectators wonder whether Faustus can use his tools to his own advantage, an answer comes when he engages Mephistophilis in a futile discussion of astronomy, only to discover that Wagner is equally well informed. More ironic still is evidence that Faustus is not getting as much as he bargained for in giving his soul to Lucifer, for Mephistophilis refuses to discuss any question which attests the supremacy of God. When Faustus thinks again of repenting, the angels come to him once more, and for the first time the Good Angel has the last word before they depart. What he says is sufficient to arm Faustus against the threat of devils: 'Repent, and they shall never raze thy skin' (II, ii, 84). This assurance, as well as the failure of Mephistophilis to live up to his bargain, could be a cue for Faustus to assert his right to freedom. Only a deficiency of courage, wisdom and faith deters him. In agony he cries,

> O, Christ, my Saviour, my Saviour,
> Help to save distressed Faustus' soul. (ll. 85–6)

Though this is a step in the right direction, the question remains whether Faustus can understand that God's help begins where man's extremity ends. He must rouse himself to claim offered grace, or his sloth will bring him nearer to final despair.

Aware of this crucial moment, Mephistophilis comes in with Lucifer, who insists that Faustus must be damned because Christ is just. If he understood the true mission of Christ, Faustus could reply that God's mercy outweighs his justice, that suffering is a way to draw man unto God. This is his opportunity to use his one unquestioned talent, the ability to dispute. But unable to muster the knowledge and courage to exercise it, he succumbs to fear and rededicates himself to the devil. If witnessed by a man of sound learning, the ensuing pageant of Seven Deadly Sins would be a warning against sin; to Faustus, however, it is merely a diversion which enables him temporarily to ignore his spiritual agony. His pursuit of magic, which carries him on diverting flights throughout the world, and the foolish tricks he plays on others also provide little more satisfaction than a momentary escape from his spiritual problem. In both he is like the slothful condemned because 'they lerne thynges whiche ben euyll, Or thynges y$^{t}$ ben onely for to make folke laughe'.[1]

Aware that his twenty-four years are nearing an end when he returns to Wittenberg, he admits that he is a man condemned to die and once more thinks of despair. Even here it is a passing thought, however; for, instead of giving up his spiritual struggle or becoming truly penitent, he toys lightly with the idea of salvation:

> Tush! Christ did call the thief upon the Cross;
> Then rest thee, Faustus, quiet in conceit. (IV, v b, 27–8)

To spectators who have observed his alternating moods, it is obvious that he has given but little thought to this reminder voiced by Robert Greene: that men should not presume too far, lest they outbid their time; or despair, lest they reject mercy which God may offer them at the very last.

To this doth the golden sentence of *S. Augustine* allude, which hee speaketh of the theefe hanging on the Crosse. *There was* (saith hee) *one theefe saued and no more, therefore presume not; and there was one saued, and therefore despaire not.*[2]

[1] *The kalēder of shepherdes*, G 2.
[2] *The Repentance of Robert Greene*, ed. G. B. Harrison; the Bodley Head Quartos (London, 1923), pp. 27–8.

The indifference of Faustus to this moderation intrudes a threat that he may well squander all his opportunities to be saved.

That there is definitely still time to repent is affirmed by the Old Man who comes to warn him against further dabbling in magic. Faustus has as yet 'offended like a man' (v, i, 41), he still has 'an amiable soul' (l. 43). The sympathy with which the Old Man entreats Faustus revives his penitent mood, but the important question is whether he can assert the will and have the faith to be forgiven. This is a real test, 'for knowledge and will, both attributes of God, are the principal foundations of human action'.[1] Having but little of either, however, Faustus nears complete despair when, with a tenderness meant to beget an impulse to salvation, the Old Man persuades him against suicide:

> Oh, stay, good Faustus, stay thy desperate steps!
> I see an angel hover o'er thy head,
> And, with a vial full of precious grace,
> Offers to pour the same into thy soul:
> Then call for mercy, and avoid despair. (v, i, 68–72)

