
Knowledge and Overreaching: The Question of Limits in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*

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Abstract

This research highlights a study of knowledge and Overreaching: The Question of Limits in Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*. Really, Christopher Marlowe is the pioneer in good Tragedy writer in the Elizabethan age. This paper shows that Marlowe was a unique dramatist in his style of writing tragedy. This Research paper explores various aspects of this tragedy with a moral that man should never go against God. Even a great scholar should avoid his pride of power and knowledge. His purpose of passion for power and knowledge should ultimately be for the welfare of mankind. Otherwise, he has to face consequences like the great scholar, Doctor Faustus. The tragedy of Doctor Faustus lies in the fact that he is unable to accept the moral, spiritual, and existential limits of mankind. As such, therefore, this paper will examine the theme of knowledge and overreaching.

Keywords: christopher marlowe, doctor faustus, renaissance humanism, knowledge, overreaching, ambition, human limits, tragedy, power, free will.

Introduction

English Renaissance literature gives the classic play *Doctor Faustus* written by Christopher Marlowe, unique standing due to its serious exploration of questions about knowledge, power, ambition, and limitation. At the time, Europe was undergoing a transformation of the mind and an infusion of culture and energy. These changing times created a Renaissance, where the idea that humans can reason was embraced, and that the ways to expand one's knowledge were available through study of the world—education, exploration and science. At the same time Hollywood and America continue to believe that being humble, obedient and understanding that humanity has limits was a prerequisite for living.

Faustus creates ideas from intellectual world. After gaining mastery in theology, medicine, law and philosophy, Faustus becomes dissatisfied with the ideas of how far conventional knowledge can take him. Faustus goes on a quest for a different kind of knowledge to gain greater control over the world, to acquire great wealth, and have power and influence in the world and to know the totality of human existence. He pursues necromancy and eventually strikes a deal with Lucifer himself.

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Doctor Faustus is more than just an individual scholar seeking knowledge; it is the story of a scholar whose quest for knowledge culminates in a pursuit of power and personal glory. Faustus exemplifies the author's character development by the way the scholar pursues knowledge beyond human potential and uses his intellectual curiosity to destroy himself through excess.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how Christopher Marlowe depicts the nature of the relationship between knowledge and limit within the play. It also seeks to demonstrate the ways in which this ambivalence regarding ambition and the exploration of extreme boundaries influences moral, spiritual, and existential aspects of humanity through Faustus' rise and fall.

The Idea of Overreaching

Overreaching is a major theme in the tragedy of Faustus. Overreaching means attempting to go beyond the limits that are part of the natural, moral or divine order in order to achieve your own personal ambitions. Faustus has ambitions that will always exceed those limits that are normally imposed on all human beings. He wants to rule over countries, control nature, obtain great wealth, and have the very knowledge that exists in the world. His ambitions are not reasonable; they are infinite (Levin).

One of the most revealing quotes from the play is Faustus imagining how far he will be able to control people when he says: "I'm going to have all those things that move on the earth be controlled by me." (Bevington and Rasmussen) This statement is representative of Faustus' desire to have ultimate power over everything in this world, and his choice to not accept the limitations imposed upon all humans, rather, he is trying to exert total control over the universe.

Marlowe depicts overreaching in a positive light and also a negative light. The audience may admire Faustus' courage and strength; however, through the end of the play, Faustus' ambitions become a source of great destruction. The search for elevation to a higher level becomes more a sign of pride than wisdom. This tragedy suggests that true greatness in humanity does not come from removing all limits but rather through understanding and responsible negotiation of limits.

An overreacher is someone who strives for much more than what is allowed by society (e.g., power, knowledge, glory), and this overreaching nature eventually leads to their demise. Overreachers can be admirable because of their courage and determination; however, an overreacher is tragic due to their inability to see past ambition and recognize the constraints

of reality (Levin). Faustus, through his desire for unlimited knowledge and power, is a character that embodies the greatest example of an overreacher in literature. Marlowe describes him as having extraordinary abilities and trying to achieve something greater than what is normally possible for humans by transcending the values of humanity. Faustus represents both the positive and negative aspects of Renaissance individuality. The tragic nature of Faustus lies in the tension between his aspirations and human limitations. He has an overwhelming desire to reach beyond limits imposed on humanity by divinity (the Divine). Faustus' demise reflects the dangers associated with excessive ambition, especially without moderation or self-awareness.

