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Divine Thoughts and the Corruption of the Will in *Doctor Faustus*

In act 2 scene 1 of Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, the title character professes that 'hell is a fable'. But how could Faustus not believe in hell, standing in the presence of a devil that he himself only recently conjured? What is the philosophical difference in the play between 'experience', as Mephistopheles describes it, and Faustus's lack of understanding on the state of his soul? This article discusses the controversy between Ockhamist and Thomist epistemology, and places Faustus within early modern debates concerning the status of knowledge and its effect on the soul's search for God.

Act 2 scene 1 of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* presents its audience with a perplexing moment. Faustus has only just signed the contract with Mephistopheles to submit his soul to Lucifer. His first order of business after retaining the devil's services is to interrogate him on a number of academic subjects, to read 'strange philosophy' with him.¹ The phenomenology of hell serves as the first topic on their syllabus. Mephistopheles describes hell as situated not around one particular locality but wherever the sinner's awareness of separation from God happens to be, which is to say it resides within the consciousness of the damned. Says Mephistopheles, 'Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed, / In one self place, for where we are is hell' (1.1.116–17). An uncircumscribed hell extending outward without limit or, likewise, a 'dominion that ... / Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man' (1.1.58–9) suggests a positive infinitude of space somewhat like the unextended Cartesian mind; like Utopia itself, both exist in 'no place'. But Faustus responds to Mephistopheles in an almost offhand manner, saying that 'hell is a fable' and an 'old wives' tale' (2.1.122, 130). Mephistopheles wryly counters that 'experience' will 'change [his] mind' (123).

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While the dramatic import of the scene has to do with the comic undertones of Mephistopheles's teacherly response, something else is happening here. The exchange begs the question of why Faustus's learning had not already convinced him that hell is more than just 'a fable'. The moment seems to ask its audience to consider how Faustus could possibly *not* believe in hell, standing in the presence of a devil that he himself conjured, and to whom he, only minutes before, swore his soul. If the moment is a joke, then what makes the joke work? What underlying ideas give it meaning? Reasonably, Faustus might not believe in the doctrine of 'everlasting death', as he declares in the play's first scene when he bids 'adieu' to 'Divinity' (1.1.45, 47). As he notes, this doctrine is especially 'hard' in that it does not include any mention of the saving grace of Christ's sacrifice (38). But to disbelieve in hell when a devil stands visibly ten feet away from him requires not a new religion but a new theory of knowledge. What is the philosophical difference, dramatized here by Marlowe, between 'experience' as Mephistopheles describes it and Faustus's lack of understanding of hell? I argue that this difference implies one of the early modern period's most important philosophical controversies, Ockhamist versus Thomist theory on human will and causality. Throughout the play, diabolical characters go to great lengths to distract Faustus from the importance of the intellect within his decision-making process and vocally reinforce the deception that he cannot repent because his will is hopelessly corrupted. In the process, however, they also dramatize the importance of intellect to repentance, showing how Faustus's own intellect has become fractured and thus has lost the ability to meditate on God's grace while guttering in either academic formalities or spectacular distractions of the mind. In short, the devils pantomime an Ockhamist universe before Faustus for their own benefit, distracting from how intellect really operates to effect grace in their Thomist-inflected reality.

Over the play's critical history, many scholars have taken up either a moralist reading of Faustus, where he becomes caught in Calvinist fatalism, or a romantic reading involving him breaking free of fate as a sceptic only to fall victim to his own foolhardy ambitions as an 'overreacher'.² More recent Faustus scholarship has worked to reconcile the overtly metaphysical themes in *Doctor Faustus* to historical realities. Jennifer Waldron argues powerfully concerning the bodily, material structure of religious meaning in early modern English Protestant thought, particularly expressed in *Doctor Faustus* where aspects of Calvinist doctrine apply to and inhere within both the imagined body of Faustus and the real body of the performer playing him.³ Waldron writes, 'to leave behind to some extent the "vertical" orientation of either Catholic or Protestant traditions of allegorical drama is not necessarily to disenchant the horizontal plane of existence, for Protestant

accounts of the sacred were resolutely horizontal in their own way.⁴ Keeping in mind Waldron's discussion of 'providential bodies', where naturalism and spiritualism interpenetrate one another in the material signs of God's providence, one could invoke an adjacent opposition within *Faustus* involving 'nature', namely medieval natural law determinism, versus a flavour of determinism grounded in divine command theory. Waldron cites Michael Witmore's discussion of the trend within Calvinist thought away from the Thomist 'emphasis on divine knowledge of events' toward a reading of divine intention more centred in God's potency and action.⁵ According to Witmore, 'Aristotle's sense of the accident's definitive metaphysical emptiness' pervaded the Middle Ages until the recognition that Boethius 'merged Aristotle's analysis of accident with a Christian theology of providence ... [giving rise to] the contradictory notion that God foresaw and controlled accidents without taking an active role in bringing them about'.⁶ This notion of the medieval God as a surveyor of worldly knowledge as opposed to the Calvinist God as a doer of worldly actions constitutes the mainstream reading of Calvinism in early modern thought.