These words bring comfort to the soul of Faustus, but his acceptance of grace depends upon his assertion of faith, which is an assured hope and confidence in Christ's mercy. With this confidence he could realize that true faith brings knowledge and happiness, but without such faith, his action depends upon whatever knowledge he can muster. That he is without the attributes of spiritual wisdom may be seen by a glance at William Perkins's summary: 'The first is, that by it a Christian sees his own blindness, ignorance, and vanitie.... The second is, that the minde runneth and is occupied in a continual meditation of Gods worde.'[2] But because of his fear of physical torture, Faustus cannot share the hope that 'there is no heart so voide of grace, or giuen ouer to wilful follie, but the merciful fauour of God can mollifie'.[3]

His will to good, therefore, nears atrophy when, instead of coping with his spiritual need, he calls for Helen, who sucks forth his soul. When the Old Man returns, this time to reprimand him for excluding grace from his soul, he sees Faustus as a complete thrall of passion. The hopeless state of his moral and spiritual wisdom is now more shocking than ever before. And the departure of both the Old Man and the Good Angel without any hope leaves an impression—the first inescapable impression—that Faustus will, indeed, lose his soul. His final meeting with the scholars is but a hopeless confession of utter desperation, and when he sends them away he chooses to cope with his problem entirely alone. Now it is apparent that he is like 'Kane, and Iudas, and such like, who offended god more in despairing of his mercy, than in committing their offences'.[4] Distraught with fear of devils, he is powerless and now isolated from effective human sympathy just when he has come to realize that, in truth, he is part of the humanity whose limitations he has scorned and tried to escape. He discovers that magic, with all its supernatural promise, cannot stop the passing of time. He cannot command the spheres which magic enabled him to explore. Yet, forgetting his past experiences,

[1] Hardin Craig, *The Enchanted Glass* (New York, 1936), p. 25.
[2] *A Treatise Tending vnto a Declaration whether a Man be in the Estate of damnation, or in the estate of grace* (London, 1595), p. 42.
[3] Greene, op. cit. p. 9.
[4] *Two Guides to a good Life*, H 4$^{v}$–H 5.

he thinks he could repent—if he had more time! His momentary awareness of Christ's love is heart-rending:

> See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!
> One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah, my Christ!
> (v, ii, 150–1)

Still he does not grasp this mercy, because his fear of Lucifer is stronger than his faith in Christ. He prays in vain that his misery after death may be shortened; then, ironically, the same Faustus who aspired to divinity now wishes to become a brutish beast. Like other knowledge which he has gathered piecemeal, his awareness that he is, after all, essentially human comes too late to benefit him. Chapman's words form an apt commentary upon the tragic predicament of Faustus when the devils come to arrest his soul:

> Learning, the Art is of good life; they then
> That lead not good lives, are not learned men.[1]

A study of the thought, the emotional impact, and the dramatic development of this play can be done effectively, I believe, only when one reckons with the shallowness of the learning of Faustus. His tragedy stems from the inadequacy of his knowledge when he is tempted to abandon himself to the fellowship of devils; and his ultimate spiritual welfare depends upon whether he will, in time, overcome this inadequacy. In other words, his want of proper knowledge is the cause, first of his rebellion, and finally of his despair. And the source of both his defective knowledge and his despair is sloth. Even though it must be admitted that he does have his eyes open in part when making his devilish pact, his intellectual blindness becomes the more apparent through his unawareness, first that the spiritual satisfaction his nature ultimately demands cannot be realized on earth, and secondly that a wrong choice will frustrate rather than liberate his aspiring soul. Even while he realizes his ambition in part, he finds that he is but heaping ashes upon the mound of his discontent. His dramatic career is, therefore, highly ironic. Such ironic treatment of both ideas and characters may be paralleled in other Marlovian dramas, particularly *The Jew of Malta*. This approach suggests that it is as reasonable to consider *Dr Faustus* a moral play as to conclude that it is largely a drama of revolt.

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[1] 'Of Learning', *Works*, p. 160.