Faustus as a Renaissance Tragic Hero

Faustus exemplifies the duality present in Renaissance culture, providing evidence of the dualities of that period. On the one hand, he is confident, ambitious, curious, and intellectually dynamic. On the other hand, he offers proof of how dangerous it is to be too self-assured or morally blind. Unlike medieval figures who emphasize humility and obedience, Faustus wishes for self-determination, independent greatness, and ambition. His goals are idealistically Renaissance. Ultimately, however, Faustus' moment of failure offers evidence of the limited nature of Renaissance optimism: Although human beings possess extraordinary capabilities, they are also finite beings bound by ethical and existential restrictions; Faustus ultimately fails because he believes he can escape those bounds.

Faustus' tragic story is one of the conflicts between ambition and the ability to realize it; he desires unlimited power while maintaining his humanity; he wants infinite power without having infinite wisdom; and the struggle between those two desires brings the story to its tragic climax.

In *Dr. Faustus*, death serves as both a cosmic limit (as in *Where Death Begins*) and an emotional weight (as in the heaviness of the weight of the two neuroses of guilt and despair). *Dr. Faustus* has great faith early on in his ability to transcend death through magic for no other reason than his absolute faith that all knowledge will allow him to change the very fabric of existence, including that of death, into something different. The continual dismantling of Faustus' belief in his ability to transcend the bounds of those two concepts is done very effectively by the play itself which shows that death does not only signify the end of life; rather it is the foundation of our ability and reason to understand life. This ends when we no longer understand death; i.e., how we relate to it. Thus, his actions have little or no moral value without the contextual basis to allow their value to exist, and his despair subsequent to his understanding of his imminent execution is both due to his disbelief of

eternal damnation, as well as, his understanding of how his time on earth and its relation to the state of his soul is wholly contingent upon realizing that without death time does not have any worth. Thus, he cannot fully understand his life until just about it has come to an end.

The tragic irony is how far the universe limits Faustus' choices all result from his own making due to prior choices and circumstances, mental states, and the theological framework in which the play functions. The repeated emergence of both Good and Bad Angels illustrates Faustus' internal war, and show how human freedom can never exist as pure autonomy; rather it is always subject to competing desires. Faustus' inability to repent at the end of the play is crucial because it highlights how externally imposed limits to existence are also foisted inside him from the forces of pride, fear, and self-delusion.

In contrast to the typical tragic hero of Aristotle, whose undoing is the result of a single fatal flaw in a universe governed by natural law and morality, the tragic downfall of Faustus comes from his deliberate rejection of the limits of existence itself (Sanders). Faustus's act of self-creation places him in the paradigm of Renaissance humanism, which places the human being, rather than God, in the center of all intellectual and moral reality, but Marlowe simultaneously critiques the elevation of the self above the moral restraints of religion (Greenblatt).

The tragic hero of the Renaissance epoch also suffers from internal conflict; the indecision and conflict present in Faustus exemplify this. Faustus's continual fluctuation between hope and despair is represented by the presence of the Good and Evil Angels. The fact that Faustus has the choice of seeking redemption versus desire for worldly goods represents the dualism of man within the Renaissance. Faustus' inability to repent several times is indicative of his inability to submit to the moral authority of God, not his ignorance. The tragic heroism of Faustus is found in his awareness of the consequences of his actions; he is aware of the consequences of his actions and therefore continues to pursue knowledge beyond his reach. Faustus, by existing in this morality versus knowledge dichotomy, serves as a modern character and is a precursor to later existential issues concerning freedom, responsibility, and self-destruction.

Faustus's confrontation with the limitations of human reason is another aspect that defines him as a Renaissance tragic hero. The Renaissance period valued the pursuit of intellectual advancement; yet, through Faustus's inability to turn knowledge into wisdom, Marlowe shows how fragile this advancement can be. Although Faustus possessed supernatural abilities, the way he uses those abilities ultimately become little more than sources of trivial entertainment (i.e., illusions and spectacles). Thus, Marlowe implies that power that lacks moral footing will

lead toward futility. The tragic irony of Faustus is that by seeking infinite knowledge, he ends up with an intellectual standstill. Faustus's aspiration for heroism is undermined by the misuse of the same faculties that define him as a hero.

