THE THOMIST CONCEPT OF VIRTUE IN CH. MARLOWE'S *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

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Four centuries of criticism on Ch. Marlowe's ***Doctor Faustus*** have systematically approached this first English tragedy from the point of view of the death of the protagonist,[1] while a detailed analysis of the foundations of Faustus' moral behaviour and of the extent to which these may back up certain interpretations of the play while disregarding others, has not been attempted yet. This paper places the study of Christopher Marlowe's ***The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus***, in a source-related perspective. Against the common tendency to base interpretation on different analyses of Faustus' sin and of his eventual damnation, I approach the problem of the moral behaviour of the protagonist through the study of the role of the classical Christian philosophy of virtue in this play.[2]

My contention here is that any interpretation of this play benefits from a careful analysis of Marlowe's concept and use of virtue in his building up of a highly ambiguous personality for his main tragic character. Therefore, I have analyzed in this paper both the presence and relevance of the seven moral and theological virtues in this first modern tragedy and I have reached the conclusion that what Marlowe is presenting before us in his ***Dr. Faustus*** is primarily a Thomist concept of virtue as an ideal for life, as well as an explanation of Faustus' fall not in terms of a subjective 'sin', but as the ineluctable result of a dogmatic inversion of the classic concept of virtue; Marlowe makes us view Faustus' sin as a *culpa in causam* that comes from history, from his biography, and not from the present and offers a superb description of how failure in the realm of virtue results first in sin and then in eventual damnation. This contention may seem, at the beginning, somewhat daring and risky, particularly in the light of our still incomplete picture of Marlowe's biography; however, to challenge and send the whole Renaissance world view to hell in eight hundred and twenty-five lines -as Marlowe, the avant-garde, to a large extent did in his ***Dr. Faustus***- was certainly more daring, while his way of life

was indeed so risky that one year after finishing this play, at the early age of twenty-nine, he was put to death: double-agents of all secret services usually die young.

It must also be noted that this is an abridged version of a much longer work that analyzes the four cardinal and the three theological virtues in the text of ***Dr. Faustus***. In order to keep the scope of this presentation to a manageable length, I will propose now a reading of this play in the light of Marlowe's use of the four cardinal or moral virtues: prudence, justice, prowess and temperance. On the other hand, I am well aware that the term 'virtue' has followed -specially in our century- that apparently ineluctable destiny of so many 'big words', (such as 'love', 'perversion', 'chastity', 'purity' or 'modesty'): this process, which I would not hesitate to call 'semantic devaluation', may indeed be the first stage of dissolution. The concept of virtue may no longer exist within our experience of reality, or may be that we are the last few ones that still search into a past where heroes, virtues and drama constituted a fundamental layer of human experience that enlightened their present for future restoration. Finally, this reading of the play implements others that I have suggested elsewhere[3]; in the light of these interpretations, the analysis of the ways in which Marlowe presents his main character at war, from the very beginning of the play, against the classical Christian virtues does not seem to encourage the possibility of successfully establishing the discussion of Faustus' relationship with the devil in terms of a 'subjective sin' (signing a blood-compact with the devil, demoniality, etc.). Faustus' sin is rather pretextual and would be defined by a theologian as a *culpa in causam*, a blame that comes from history and not from the present, a blame that is not dependant on the actions we see performed on stage.

My contention that Faustus is presented to us, from the very beginning of the play, as an obsessed -and later as a possessed- man, who is not free to choose, and therefore cannot sin, is based -among others- on the following pieces of evidence:[4]

1. Faustus sees devils -in both forms, ugly and pleasant-.[5]
2. Faustus and other characters hear the voices of the devils and the former converses with them.
3. His first monologue shows no hint of rational thinking and can be interpreted as an attack of logorrhea, a symbolic formula, according to which

his journey through the arts is not speculative but merely rhetorical, in an attempt to justify his former decision to abjure divinity and take up magic.

4. Faustus signs a pact with the devil and is physically threatened several times.

5. By the end of the play, the devil has taken control of Faustus' body: "Ah my God, I would weep, but the devil draws in my tears!/ Gush forth, blood instead of tears, yea life and soul!/ O he stays my tongue; I would lift up my hands, but, see they hold'em, they hold'em." (V. ii. l. 54-58).

At this time, we also learn that Mephostophilis -presumably before, and certainly within the opening soliloquy- has deprived Faustus of a correct perception of reality:

> 'Twas I, that when thou wert i' the way to heaven/ Damned up thy passage; when thou tookest the book/ to view the Scriptures, then I turned the leaves/ And led thine eye.
> (V. ii. l. 191-194).