I would like to offer another perspective on this difference. While Waldron and Witmore describe Calvin's God as performing material actions upon the world, that supposition begs for elaboration of the philosophical and theological cosmoi imagined to exist behind such actions, and whether themes of Calvinist determinism within *Doctor Faustus*, as exhibited in dialogue between the devils and Faustus, are in tension with Thomist sense of intellectual inclinations to the good. Thomas Aquinas conceived of human causality as linked inextricably to the teleological underpinnings of natural law, where mind bends toward the immanent goodness of God:⁷

It is evident that all things partake somewhat of the eternal law, in so far as, namely, from its being imprinted on them, they derive their respective inclinations to their proper acts and ends. Now among all others, the rational creature is subject to Divine providence in the most excellent way, in so far as it partakes of a share of providence, by being both provident both for itself and for others. Wherefore it has a share of the Eternal Reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end: and this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law ... the light of natural reason, whereby we discern what is good and what is evil, which is the function of the natural law, is nothing else than an imprint on us of the Divine light. It is therefore evident that the natural law is nothing else than the rational creature's participation of the eternal law.⁸

Human intellect apprehends the grand design with natural ‘inclinations’ toward the good of that design; sin comes via corruption of the will. For Ockham, meanwhile, ‘God is a debtor to no one, but whatever he does to us, he does purely from grace. And hence from the very fact that God does something, it is done justly’.⁹ Insofar God determines goodness by his divine will, so are human souls obligated to obey his will whether they are inclined, in the Thomist sense, to do so or not. Within this Ockhamist theory, human intellect is much more compromised, corrupted, and susceptible to deception and doubt. Both Ockham’s theories on the human mind and those on the nature of God reject Platonic essences; the God who commands creatively and the humans who become obligated under that will exist within the same de-Platonized nature.

My reading on one hand looks behind the world of the play to the surrounding cosmos and on the other looks behind the outward actions of the play’s characters to the philosophical worldview underlying individual psychologies to suggest an inherently more inward interpretation. If a Calvinist God is an active God, and Faustus rebels (ineffectually) against such activity, understanding the philosophical alternatives to which he might have fled becomes crucial to understanding the terms and stakes of his rebellion. Faustus performs self-awareness in deeply theological terms, both referring back to the morality plays that had preceded him in their depiction of psychomachic scenes meditating on possibilities of personal salvation, and complicating their claims on how to approach salvation through the will and the intellect. *Doctor Faustus* seems to present the last opportunity for the morality play to be staged while simultaneously twisting the genre and leaving those conclusions that would be typically drawn from them unresolved. And one of Marlowe’s primary tools in accomplishing this genre-bending maneuver is his dramatic description of thoughts, particularly how spiritual beings bend Faustus’s thoughts toward heaven or hell. Thoughts become an important tool in Marlowe’s efforts toward complicating the relation between humanity and the divine mind.

The word thought does a lot of work in *Faustus*, functioning particularly as an experiential point of reference for the title character’s spiritual status, showing the fact of his damnation while also hinting at the grounds for that state. On the subject of Calvinist contradictions, John Stachniewski describes a spatially defined Calvinist theology of the will, arguing that ‘Calvin had a three-tiered concept of causation’.¹⁰ Stachniewski quotes the *Institutes* where Calvin describes ‘no absurditie ... that one selfe acte be ascribed to God, to Satan, and to man’.¹¹ Rather than express God’s will under Calvinism as a ‘crude display of force majeure’, Stachniewski refers to a system where God’s will need not run contrary to that

of devils or humans but where all can agree according to their own interests.¹² That is, God's will does not negate the will of other agents but operates within the distinction already noted by Waldron and Witmore. God predestines his will but also seems to preside passively, where his will instantiates within the actions of other agents. Stachniewski writes on the prologue of *Faustus*, 'God first conspires by means of predestinarian decrees which are to be executed through providence in which, in the case of the reprobate, the devil plays an active manipulative part. Lastly there is the concurrence of the human will, chiming in with an antecedent necessity'.¹³

His use of the word 'necessity' is telling, suggesting Luther's distinction between the *necessitas* (necessity) and *coactio* (constraint) of humankind's sinful nature, that the draw toward unity of wills between the three agents mentioned comes from humanity's hopelessly fallen nature so that individuals sin 'from the inside' rather than being forced through constraint by God or other causes. Yet Stachniewski also seems clear that all three agents choose contingently. Calvin himself admitted a contradiction at the centre of the idea of necessary sin that is somehow also chosen contingently, writing in his *Treatise on Predestination*:

The faithful indeed make two things agree with one another; that the state of man was so constituted at his creation that in stumbling and falling of his own will he was the cause of his ruin; and that nevertheless he was thus determined by the admirable wisdom of God, to the end that the voluntary ruin of Adam should be a reason for humility to all his race. For although God knew that this was expedient, it does not follow that man was not ruined by his own fault, who had otherwise been endowed with a good nature and formed in the image of God. I say once again, that I know well enough what an appearance of absurdity and contradiction this presents to profane people and those who despise God.¹⁴