Faustus as the Renaissance Individual

Faustus is often regarded as an example of the idealized Renaissance man; unlike the characters of the Middle Ages, who represent primarily moral values, Faustus was a man with that has the individual characteristics of an independent-minded, ambitious man (Greenblatt). He does not want to permit himself to simply follow the existing order or to accept the traditional beliefs of his ancestors. He demands the right to find out for himself what he is meant to do in this world. This right to develop one's own identity by virtue of one's own choices is very much a part of the culture of the Renaissance as embodied by thinkers of the "humanist" tradition, who espoused independent thought and commended all humans for their ability to create their destinies.

Faustus' outward appearance is one of confidence in his ability throughout the play. He believes that he is capable of great things because of his intellect and the number of great degrees that he has to his credit.

In addition, there is a great deal of evidence of the destructive nature of overindulging in one's individualism. Faustus' confidence develops to the point of becoming prideful in his own abilities, and he also becomes incapable of accepting anyone else as having authority over him. Thus, Faustus ends up destroying himself in his quest for self-fulfillment.

Marlowe's depiction of Faustus is complex; he is neither praised nor blamed for being ambitious. The audience may be drawn to admire Faustus' intellectual efforts but must see that these same attributes will cost him his life. This ambiguity contributes greatly to why the story of Faustus has continued to appeal to people for centuries.

Knowledge as the Source of Power

The importance of knowledge in Faustus' view of existence is not only because it helps him understand real life, but also gives him power over the world around him. The reason Faustus is dissatisfied with most academic fields of study is because they don't offer him the absolute authority and mastery that he desires. When Faustus examines medicine, law, theology and philosophy at the beginning of the play, he is left with nothing to point to that will help him accomplish his aspirations for ultimate knowledge. A quote in the play describes Faustus' view of the connection between knowledge and divine power:

“A magician is a god when he is sound.” (Gill)

This quote illustrates the relationship he sees between knowledge and divine power. Knowledge has value because it appears to elevate humanity beyond normal limits. However; Marlowe challenges this belief throughout the play. Faustus gains many extraordinary abilities. Yet they do not provide him with true happiness or fulfillment. His experience shows that power alone cannot satisfy all of the basic human needs including: death, purpose, or morality. Thus, the distinction Marlowe makes between knowledge and wisdom. Wisdom requires one to have a sense of the moral bounds they should impose upon themselves and that they are frail or fragile beings. Faustus seeks knowledge while ignoring wisdom.

Ambition, authority, and knowledge are closely connected. During the Renaissance, people became very curious about the world around them. They also began to explore and develop new scientific ideas. These experiments lead to the creation of new inventions and technologies.

Thus, the play illustrates the ambiguity of knowledge as power because it does not always provide safety or benefit when being pursued without any type of personal responsibility. The true power comes from using knowledge correctly, rather than simply having a lot of it. In addition, Faustus is an exceedingly educated man with the belief that obtaining more knowledge, in particular forbidden or magical forms of knowledge, will give him the ability to do anything, and ultimately, he believes that obtaining that type of knowledge will make him equal to God.

The emergence of knowledge was the basis of much of our power, yet chasing after it without ethical boundaries sometimes leads to tragic results. The time of the Renaissance was defined by an explosion of advancements in science, philosophy and the study of what it meant to be a human being; thus, the place of knowledge became to extract true meaning from nature as well as from society. Faustus is a direct result of this cultural change; at first, he praises the power of knowledge and derides the old disciplines (such as religion and philosophy) because they cannot give him the answers he seeks to determine the ultimate truths of life. Faustus wants not only to have a greater depth of knowledge, but he wants to be “like God” because of his accumulative knowledge, which is similar thinking to that of the Renaissance person and their view on human potential. However, through Faustus, Marlowe complicates this view of knowledge and shows that knowledge that has no moral grounding or spiritual restraint becomes a tool of destruction.

As Faustus progresses through his journey, the discovery of important insights about himself causes him more anguish, although knowledge functioned initially as a way to empower him

when he had achieved little with his academic career. He learns more about who he is and becomes increasingly aware of his predicament and the consequences of his impulsive decisions, reinforcing the idea of how much he has lost through his choices. This theme illustrates the fear of the Renaissance: with greater knowledge comes also an increased awareness of how finite everything is. Becoming aware of the consequences of his actions does not give him any ability to change his fate, demonstrating that simply acquiring more knowledge does not mean that we can escape the moral and metaphysical boundaries surrounding humanity. Faustus' knowledge does not relieve him from the pain that results in his loss; rather, it compounds his suffering and deeply increases the tragedy of his downfall.