In the light of the above, it is clear that Faustus neither has enough knowledge nor enough will to act in a free way and thus be fully responsible for his acts. Faustus' sin must then be looked for, not in the actions he performs throughout the play, but rather in the often subtle description that Marlowe gives us of Faustus' personality as an anti-Christian hero. Through Faustus' failure in the realms of prudence, justice, prowess and temperance, the devil can easily make his way into his soul, first in the form of obsession and later through possession proper.

I. PRUDENCE

"Omne peccatum opponitur prudentiae" and "Prudentia dicitur genitrix virtutum"[6] are the starting points for St. Thomas Aquinas' analysis of 'prudence' in his ***Summa Theologica***. This virtue constitutes the skeleton of Christian metaphysics: the scholastic theology about prudence tells us that sin is not hurtful because it is forbidden, but it is forbidden because it is hurtful;[7] that is, in more theoretical terms, that goodness depends on truth and truth depends on the nature of things, on the being. Therefore, to enact goodness, a close contact with reality is required, and the cognoscitive dimension of

prudence imposes three moments for an action to be considered prudent: deliberation, judgement and decision.

Faustus fails in all three stages: he never stops to ponder the complexities of reality, thus constantly committing two unforgivable intellectual mortal sins: "overgeneralization" and "contradiction". In the opening monologue, he reduces philosophy to logic, law to death duties according to Roman law, while the theology of sin is deprived from its counterpart, that of redemption: "Stipendium peccati mors est [...] si pecasse negamus,/ fallimur et nulla est in nobis veritas".[8]

Faustus stops precisely at the point when the biblical text continues: "if we repent and confess our sins Grace will be bestowed on us through Jesus Christ our Lord". In eighty lines, Faustus has rejected -by refusing to correctly apprehend reality- the whole universe of the licit sciences of his time.

The virtue of prudence is the norm, the guide of human actions (*recta ratio agibilium*), it is indeed a sign of the maturity of a truly free will; Faustus, with his unsteady and childish desires and games, with his readily acceptance of silly explanations on the part of Mephostophilis and with his reductivist approach to the global nature of reality is the exact opposite of a mature being. In rush haste, he is incapable of pondering on the meanings, symbolic and otherwise, of events, such as the freezing of his blood or the inscription that reads "homo fuge", when the time has come to sign the pact.

Precipitation and lack of docility are two other weaknesses that often accompany human lack of prudence: Faustus never looks for a good counsellor -as the scholars suggest, when it is perhaps too late-,[9] and we never see him devoted to thinking proper; quite on the contrary, he is always talking and acting.

Finally, avarice, which is considered by Th. Aquinas as one of the results of the perversion of prudence,[10] is again one of the foundations of Marlowe's building up of his main character: if Faustus had to choose just one of the three classical 'libidos' ('sciendi', 'sentiendi' and 'dominandi'), he would probably choose the latter; above all, Faustus sells his soul in exchange for riches; he wants Indian gold, Orient pearls, princely delicates, that is, to be king, to be rich. In German the word 'wies' means both 'prudent' and 'miser'; the extreme thirst to possess things that would supposedly guarantee dignity and power is one of the marks of egotism,[11] and he that concentrates the target of

all his attention on himself, his welfare, his desires, without contemplating the truth that lies at the very core of objective realities cannot be prudent, but, above all, cannot be just.

II. JUSTICE

In order to be just, one has to somehow get rid of oneself in the process of decision-making. Thus, we talk about injustice as lack of objectivity, as a failure to correctly acknowledge objective realities. Justice is, in essence, "debitum reddere", to give each one what is his or hers, what is due to him or to her.

Dr. Faustus does want power, political, economic and otherwise, and he wants it in order to establish injustice. He wants to use devils to steal for him, to establish a kingdom of luxury and hedonism at whatever cost:

> I'le haue them [devils] flie to *Indian* for gold;
> Ransacke the Ocean for Orient Pearle,
> And search all corners of the new-found-world
> For pleasant fruites, and Princely delicates.
> I'le haue them read me strange Philosophy,
> And tell the secrets of all forraine Kings:
> I'le haue them wall all *Germany* with Brasse,
> And make swift *Rhine*, circle faire *Wittenberge*:
> [...] I'le leauy souldiers with the coyne they bring,
> And chase the Prince of *Parma* from our Land,
> And raigne sole King of all the Prouinces.
> Yea stranger engines for the brunt of warre,
> Then was the fiery keele at *Anwerpe* bridge,
> I'le make my seruile spirits to inuent.
> (I. i. 109-124).