On one hand, Stachniewski uses spatial metaphors like 'convergence' and 'three-tiered', and on the other temporal metaphors with words like 'antecedent' and 'concurrent'. Spatial metaphors suggest a structured reality already having come into existence — three tiers having been built on top of the other or three roads converging. Temporal metaphors suggest a sequence of moments within an action still occurring or yet to occur. The temporally defined metaphor seems more instructive as to which agents precede, or cause, which. But given the importance of the contingency of these three agents' individual wills, Ockhamism would seem a good point of departure to explain how will precedes intellect in the moment of divine decision. While Calvin explicitly denies the influence of Ockham and

Duns Scotus in the *Institutes*, his take on divine will bears more than a passing resemblance to nominalist thought. Calvin writes in his denial of nominalism, 'We do not approve of the dream of the Papist theologians touching the absolute power of God; for their ramblings about it are profane, and as such must be held by us in detestation. Nor do we imagine a God without any law, seeing that he is a law to himself'.¹⁵ However, elsewhere Calvin attributes to God a sort of power that denies this denial:

The will of God is so much the supreme and sovereign rule of justice that whatever he wills must be held to be just in so far as he wills it. So that when one asks, Why did God do this? We must reply, Because he willed it. If one goes further and says, Why did he will this?, that is asking for something greater and higher than the will of God, which there cannot be.¹⁶

In his commentary on Exodus, Calvin writes that God is 'independent of all law ... that he is his own law and is the norm of all things'.¹⁷ The Calvinist leanings within *Faustus* thus reflect this sense of the highly vulnerable human intellect corrupted under the manipulation of devils, where the human will is left either to choose rightly by the grace of God's contingently determined command or left to choose wrongly within its own fallen state (though there is a strong argument to be made that this fallen state, and thus the human flight from grace, is also God's doing owing to the doctrine of double-predestination). Calvin writes that both the human will and intellect are hopelessly corrupted; if anything the nominalists do not go far enough in condemning their corruption. Calvin writes of the nominalists, 'Therefore those who have defined original sin as a lack of the original justice which ought to be in man, although these words that have comprehended all the substance, still they have not sufficiently expressed the force of it. For our nature is not merely empty and destitute, but it is so fecund of every kind of evil that it cannot be inactive'.¹⁸ Here Calvin's take on the poverty of the intellect is not of a different kind than that of Ockham and Duns Scotus so much as marked by a difference of degree; he believed the nominalists did not go far enough in their thoughts on the corruption of human reasoning powers. And while Calvin ends the above passage by calling one of humankind's worst 'fecund[ities]' of evil his inability to contain his activity, elsewhere Calvin also writes that humanity in its unfallen state chose to sin willfully: 'Adam could have kept his status if he had wished, seeing that he stumbled only by his own will; but because his will was pliable to good or to evil and the constancy to persevere had not been given him, that is why he so soon and so easily fell'.¹⁹ Stachniewski aptly represents the

logical contradictions at the centre of Calvin's thought, yet referring to the nominalist influence, where will precedes intellect, would shed more light on such contradictions. According to Calvin, the intellect is subject to all forms of deception and confusion; the human decision to act, whether within the providential will of God or within humanity's predetermined fallen state, therefore owes much to the Ockhamist precedence of will, a picture that figures in an opposite relation to that of Aquinas's take on the moment of human deliberation, where the will is fallen and unable to repent until an intellectual inclination toward good allows the will to choose under the influence of divine grace.

Consider the moment at the beginning of act 2 scene 1 where we find Faustus chiding himself for his impulse to repent of his magic, to backslide into belief, saying 'not go backward, no, be resolute!' Faustus had said to himself just before this

must thou needs be damn'd?
 Canst thou not be sav'd?
 What boots it, then, to think of God or heaven?
 Away with such vain fancies, and despair.
 Despair in God and trust in Beelzebub. (2.1.1–5)

Compare that to how Mephistopheles orders Faustus, twice throughout the course of the play, to think on hell and also how, just after Faustus proclaims himself to be beyond heavenly help, Good Angel appears and implores Faustus to 'think on heavenly things', to which Bad Angel immediately counters that Faustus should instead 'think of honour and wealth' (20–1). There seem to be two approaches to thoughts here. Mephistopheles and the other spiritual beings, on one hand, value them more greatly than Faustus, but on the other, particularly when the devils want to persuade Faustus that he is responsible for his actions, they suggest his will to sin figures more prominently within his damned state than the intellectual temptations to which he has been subjected. I believe a deception is happening here. Mephistopheles and Bad Angel tempt according to an Ockhamist approach to will, leading Faustus to believe he would become subject to the authoritative will of God; meanwhile the devils act and speak according to a Thomist approach to intellect, where goading the tempted into an intellectual state most amenable to hell makes quite a large difference. Of course, Mephistopheles would take this approach, downplaying his own influence while highlighting the actions of the tempted to determine their own fate. But Mephistopheles exhorts Faustus to 'think thou of hell' (2.3.73) just after Faustus had asked Mephistopheles to 'tell [him] who made the world' (66), and his phrasing implies that thoughts on hell