Faustus' loss of intellectual purpose is also shown in his lack of desire to gain knowledge. At the beginning of the play, he has dreams of changing the world, but his focus shifts to performing trivial magic tricks for fun. This diminishing ambition signifies the loss of knowledge as a way to exert influence upon the world. What once appeared to be a means of achieving transcendence is now a way to distract oneself and ultimately decay into nothing.

Renaissance Humanism and the Intellectual Context of the Play

The Renaissance was marked by a revival of interest in classical learning and belief in the power of humankind to accomplish great things. Scholars who followed the principles of Humanism believed that the pursuit of knowledge through education and the use of rational thought, as well as the study of ancient texts, would result in personal improvement and advancement of society. The educational system of the Renaissance encouraged people to think creatively and statistically about the world around them and to find new ways of learning (Hunter).

Faustus represents many of these Humanist ideals. He is well-educated, intellectually ambitious, and striving to expand the boundaries of human understanding. Unlike medieval scholars who relied upon the teachings of established authorities, Faustus seeks knowledge on his own terms and believes that traditional academic disciplines do not provide the answers he is searching for.

Yet Marlowe presents an ambivalent view of Humanism during the Renaissance. The same intellectual confidence that leads to discovery can also lead to pride and arrogance. Faustus' discontent with traditional learning illustrates both the benefits and drawbacks of Humanist thought during this time. Although Faustus' aspiration for unlimited knowledge relates closely to the optimism of the Renaissance, his fall demonstrates the inherent dangers of being overconfident (Dollimore).

Consequently, *Doctor Faustus* can be seen as both a celebration and a critique of Renaissance Humanism. Marlowe acknowledges the worth of a desire for intellectual ambition, but he warns against the idea that humans can exceed any limitations placed on them. Scientific discoveries, explorations, and literary pieces were enhanced by the Renaissance's intellectual shift. Observation, inquiry, and experimentation were all respected as ways to gain knowledge. As people sought ways to further their education and learn more about the world, they began to relate education with progress and empowerment. While increasing education opened the door to new facts and new knowledge about the world, this same increase in liberalism also created new anxieties. While the Humanist belief system said that humans had the potential to learn everything, was there any limit to what could be learned or done by humans?

These same questions form the themes of *Doctor Faustus*. *Doctor Faustus* reflects the excitement and uncertainty of the Renaissance educational environment. *Doctor Faustus* is the perfect example of what every Humanist believes should be a person of intellectual prowess, but at the same time, he exemplifies the downside that can occur when one places too much belief in his or her individual capabilities.

Pride and the Corruption of Knowledge

Pride is a major contributing factor to Faustus' downfall. Faustus' accomplishments lead him to believe he can attain powers that are not accessible to a normal person. This is the point at which pride changes the purpose of knowledge from the ability to understand to the tool of glorifying oneself. As Faustus becomes more confident in his ability to achieve greatness, he begins to ignore warnings, ignore the moral issues surrounding his actions and put total faith in his decisions. He becomes cut off from God and society.

Marlowe shows pride as a perversion of perception; Faustus can no longer tell the difference between wisdom and ambition. He is unable to see what the consequences of his decisions will be because of his obsession with greatness. The implication of this is that there is danger in having knowledge without humility. Intellectual accomplishments do not make it unnecessary to consider ethical issues. The more knowledge you have, the more need you have to act responsibly.

Pride and knowledge have remained significant topics of interest throughout the history of philosophy, theology, and literature, culminating in the use of knowledge as a source of enlightenment, development, and human progress. Knowledge also becomes a means of corruption when one seeks or possesses knowledge for no other reason than pride; it is no longer an ethical and moral base but rather a tool to cause harm. Rather than increasing

human beings' ability to achieve success, corrupted knowledge enables one to demonstrate overconfidence, moral blindness, and destructive ambition (Dollimore). The use of corrupted knowledge as a form of corruption has been thoroughly studied in both classical and

Renaissance literature, where the demise of many individuals was preceded by intellectual pride. Pride in one's knowledge inflates the ego and causes its owner to experience a cognitive distortion. The person will begin filtering out any type of information that is contrary to their belief of superiority. Any critical feedback will be dismissed, and anything that supports their position is accepted as truth. This isolation from critical thought creates a stronger foundation for continued corruption, as it disallows individuals to be challenged through reflection and/or dialogue.