He wants the old man to suffer, instead of him, the consequences of his weakness of character: "Torment sweet friend, that base and aged man,/ That durst disswade me from thy Lucifer,/ With greatest torment that our hell affoords". (V. i. 1857-1859).

He wants to offer Lucifer the "lukewarm blood of innocent babies", and, finally, he wants God to be unjust and let him alone enjoy immortality without the previous passage of death.

He does not want to pay back the 'debitum' of the Christian soul towards its creator, the *debitum filiorum Dei*:

> That time may cease, and midnight neuer come.
> Faire natures eye, rise, rise againe and make
> Perpetuall day: or let this houre be but a yeare,
> A month, a weeke, a naturall day, [...]
> Mountaines and Hils, come, come, and fall on me,
> And hide me from the heauy wrath of heauen.
> (V. ii. 2040-2043; 2054-2055).

And he not only abjures divine filiation but also blames his parents, as Adam blames Eve and Eve blames the serpent: "Curst be the parents that ingendred me". (V. ii. 2080). The virtue of justice necessarily implies 'the other', the fellow-being. In sharp contrast, we meet Faustus alone on stage at the opening of the play, at the close of the play, and during two thirds of the theatrical time of the drama[12].

III. PROWESS

It is impossible to achieve justice without prowess; the nature of this world is not one that would easily admit justice into it. The experience, the evidence of evil, in all possible forms, implies the necessity of prowess if goodness is to outwin evil; and Dr. Faustus also lacks that prowess. His high aspirations cannot resist a vulgar threatening of physical pain on the part of the devil. On every occasion in which Faustus is about to repent and turn to God again, the devil uses the very same menace, physical pain:

Meph:	Reuolt, or I'le in peece-meale teare thy flesh.
Faust:	I do repent I ere offended him, Sweet Mephasto: intreat thy Lord

To pardon my vniust presumption,
[...] Torment sweet friend, that base and aged man,
That durst disswade me from thy Lucifer.
(V. i. 1849-1851; 1857-8).

Faustus is unable to pursue any goal for too long. He wanted empires, riches, supreme knowledge and the most beautiful wife; in the end, he gets none of these. The buffoon of the court of Charles the V, the carnal partenaire of devils in disguise, the inhabitant -at the end of the play- of the same study where we met him, for the first time, in the opening monologue, that is Faustus the character is weak and hesitating. He did not know how to live and did not know how to die; without being the protagonist of his own life, the proud scholar that embodies all anti-scholarly attitudes, (presumption, despair, contradiction, overgeneralization, [...]), asks for dissolution into the elements: "O soule be chang'd into small water drops,/ And fall into the Ocean ne're be found" (V. ii. 2086-7). To fight the power of evil is the task of prowess; and the prize is called "bonum ardum", arduous goodness. There is nothing 'arduous' or 'good' about Faustus' life after the pact. Faustus is never ready to fight at all, neither for goodness nor for evil. He wants "spirits which fetch me what I please, resolve me of all ambiguities" (I. i. 106-7).

> This extreme laziness, utter lack of prowess -which leads into existential 'torpor'-, is presented by Marlowe as the direct result of his lack of temperance; finally, Faustus' lack of prowess, the weakness of his will, that always follows the indications of that who speaks last (good angel or evil angel, old man or Mephostophilis), is fed by the lack of a "quies animi", that is by the lack of temperance.

IV. TEMPERANCE

Semantic change is one of the features of language that make it exciting to go back into the past in search of lost meanings and to check how much of ourselves has been gained and/or lost in the metamorphoses of human existence, in the shadowy fields of temporality. Nowadays, by 'temperance' the average

man in the street understands almost exclusively something like moderation in the amounts of our daily intake of food and wine (water and sodas normally do not count!). Of course, this approximate opposite of gluttony does not fully satisfy my intent here, but, since it is probably shared by all, it may be a good point to start: Faustus sells his soul to the devil, because he wants "pleasant fruits and princely delicates" (I. i. 111); magic can only come to him, through Valdes, in a dinner (Cfr. I. i. 185); when Mephostophilis warns him about hell, Faustus quite stupidly answers: "If this is hell, I'll willingly be damned. What sleeping, eating, walking, disputing?" (II. i. 530-1).