should come as a result of being damned. 'Thou art damned; think thou of hell, (70) Mephistopheles says. The doctrinally defined status of damnation and the action of 'thinking' appear together in this line as if constitutively intertwined, and the order of the statements and their grammatical construction implies causality. But that progression of thought does not seem particularly logical. If Mephistopheles is representing Faustus's spiritual state as sealed by saying 'thou art damned', why *should* Faustus think on hell? The statement in the imperative case entails an act Faustus could perform or not. But given that Mephistopheles suggests such thoughts would result from being damned, the imperative nature of the statement sounds peculiar, since if Faustus is already damned, then what would be changed by him 'think[ing] on hell'? Presumably he would be damned either way. Again in this same scene, Lucifer tells Faustus, 'Thou shouldst not think of God' (92). Then Lucifer tells him, 'Think of the devil' (93). Faustus responds by assuring Lucifer, 'Nor will Faustus henceforth. Pardon him for this, / And Faustus vows never to look to heaven' (95–6). Faustus rehearses the manner that actions follow thoughts to Lucifer's satisfaction; Lucifer answers, 'So shalt thou show thyself an obedient servant, / And we will highly gratify thee for it' (97–8) at which point the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins begins.

One possibility is that Mephistopheles and the other devils become motivated to distract Faustus from God's creative power to think on his own will to damn himself, when really his being in a different frame of mind could work to undo that willed state. In other words, perhaps Faustus is not quite so damned as Mephistopheles would like him to think, but rather damnation is contingent on his being persuaded from moment to moment to believe in God's grace or not. But rather than enter into doctrinal discourse about the criterion for damnation, Mephistopheles downplays the status of thoughts altogether, relying instead on an understanding of damnation that resides securely in the actions of the damned. Then again, another possibility is that Faustus actually is damned, and Mephistopheles and the other devils want to heighten Faustus's torment through the ineffectual nature of his thought, that he can 'think' on hell all he wants without affecting at all his inability to do anything about it. But given the very pointed repetition of the devils' instruction for Faustus not to think of God (2.3.92) but to think on 'hell' (73, 88) or 'the devil' (93) or 'honor' and 'wealth' (2.1.20–1) (twice by Mephistopheles, once by Bad Angel, once by Beelzebub, and once by Lucifer) and the way spiritual beings of either heavenly or diabolical orientation seem particularly concerned with Faustus's mental state, thinking seems to carry with it considerable power to determine Faustus's place in eternity. The tormented Faustus says,

Scarce can I name salvation, faith, or heaven.
Swords, poison, halts, and envenomed steel
Are laid before me to dispatch myself. (2.3.19–21)

Even in moments when Faustus wants to repent, he comes under the influence of thoughts taught to him by devils that draw him away from such a consideration.

In response to his wavering at the beginning of act 2 scene 3, Bad Angel appears to tempt Faustus, telling him that 'Faustus never shall repent' (17). The fact that Bad Angel does not refer to any doctrinal argument in his assault on Faustus's vulnerable state is telling. The lack of belief in God, of course, constitutes the epistemologically desired state of the devils, but unbelief is reinforced not according to intellectual assent (or dissent) to any particular doctrine but within a sense of repentance as an experiential frame of mind. Faustus had only just proclaimed that when he 'behold[s] the heavens, then [he] repent[s] / And curse[s] [the] wicked Mephistopheles' (1–2). Faustus sees the majesty of creation and becomes afraid, professing that he has made a mistake in joining with the devil, an admitted enemy of that creation. But as soon as the Bad Angel counters with certainty that Faustus will not, in fact, repent, he almost immediately agrees, saying 'My heart is hardened, I cannot repent' (18), as if repentance had been only an abstract idea, failing at the first challenge. Bad Angel sets himself up as an authority who must be convinced of Faustus's good faith and whose conviction would be the end result of Faustus making a rhetorical argument rather than from any action he could perform — or so goes the torment of the devil's deception. As soon as Faustus repeats Bad Angel's assertion, referring to himself in the third person by saying 'I am resolved: Faustus shall ne'er repent', his next line is 'Come Mephistopheles, let us dispute again / And argue of divine astrology' (31–2). The return to abstraction follows immediately after Faustus recognizes repentance as a willed action that is impossible and forsworn. Indeed, the power of Bad Angel's rhetoric over Faustus predicates on the confidence with which he expresses Faustus's damned state, especially his inability to will himself to repentance. Good Angel, meanwhile, does not mount a defense against Bad Angel but says, 'Faustus repent; yet God will pity thee' (12). Good Angel's simple invocation to repent suggests that the way forward to repentance would be a sort of temporal correspondence in the state of mind from the moment Faustus had '[beheld] the heavens' and 'repent[ed]' (1) to the present moment of temptation. In other words, Good Angel wants him to persist in repenting, an experiential state that could be intellectually reinforced by Good Angel via the performative utterance of simply stating that God will pity him. Good Angel's declaration of God's pity, and the

intellectual state of Faustus being renewed in his mind brings a Thomist reality to the fore. Bad Angel quickly drums up an Ockhamist distraction to divert from it (the assertion that Faustus cannot will his own repentance). The reality either angel wants to achieve is an intellectual state of mind, a state of persistence of thought that both heavenly and diabolical forces wish to influence, but where Bad Angel's rhetoric is based in Faustus's lack of will. The reality of Faustus's damnation proceeds from a lack of will, but his will founders within a thwarted desire to experience repentance, a foundering that of itself is the most agreeable intellectual state in relation to hell's mandate.