As time progresses, the individual's mind establishes itself within its own state of certainty, creating the illusion that it has absolute understanding of everything. The example of an individual corrupted by their intelligence is their perception that they have absolute certainty in their thoughts.

The Misuse of Knowledge and the Failure of Achievement

The ironic thing about Faustus is how he combines his dreams to do so much but, in the end, he does not achieve any of them. Faustus has high hopes of having unlimited power and learning in his exchange with Lucifer and then proceeds to use that power primarily for superficial activities.

The expected outcome of his magic is the ability to change society, find the meaning of life or reveal the truth. However, Faustus primarily uses his magic to entertain the nobility, perform tricks and gratify his own desires. The magical world that presented Faustus with extraordinary possibilities is merely turned into shows and diversions. This difference between his dreams and reality shows how empty his ambitions are. He has great power, but there is no real purpose to that power. He is unable to accomplish anything close to what he imagined he would.

Marlowe's depiction of Faustus' lack of satisfaction in his life after his use of knowledge for selfish and superficial purposes suggests that simply having knowledge is not enough to ensure one's happiness. Without having an ethical and meaningful motive to use that knowledge, power is meaningless. The tragedy illustrates that the value of knowledge is determined solely by what that knowledge is being used for.

Marlowe makes a distinction between knowledge and wisdom, with Faustus having acquired knowledge but not the ability to use it wisely. There is no consideration given by Faustus

towards the moral implications of his actions or the spiritual repercussions of his decisions. Faustus' academic training turns into an avenue of arrogance as opposed to one of acquiring wisdom.

Therefore, what should have provided power and wisdom for Faustus, eventually leads to his own demise. At the play's outset, Faustus possesses very much knowledge (being a doctor, a theologian, a lawyer, and a philosopher); however, because he can't derive unlimited power from his studies, he becomes disenfranchised with them. Consequently, his focus changes from the search for wisdom to a search for dominance and control. Instead of pursuing knowledge for the advancement of the well-being of society, he seeks knowledge that augments his own extraordinary existence by acquiring power.

This demonstrates the beginning of Faustus' error relating to his enquiry into knowledge. The root of Faustus' blunder appears not to be with his quest for knowledge but in the assumption that wisdom should serve one's own self-interest regardless of the ramifications. When Faustus reaches the end of the drama, he realizes that no amount of power can mitigate the onset of death or reverse the acts he has committed. The ultimate result of Faustus' endeavour to know is that his knowledge has ultimately failed to provide either a sense of purpose or a sense of salvation.

Free Will and Moral Responsibility

Doctor Faustus raises the question of how (if at all) individuals exercise free will in their lives and how they balance making their own decisions with respecting their ultimate fates. Throughout the course of the play, Faustus has several opportunities to change his fate and repent for his actions. Time and again characters such as the Old Man and the Good Angel dissuade Faustus from pursuing his dangerous path by convincing him to pursue redemption instead. The acts of these characters demonstrate Faustus' ability to choose to alter his fate by making different choices. The fact that these characters attempt to intervene in Faustus' life in this way suggests that Faustus' tragic fall cannot solely be attributed to fate or the influence of the supernatural.

Essentially, Marlowe shows us that while Faustus has the ability to make choices using free will, he ultimately bears the burden of consequence for those decisions — Marlowe wants us to see that freedom is bound to accountability and that our actions do have consequences.

Ultimately, Faustus' tragedy shows us that humans cannot escape their responsibilities for the decisions they make. In his quest to obtain total freedom, Faustus ultimately creates a form of spiritual captivity due to the choices that he makes for himself.

The protagonist's unfortunate exercise of free will through making choices is illustrated by his thoughtless pursuit of free will. Faustus wasn't solely subject to external forces, so he was depicted as an intelligent person making an intellectual choice to reject the moral and theological limitations in order to pursue knowledge/power without any limitations. The first soliloquy highlights a mind that uses rational reasoning to weigh options such as (law, medicine, and theology) and finally moves to necromancy. The selection process represents a major concern during Renaissance-time, where human beings have been granted power by humanistic learning, should individuals be allowed to self-govern their desires? Faustus, by stating “glut the longing of my heart's desire”, displays his free will movement as well as establishes moral obligation (Gill).