To delight Faustus' soul, Mephostophilis quite cleverly produces the pageant of the seven deadly sins (II. ii. 679 & ff), but among them, by far, the longest statement is made by gluttony:

> My father was a gammon of bacon and my mother was a hogs-head of Claret wine. My godfathers were these: Peter-pickled-herring and Martin Martlemasse-beefe: But my god Mother, O she was an ancient gentlewoman, her name was Margery, March-beere. (II. ii. 711-781).

In Rome, Faustus and Mephostophilis want and actually steal the food from the Pope's dish; the River Rhine is mentioned because its "bankes are set with Groves of fruitful vines" (III. i. 810).

To quote just one more instance of Faustus' lack of temperance in this vulgar sense (vulgar meaning common and not coarse or rude), let us consider Wagner's statement about his master just before the conclusion of the tragedy, when he is supposed to literally go to hell:

> I think my master means to die shortly, for he has given to me all his goods. And yet me thinks, if death were near, he would not banquet, and carowse, and swill amongst the students, as even now he does, who are at supper with such belly-chear as Wagner never beheld in all his life.
>
> (V. i. 1776-1784).

Of course, temperance does not stop at gluttony; the "state-of-the art" of Faustus' lack of temperance is better explained by referring to the Latin concept of 'temperantia' or to its Greek correspondent 'sophrosyne'. Thomas Aquinas takes this deeper meaning in his ***Summa Theologica*** (4, d. 14, 1, 1, 4 ad 2; 2-2, 142, 2 obj. 2). Taken in this more accurate meaning, temperance is, from a positive point of view, the act of building up something harmonious, and negatively "to stop", to set limits to human desires, actions, endeavours. Thus, we can easily understand that from the original Latin verb 'temperare' we get 'temperamentum', i. e. "character" and even temperature (i. e. right proportion, adequate structure), and also, of course, temperance, i. e. *quies animi*, peaceful, quiet spirit. Through experience, we know that people can "take care of themselves" in one of the two following fashions: the generous, trying to preserve their own integrity; this requires and implies temperance; and the egotist, connected with the lack of temperance and which ends -as we can see in ***Dr. Faustus***- in self-destruction.

Destruction itself derives from the selfish degeneration of the very same energies that should be destined towards self-preservation. It seems and may be indeed an ineffable paradox that those very same forces, we can call them now natural tendencies, designed to preserve the individual, can pervert, if misdirected, the internal balance, the order and structure of the human being up to the point of destruction. As we have seen, Faustus is a clear instance, even a paradigm of the result of a mistaken use of our spiritual forces, as they materialize themselves in the three 'libidos'. The opposite of temperance is incontinence. Faustus' lack of temperance within the realm of the *libido sciendi* results in 'curiositas', i. e., in Faustus disorderly, inordinate search for knowledge, a search which takes the form of mere curiosity, a search that lacks depth, system, order and logic. For every single issue, either Faustus' questions are trivial and inappropriate for a Doctor of Divinity or he acritically accepts trivial answers from Mephostophilis (see II. ii. 605-635).

Magic itself -that was Faustus' choice- is according to Thomas Aquinas (***Summa Theologica***, 2-2, 1671) a consequence of 'curiositas'; the right orientation of that libido would be, in his terminology, 'studiositas'. Temperance, studiositas, are not compatible with being "glutted" as Faustus confesses to be several times along the play. Temperance means self-awareness, the dominion of passions, the conscious control of the body, and, it is obvious that Faustus cannot do that.

Temperance is also an instrument to control pain -which requires a previous training in keeping pleasure, to some extent, under control-, and we also know that Faustus is not too good at that either. Overreaching -H. Levin's lucky neologism to refer to Faustus-[13] and despair are also incompatible with temperance and Faustus is bound to both through his obstinate attempt at reaching immortality within this world. Finally, Faustus' sexuality, lacking any sense of joy, -as I have suggested elsewhere-[14] cannot come to terms with temperance either. Without wife, without Hellen, without pleasures and without 'virtus', Faustus is left to that minor and symbolic form of immortality which we call a myth.