The second instance of Mephistopheles's command to Faustus to 'think on hell' happens in act 5 scene 2, just after Faustus had told his tale to the scholars and asked them to check on him the next day:

MEPHISTOPHELES Ay, Faustus, now thou hast no hope of heaven;
Therefore despair, think only upon hell,
For that must be thy mansion, there to dwell.

FAUSTUS O thou bewitching fiend, 'twas thy temptation
Hath robb'd me of eternal happiness.

MEPHISTOPHELES I do confess it, Faustus, and rejoice.
'Twas I that, when thou wert I' the way to heaven,
Damm'd up thy passage; when thou took'st the book
To view the scriptures, then I turn'd the leaves
And led thine eye.
What weeps't thou? 'tis too late, despair, farewell!
Fools that will laugh on earth must weep in hell. (5.2.87–98)

Mephistopheles definitively professes 'thinking on hell' to be the result of damnation here. But then in his very next passage of dialogue, he characterizes temptation as a process of subtle manipulation, of 'lead[ing] [his] eye'. Bad Angel tells Faustus that thinking on heavenly things 'make[s] them foolish that do use them most' (2.1.19), but this distraction falls into the same category as Mephistopheles's refusal to reveal the creative poverty of hell, where a deflection all but constitutes an admission that purpose-oriented thoughts would break the spell of the devils' own rhetoric. In other words, to think on heavenly thoughts and to understand God's creative power give shape to a sort of experience, a meditation that goes beyond abstract reasoning. Faustus presumably already knows as a point of doctrine the significance of the heavenly things Good Angel prompted him to meditate on, 'contrition, prayer, repentance' (16), and just as well who created the universe. In a later moment of reflective clarity, Faustus implores himself to

‘Think, Faustus, upon the God that made the world’ (2.3.74), a proclamation that causes Mephistopheles to flee (75). All this suggests that the world of the play exists within a universe of Thomist inclination, where intellect figures as the first moment of human action.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* first defines ‘thought’ as ‘The action or process of thinking; mental action or activity in general, esp. that of the intellect’. The third definition, however, allows for the sense Mephistopheles and the devils prefer, as ‘Conception, imagination, fancy’, while the sixth definition describes those thoughts most connected to the possibility of action and, thus, most dangerous to their power over human minds, ‘The entertaining of some project in the mind; the idea of doing something, as contemplated or entertained in the mind; (hence) intention, purpose, design’.²⁰ The devils do not want Faustus to think about God or the possibility of his saving grace as a prospective ‘project of the mind’, and thus they attempt to occupy Faustus’s thoughts, his ‘imagination’ and ‘fancy’, with ideas on the hopelessness of his situation as pertaining to his lack of will. So in one sense thoughts are tied to experience much more so than to the learning that led Faustus to abandon divinity. Marlowe’s use of thoughts also resembles how William Perkins uses the word in his theological treatise *Satan’s Sophistrie Answered by Our Savior Christ*.²¹ Cross-referencing *Faustus* with *Satan’s Sophistrie* most likely does not shed light on questions concerning will and intellect in the former text. But it may aid understanding of the use of the word thoughts and its possible theological implications to early modern audiences.

In a passage where Perkins describes the theological basis for Christ’s temptation by the devil, he focuses on the effect of the Holy Spirit on Christ’s thoughts. He follows this by posing the objection that, since, theologically speaking, the Spirit proceeds from Christ, one could question how Christ himself could be led by the Spirit. This objection he answers by noting the intentional humility of Christ’s humanity in being ‘guided by the Spirit of God, euen in his mouing from one place to another’ and arguing that believers likewise should ‘suffer our selues to be guided & directed by Gods holy spirit in all our thoughts, words and deeds’.²² But, according to Perkins, the devil can also direct believers’ thoughts:

The Diuell tempts men with sundry blasphemous, horrible, and vncleane thoughts. Now that we may discern them, and keepe our selues from despaire when we find them in vs, we must know that in the mind there be many cogitations which arise of the flesh, and from our owne corrupt hearts, and these be sinne. Besides these there be other cogitations conueyed aud suggested vnto vs by the Diuell, and these

be the Diuels temptations but no sinnes to vs, vnlesse we entertain them, receiue and approoue of them.²³