According to moral philosophy, Faustus is an example of someone making a tragic error in making poor use of free will. Faustus did not “sell his soul to the devil” through coercion but freely consented to this action; this increases his culpability in light of a Christian ethical system for the consequences of his actions. Marlowe develops Faustus as a character able to fully understand the consequences of his actions and yet chooses to continue to engage in those actions reinforces the notion that moral responsibility and conscious agency are synonymous.

From the perspective of moral philosophy, Faustus is a classic example of one who has wrongly exercised free will. The voluntary act between Faustus and the evil one is not forced; thus, Faustus is more guilty under a Christian ethical system. Marlowe creates Faustus as someone who has considered the moral consequences of what he has done on numerous occasions, but who has nevertheless decided to continue doing so, affirming that moral accountability cannot exist without conscious agency. The Good Angel and Evil Angel have personified Faustus's internal moral anguish; the ultimate choice will always be Faustus's. This demonstrates how freedom without morality could turn into self-destruction and reinforces the idea that autonomy has a purpose when it is driven by moral reasoning.

Time, Mortality, and Existential Limitation

Practically by the end of the play, time plays a larger and larger role in the story. Faustus, in the beginning, treats the time he has on earth very flippantly after getting 24 years of power with Mephistopheles and thinks he has made a good deal. As the time is winding down, he starts to get anxious and terrified when thinking about time passing, and how time shows him that humanity is mortal; there is no amount of knowledge that will help prevent death.

Towards the end of the play, Faustus wants nothing more than to stop time and escape being judged. All these moments serve to illustrate the greatest limitation that we have as humans:

having to die. Marlowe illustrates that there is nothing that you can attain in knowledge to rid yourself of the existential reality of death. Knowledge increases what humans learn, but cannot take away from humanity's mortality. Because of this, the play suggests the futility of placing all hope in the abilities of humans due to their limited knowledge. Time in the final acts of *Doctor Faustus* becomes increasingly compressed and psychologically unbearable. Faustus's desperate phase:

“O, let this hour be but a year, a month, a week” (Bevington and Rasmussen)

Demonstrate Proof of Faustus's Understanding of The Indivisibility of Temporal Limitations and Moral Consequence. The Experience of Regret Will Be Turned into Tragedy Because Time Cannot Be Reversed Once a Particular Time Interval Has Been Completed. By Having The Clock Outside of Faustus During the Last Scene, Faustus' Innermost Fear Is Externally Symbolized, As All His Illusory Freedom and Hope Has Collapsed. While Time Was an Instrument of Ambition, It Has Now Become an Instrument of Judgment. The Concept of Time Presented in The Play Is Not a Measurement That Can Be Considered in The Abstract; Rather, It Forms Both a Moral and Metaphysical Boundary Which Demark the Limits of Human Existence. When Faustus Deciding to Sell His Soul to The Devil for Twenty-Four Years of Earthly Power, It Was the Result of a Serious Misjudgment on The Part of Faustus as To the Ethical Value of Time. Rather Than Being Free, Faustus Has Now Increased His Awareness of Oncoming Death and With Each Moment He Becomes More Cognizant of The Fact That He Has Lost His Soul Forever. With Each Passing Moment the Clock of Faustus' Damnation Advances, Thereby Creating a Silent Judge for Faustus Who Does Not Measure His Accomplishments but Rather His Spiritual Decline. *Dr. Faustus* Is a Product of Renaissance Thought; It Is Embedded into The Thought of The Age.

The play continually challenges Faustus' belief that knowledge has the power to help one live beyond their physical death. Faustus uses magic in his search to find an alternative to his humanity's “universal theme” relationship to death; however, neither the supernatural nor his abilities to control it will change that he is still a mortal who will die.

The Role of Religion and Spiritual Authority

Religion represents a vital counterforce in Faustus' rebellion against intellect. The central ideas of Christianity divine authority, the existence of moral law, and the ability for salvation are the forces that directly oppose Faustus' goal of transcending humanity (Bate and Rasmussen).

The Good Angel and Evil Angel demonstrate Faustus' internal conflict between good and evil. The Good Angel represents the ability to repent and spiritually humble oneself, while the Evil Angel represents ambition and rebellion. This duality reflects the Renaissance view of psychology as being the battlefield of conflicting moral impulses.