NOTES

1.- See: J. P. Brockbank, "The damnation of Faustus", in C. Leech (ed.), ***Marlowe. A Collection of Critical Essays***, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964). G. H. Cox, "Marlowe's Doctor Faustus and 'Sin against the Holy Ghost'", ***Huntington Library Quarterly***, 36, 1973, 119-137. T. W. Craik, "Faustus' Damnation Reconsidered", ***Renaissance Drama***, 2, 1969, pp. 189-196. W. W. Greg, "The Damnation of Faustus", in C. Leech (ed.), ***A Collection of Critical Essays***, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964). N. Kiessling, "Doctor Faustus and the Sin of Demoniality", ***Studies in English Literature 1500-1900***, 15, 1975, pp. 205-211. R. Ornstein, "Marlowe and God: the Tragic Theology of Dr. Faustus", ***P.M.L.A.***, LXXXIII, 5, october, 1968, pp. 1378-1835. M. Peña, "Cielo e Infierno en Dr. Faustus de Ch. Marlowe", ***Diálogos***, 87, 1979, pp. 24-28. C. Rae, "A Study of the Reflections of Religious Doctrine on Sin and Damnation in Ch. Marlowe's ***Dr. Faustus***", ***Dissertation Abstracts International***, 40, 6293 A. W. D. Smith, "The Nature of Evil in ***Dr. Faustus***", ***MLR***, LX, 2, april, 1965, pp. 171-175.

2.- This is an abridged version of a much longer essay on the role of the seven Christian virtues, according to St. Thomas Aquinas; for obvious reasons of brevity I present now just an outline of the four moral virtues.

3.- "Marlowe's Faustus at the Crossroads. Mediaeval elements and Diabolical Games", in M. Martínez López, (ed.), ***Literature, Culture and Society of the Middle Ages***, (Barcelona: PPU, 1989), pp. 2639-2695. See also: "The Philosophy of Death in Ch. Marlowe's ***Doctor Faustus***", in J. Sánchez Escribano, (ed.), ***Proceedings of the I Annual Meeting of SEDERI***, (Zaragoza: Sederi, 1991), p. 105-122. "The Discovery of Solitude and Christopher Marlowe's ***The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus***", ***Il Confronto Letterario***, Pavia, Pavia U. P., 1992; "Principales resultados de un análisis semiótico del ***Doctor Faustus*** (Texto A, 1604),

de Christopher Marlowe", en A. Chicharro Chamorro & A. Sánchez Trigueros, (eds.), (Granada: Universidad, 1990).

4.- About this point, see my chapter "Marlowe's Faustus at the Crossroads [...]", ***op. cit.***, p. 2684 & ff.

5.- All quotations, when it is not stated to the contrary are taken from W. W. Greg, (ed.), ***Marlowe's Doctor Faustus 1604-1616. Parallel Texts***, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950). Cfr. Act. I., sc. iii., l. 25 & ff.

6.- Thomas Aquinas, ***Summa Theologica***, 3, d. 33, 2, 5.

7.-"Sin is not hurtful because it is forbidden, but it is forbidden because it is hurtful. Nor is a duty beneficial because it is commanded, but it is commanded because it is beneficial". B. Franklin, ***Poor Richard***, 1739.

8.- John I, 8.

9.- "Why did not Faustus tell vs of this before, that Diuines might haue prayd for thee?" (V. ii. 1964-5).

10.- See about this Josef Pieper, ***Las Virtudes Fundamentales***, (Madrid: Rialp, 1988), p. 55-6.

11.- *S. T.*, 2-2, 55, 8.

12.- See my paper "Principales Resultados de un Análisis Semiótico del ***Dr. Fausto*** de Ch. Marlowe, Texto-A, 1604", in ***Proceedings of the II International Conference of the Andalucian Society for Semiotic Studies***, (Granada: Universidad, 1990).

13.- H. Levin, ***The Overreacher: a Study of Christopher Marlowe***, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1952).

14.- M. Martínez López, "The Philosophy of Death in Ch. Marlowe's ***Doctor Faustus***", ***op. cit.***, p. 111: "It is not strange that there are no more explicit sexual references than that subtle one to the kiss and subsequent departure of both characters together. Marlowe is quite orthodox in this point too: if in eros through sex the beloved one is looked for, in sex without eros only a pure objectivity (which only apparently produces pleasure) is pursued; and this is almost completely alienated from any sense of sexual or communicative plenitude. This is Faustus' case in connection with Hellen's kiss; her kiss -that she kisses him and not the other way round must be noticed- is completely 'peripheral'; there is no passion in it for either of the participants; it is a kiss that, instead of symbolizing life, energy, passion, and vitality, clearly announces death, symbolically and otherwise. Faustus' sexuality -to put it in modern terms- lacks any sense of joy, of happiness or pleasure. He apparently arouses Hellen solely to give satisfaction to the scholars' request, almost in order to 'show off'".