The step from temptation to sin becomes defined within ‘entertain[ing]’ and ‘approv[ing]’ such thoughts. The word ‘entertain’ in and of itself does not offer much help in the determination of the ultimate function of thoughts as entertainment can mean ‘to maintain, sustain, keep up’ in two relevant senses, either ‘to keep up, maintain (a state of things, a process); to keep going, continue with (an action, practice, attitude, etc.)’, which would seem to emphasize the status of will, or ‘to keep in a certain state or condition; to keep (a person) in a certain frame of mind’.²⁴ Both are inward acts, and neither definition makes clear whether such mental entertainments take constitutive precedence as the will moving the intellect to action, or vice versa. Yet the sixth definition of ‘thought’ above involves ‘the idea of doing something, as contemplated or entertained in the mind’.²⁵ Entertainment in Perkins’s sense thus seems to be a mental act allowed to persist for the pursuance of willed action, separate from the mental act entertained in the process — a thought continued from its abstract, inert state into something more substantial and practical.

As a further elaboration of the way the devil tempts by way of thoughts, Perkins directs his reader to the example of Judas:

The Diuel tempts men either by conueying into their minds some secret suggestion, or else moues them by some outward obiect, that he may put into them some conceipt of that sin which he would haue them commit: as vnto *Iudas*, the Diuel cast this vile thought into his heart, *Iudas* betray thy maister, *Iohn 13. 27*. So here the Diuell suggests vnto the mind of Christ these motions, to moue him to vnbeleefe, idolatrie and couetousnesse.²⁶

This likewise seems to emphasize entertaining thoughts as intellectual or meditative frames separate from either cogitations or willed action. For both Jesus and Judas, the cogitation comes as a temptation and functions separately from action, not being in and of itself ‘sinne’; otherwise Christ himself could be said to sin in his temptation. But the two men diverge where one entertains such thoughts and thus wills himself to act on the temptation and the other does not. Thoughts as intellectual cogitations do not themselves serve as the first moment of the sinful act; rather sin results from their continuation, or their being taken up within a reflexive awareness of the cogitation — their entertainment. Perkins describes a sort of separation of moment between the suggestion to act and the action itself,

but where the sinning person performs a continuation of the intellectual run-up to the action by entertaining the thoughts that had been spiritually implanted. This mental entertainment is, thus, an act of the will, and does constitute sin within Perkins's theology. While the distinction between tempting thoughts and the will to sin hinges upon an epistemic distinction between movements of the intellect — or 'secret suggestions' as prompts to willed action — and the actual willed decision to act, one can also act by continuing to think, by entertaining such implanted spiritual influences. This sense of thoughts agrees with Hamlet's speech about 'conscience making cowards of us all' where 'the pale cast of thought' thwarts 'enterprises of great pith and moment' and causes them to 'lose the name of action'.²⁷ Thought's pale cast only qualifies as a tempting cogitation, in Perkins's sense, not an entertainment, which would spur Hamlet on to revenge. The strong distinction between thought and action here suggests they can work at cross purposes where will is held as the more momentous causal instigator, but also that where entertainment of thought itself qualifies as action.

At this juncture, we can question how Ockhamism versus Thomism, particularly in relation to experiential thoughts, might have found their way into Marlowe's world during his composition of *Faustus*. Two events laid the foundation for this possibility: the Condemnations of 1277 at the University of Paris, made by the bishop of Paris Étienne Tempier under the direction of Pope John XXI and in conjunction with Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Kilwardby as well as the Fifth Lateran Council, held between 1512 and 1517. After the rediscovery of Aristotle's works in the twelfth century, Aristotelian philosophy inundated medieval thought through the translations and commentaries of Arabic philosophers such as Avicenna and Averroes. By synthesizing Aristotle with Plato, they particularly influenced theories of causality and coloured Aristotle's works with the neo-Platonic conception of emanation, whereby God was understood to be 'essentially linked to creation and, God's transcendence notwithstanding, immanent and present with the world'.²⁸ Also inherent to this Platonized Aristotelianism was the idea of the free-standing nature of goodness, one that emanated by nature from God and not by an act of his will. The creeping pantheism of emanative neo-Platonism seemed to detractors to compromise God's omnipotence. Aquinas meanwhile 'plac[ed] the Eternal Forms in the divine mind as exemplars in accordance with which God created the world and ruled it' as a compromise position between the Arabian-Aristotelian influence (which by the mid-thirteenth century had spread to dominate European universities), radical Aristotelians like Boethius, and radical anti-Aristotelians such as Bonaventure and Henry of Ghent.²⁹ In 1277, the church took a hardline stance against Aristotelianism, implicating

Aquinas in the process.³⁰ Ockham wrote his philosophy on human will in reaction to these condemnations, building on the work already completed by Duns Scotus. Aquinas's view dictated that 'an act of will must be preceded by an act of understanding', which is why Aquinas's view on human cognition or causation is sometimes referred to as 'intellectualism'.³¹ After the condemnations of 1277, when the church demanded that philosophers begin to argue for the total freedom of God, such a position further entailed a stronger precedence of will over intellect in human cognition. Again, where God's will enacts his creative power, so does it also morally obligate human will to obey. Ockham thus argued for human voluntarism, where 'an act of choosing may conform to a judgment preceding, but it need not do so, [and where] an agent is perfectly capable of choosing to do what he himself judges to be the worst of the alternatives available to him'.³² Faustus exemplifies just such an alternative.