A Christian perspective on life is fundamental to The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus; that is to say, salvation/damnation and divine judgment are the primary forces in human life and exist independent of human choice. There is an academic, as well as a spiritual, dimension to Faustus' abandonment of theology; in addition to abandoning traditional academic pursuits, Faustus is also abandoning the highest tradition of knowledge found in the intellectual hierarchy that existed during the Medieval and Renaissance periods. Therefore, when Faustus rejects scripture and the divine, he illustrates the tensions that existed between the emerging humanist skepticism of the Renaissance and the established religious orthodoxy, positioning Faustus as one who has rejected the authority of the Church, and ultimately, who will be judged according to the moral order of the Church.

The moral binaries, especially reflected in the figures of the Good Angel and Evil Angel, enforce the religious authority present in The Tragedy of *Doctor Faustus* through their constant presence. The Good Angel and Evil Angel reflect the inner battle between Faustus' desire for repentance versus his desire to sin; therefore, spiritual authority is not absent from Faustus' awareness, but rather is actively involved in Faustus' consciousness. As both the Good Angel and Evil Angel represent different aspects of Faustus' spiritual authority, the repeated entreaties made by the Good Angel to Faustus to seek repentance portray God's mercy and the opportunity for redemption, while the Evil Angel's presence illustrates temptation and pride.

Faustus' refusal to listen to the Good Angel illustrates that he has misappropriated free will and demonstrates that the authority of the divine does not compel action but instead provides moral guidance that must be accepted willingly. Thus, Faustus' downfall is not because he has ignored or rejected God, as he has done so intentionally.

Another aspect of the exploration of divine authority and spiritual hierarchy is provided through Mephistopheles' presence in the play. When he first meets Mephistopheles, Faustus perceives the existence of demons as a means of freedom from the restrictions of religion; however, Mephistopheles consistently reminds Faustus that the divine order is present everywhere. His statement about hell being more than a place is a literal representation of the inability to escape divine authority, even through the agreement of the demon. This lesson ultimately contradicts Faustus' belief that he has transcended God's rules; however, it

reinforces the fact that divine authority knows no bounds. In Marlowe's world, divine authority exists in all its forms, even when its existence cannot be demonstrated.

Faustus does not reject religious authority all at once; instead, he continuously receives opportunities to repent and is offered warnings through the play. However, Faustus refuses to repent with each opportunity and continues to justify his decision to commit evil. His pride in his intellect prevents him from fully submitting to the authority of God. From a theological standpoint, Faustus' biggest error is the belief that one can operate outside the idea of salvation and damnation. He thinks knowledge will replace faith; therefore, his understanding of how to get knowledge will ultimately lead him to have such great power that he can redeem himself without the help of God. This is a fatal mistake for Faustus.

The conclusion of this work highlights that human knowledge has limitations—nothing about humanity will be able to be understood using only intellect or logic; there are truths that exist which are beyond the scope of humanity. These truths are the truth about salvation and/or moral law and/or order of God.

Conclusion

Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* explores the limits of humanity through its focus on the desire for knowledge, ambition and the interplay between those two facets through the central character of Faustus. With the Renaissance fascination with the pursuit of knowledge and the dangers of excess ambition, Faustus serves as an example of an individual who is trying to achieve too much without taking into account his human limitations. In the play, Marlowe demonstrates how, while knowledge can open up possibilities for advancement, it also can have a detrimental impact if not accompanied by humility, wisdom and ethical responsibility. Faustus' tragic downfall is a result of his ambition to pursue forbidden knowledge and failure to recognize the limitations of man. The universal human desire to exceed our limits in the pursuit of greatness is demonstrated through Faustus' pursuit of forbidden knowledge. In the end, Marlowe shows that true wisdom lies in recognizing the difference between aspiration and excess ambition; in other words, a balance of humanity's desire for knowledge must be tempered by our understanding of the human condition and our responsibility to be ethical in our use of that pursuit.

The themes explored in *Doctor Faustus* are still applicable today as we grapple with questions that shape our modern society and morals. Through technology and science, we can achieve beyond what we have thought possible; however, we must also continually evaluate the ethical implications of our human existence and therefore be aware of the dangers associated with power gained without wisdom and ambition exercised without limits.

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