

Adam's questions about the nature of the universe. Raphael says :

" To ask or search I blame thee not ; for heaven
Is as the Book of God before thee set,
Wherein to read his wonderous works, and learn
His seasons, hours, or days, or months, or years.
This to attain, whether Heaven move or Earth
Imports not, if thou reckon right ; the rest
From Man or Angel the great Architect
Did wisely to conceal, and not divulge
His secrets, to be scanned by them who ought
Rather admire . . .

And, for the Heaven's wide circuit, let it speak
The Maker's high magnificance, who built
So spacious, and his line stretched out so far,
That Man may know he lives not in his own—
An edifice too large for him to fill, . . . "

Now this, of course, opens up the whole question of Man's approach to scientific knowledge. And the question is not so much whether scientific enquiry is right or wrong, but the degree of significance we attach to it. Stated briefly, the issue rests between humility and insolence in approach.

The tragedy of Dr. Faustus is the tragedy of a scholar whose pride leads him into a total misconception of his place in the universe. In his misconception lies his damnation. He is himself made aware of this when Mephistophilis begins to open the doors of new knowledge for him :

Mephistophilis : The iterating of these lines brings gold ;
The framing of this circle on the ground
Brings whirlwinds, tempests, thunder and lightning ;
Pronounce this thrice devoutly to thyself,
And men in armour shall appear to thee,
Ready to execute what thou desirest.

Faustus : Thanks, Mephistophilis : yet fain would I
have a book wherein I might behold all spells
and incantations that I might raise up spirits
when I please.

Mephistophilis : Here they are in this book (*Turns to them*).

Faustus : Now would I have a book where I might
see all characters and planets of the heavens,
that I might know their motions and dis-
positions.

Mephistophilis : Here they are too. (*Turns to them*).

Faustus : Nay, let me have one book more, and then I
have done, wherein I might see all plants,
herbs, and trees that grow upon the earth.

Mephistophilis : Here they be.

Faustus : O, thou art deceived.

Mephistophilis : Tut, I warrant thee. (*Turns to them*).

Faustus : When I behold the heavens, then I repent,
And curse thee, wicked Mephistophilis,
Because thou hast deprived me of those joys.

Mephistophilis : Why, Faustus,
Think'st thou heaven is such a glorious
thing ?
I tell thee 'tis not half so fair as thou,
Or any man that breaths on earth.

Faustus : How provest thou that ?

Mephistophilis : It was made for man, therefore is man more
excellent.

Faustus : If it were made for man, 'twas made for me :
I will renounce this magic and repent.

But he is too hardened to repent and is drawn farther and farther into the net which Mephistophilis spreads for him. He increases his knowledge and achieves great power, but always moves to final damnation. And we are able to see that although Faustus has as much power to do good as he has for evil it makes no difference. Where his pride is fed he is damned no matter how he uses his power.

Thus we see the universal significance of the play. " Dr.

Faustus " deals with a problem that never grows old. Faustus, the scholar who turned to the study of magic becomes a figure with whom all humanity can be identified. We who have the power to learn and to reason find ourselves faced with the eternal problem of the consequences of knowledge. According to Marlowe the difference between good and evil in scientific knowledge is entirely a matter of attitude. It is left to us to decide whether we agree with that conclusion or not, but whether we agree or disagree, the appeal of the play is still universal. For the play dramatises the problem rather than the conclusion and where a drama reflects all human experience, there is universality.

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