But implicit to Ockham's notion of the primacy of will over intellect, however, is the adjacent theory on the distinction of the sensitive soul and the intellectual soul, that the substantial form of the human being is plural rather than unified (as Aquinas had taught). This theory has vast implications for the early modern understanding of the immortality of soul, particularly after the Fifth Lateran Council took up Ockham's sense of the plurality of soul as the church's official stance. Filtering down through the writings of John Buridan and John Mair, Ockham's ideas about the plurality of human substance would become the official position of the church following the controversy surrounding Pietro Pomponazzi, who argues in his *De immortalitate animae* against any 'natural reasons [that] can be brought forth proving that the soul is immortal'.³³ Pomponazzi takes up the Thomist argument against the natural proof for the immortality of the soul, and it is in direct opposition to such arguments that the Lateran Council proclaims the Ockhamist position, and to which Descartes explicitly responds in the dedicatory letter his *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Descartes's dualism is often likened to that of Ockham concerning the plurality of the human substance, so much so that Ockham has been called by some 'the first dualist' as a philosopher whose take on human intellect is widely understood to prefigure that of Descartes.

Francis Oakley argues for the influence of Ockham pervading the intellectual world of early modern England, particularly where Protestantism becomes suffused with voluntarist ideas, noting that Luther was educated by nominalists of an Ockhamist strain and that Calvin likewise 'viewed the moral law as completely dependent on the will of God, which law he equated with the testimony of the natural law implanted in the souls of men'.³⁴ When challenged about the difficulties of parsing the doctrinal significance of certain biblical passages, both

reformers claim that God only illumines the minds of those who are chosen to be illumined; the power of the human mind to reason does not fall under the purview of a divine order where creation is immanently legible but apparent only through the willed mandate and revelation of God. Two theologians who hold so strongly with predestination, as Luther and Calvin do, might seem unlikely proponents of the voluntarist position on human agency. But voluntarism, in their sense, entails not a will to act but a limitation placed upon the intellect's capacity to respond to universals. Anti-intellectualism characterizes this doctrinal view more so than the freedom of the will. Others who explicitly held comparably voluntarist views include John Preston, William Ames, and early Cambridge Platonist Nathaniel Culverwell. The broader argument concerning the influence of voluntarism indicates Ockhamism, and particularly its historical origins in the Condemnations of 1277, set the stage for the advent of the science of Galileo and Newton as well as the mechanistic worldview of René Descartes, particularly where they owe a debt to a version of nature wherein causality can be attributed to God's creative fiat rather than to laws of nature emanating from divine goodness. Nature does not fall under the metaphor of the organism suffused with the goodness of God and falling into place in a grand design; rather, it is a mechanism set into motion by God's revelatory command.

Marlowe attended Cambridge University from 1580 to 1587. Gaining his master's in divinity would have exposed him on a daily basis to controversies within humanist thought that recall the above-mentioned, long-standing conflict between Aquinas and Ockham. In 1570, the Cambridge statutes and the general humanist trend in education prescribed a bachelor's curriculum should focus on Aristotelian and Ciceronian rhetoric (the former's *Sophistical Refutations* and the latter's *Topica*) in precedence over logic or 'the medieval accretions of the Aristotelian syllabus' mentioned before; while lecturers were given a lot of leeway on how to apply these restrictions, the norm trended away from Arabic commentaries on Aristotle, reflecting the old controversy of 1277 in which Aquinas had been caught up.³⁵ The humanist focus on ancient Greek texts would have reflected the Greek philosophy of nature as a unified order, and both Cicero and Aquinas take the Aristotelian line in that regard, the natural law ethic of which persisted even when divorced from the neo-Platonic influence of the Arabic commentators. Yet Richard F. Hardin notes that, while the early modern humanist focus in some ways resembled the trivium of the Middle Ages, English university education in Marlowe's time also begins to undergo significant changes motivated by a conflict between medieval meditations and the more practical aims of modernity, and 'the conflict between practical and spiritual ends of education had reached a crisis in

Marlowe's time'.³⁶ Humanism itself was beginning to edge away from the Ciceronian emphasis of natural law toward the practical and sceptical political theory of Tacitus, and this dynamic infused the universities as they increasingly became training grounds for upholding state bureaucracy. The debt early modern scientific thought owed to the voluntarist theology of Ockham and Duns Scotus, as noted by Oakley, would seem also to extend to humanist university curriculum. As Marlowe was caught in the move toward the modern, the academic conflict between action and contemplation and the manner in which those two categories related to one another very likely came to his awareness.

When Faustus describes hell as a fable, therefore, he demonstrates the dilemma of knowledge as a willed action and the opportunity that dilemma makes for theatres of the mind, whether to persuade others to desired rhetorical positions or to persuade oneself to the metaphysical possibilities of inward thoughts. Under these conditions, damnation results from being distracted by 'delights of the mind', drawn to performances that would pass for knowledge. Likewise, salvation comes of noting the means of those delights by way of self-reflective thoughts, the mental apparatus that allows performances to crowd the inward perspective with real-seeming images and ideas and thereby to indicate a sort of purposiveness that undermines the anti-intellectualism of willed knowledge. Through his parody of the dilemma of scepticism in *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe meditates on the strong determinism of the sceptical problematic and invites his audience to imagine other avenues of thought and experience.

Notes

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- 1 Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. David Scott Kastan (New York, 2005), 1.1.84. Hereafter parenthetical citations reference scene and line numbers in the B-text version of the play in this edition.
- 2 The long critical tradition surrounding *Doctor Faustus* positions the play between these two options. For the moralist argument, see Una Ellis-Fermor, *Christopher Marlowe* (1927; rpt. London, 2013) and Harry Levin, *The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe* (Boston, 1952), <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674424869>. For the idea of a lapsed Calvinist caught within the determinisms of his own sin, see Leo Kirschbaum, 'Marlowe's Faustus: A Reconsideration', *Review of English Studies* 19.75 (1943), 225–41, <https://doi.org/10.1093/res/os-xix.75.225> and Clifford Davidson, 'Renaissance Dramatic Forms, Cosmic Perspective, and Alienation', *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 27.1 (1985), 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1177/018476788502700104>. This dichotomy breaks down when considering the early modern tendency for ideological enemies to freely accuse each other of subjectivism of conscience; such accusations position both free-will sceptics and determinists within the same problematic. Richard Popkin winnows down the 'intellectual crisis' of the Reformation to a scepticism concerning the criterion for knowledge, but also to the widespread appeal to individual conscience; see *The History of Skepticism From Erasmus to Spinoza* (Oakland CA, 1979), 4–5. My argument follows John Parker's discussion of how Marlowe's plays trade in 'traditional instabilities' in *The Aesthetic of Anti-christ: From Christian Drama to Christopher Marlowe* (Ithaca NY, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801463549>.
- 3 Jennifer Waldron, *Reformations of the Body: Idolatry, Sacrifice, and Early Modern Theater* (New York, 2013), 5–12, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137313126>.
- 4 Ibid, 87.
- 5 Ibid, 91.
- 6 Ibid, 43.
- 7 Francis Oakley, 'Christian Theology and the Newtonian Science: The Rise of the Concept of the Laws of Nature', *Church History* 30.4 (1961), 433–57, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3161219>: 'The natural law, according to Aquinas, is nothing other than the Eternal Law in so far as it concerns man and is apprehended by him, and the

Eternal Law itself is the divine reason in which all things, irrational as well as rational, participate — in that “they derive from it certain inclinations to those actions and aims which are proper to them” (442).

- 8 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (London, 1920–1935), Ia, 2ae, qu. 91, art. 2 Resp.
- 9 From Ockham, *In libros Sententiarum*, 4.3–4, quoted from *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. Paul Vincent Spade (Cambridge, 1999), 295. For Ockham ‘Not only the moral law but the whole of Creation ... must be radically contingent upon the undetermined decisions of the divine will ... And, believing this, he had little choice but to abandon the traditional doctrine of the divine ideas, and to dismiss with it the whole realist metaphysic of essences upon which it depended’ (quoted in Oakley, ‘Christian Theology’, 442). Ockham also extends this flavour of unchecked authority to the pope and to secular rulers. For his position on the former see *Quodlibetal Questions VI.I*, and for the latter see *Dialogus de potestate papae et imperatoris*, both quoted from *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. Spade, 298.
- 10 John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford, 1991), 292.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid, 293.
- 14 François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* (New York, 1963), 187.
- 15 Ibid, 127.
- 16 Ibid, 128.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid, 188.
- 19 Ibid, 186.
- 20 *Oxford English Dictionary Online (OED Online)*, s.v. ‘thought’.
- 21 Stachniewski calls Perkins ‘the most influential English Calvinist’; see Stachniewski, *Persecutory Imagination*, 17.
- 22 William Perkins, *Satans Sophistrie Ansuuered by Our Sauuour Christ and in Diuers Sermons Further Manifested / by That Worthy Man Maister William Perkins; to Which Is Added, a Comfort for the Feeble Minded, Wherein Is Set Downe the Temptations of a Christian* (London, 1604; STC: 19747.5), B4v.
- 23 Perkins, *Satans Sophistrie*, C1v.
- 24 *OED Online*, s.v. ‘entertain’.
- 25 *OED Online*, s.v. ‘thought’.
- 26 Perkins, *Satans Sophistrie*, C1r.

- 27 William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston, 1973), 3.1.84, 86–9.
- 28 Alexander S. Jensen, 'The Unintended Consequences of the Condemnation of 1277: Divine Power and the Established Order in Question', *Colloquium* 41.1 (2009), 57–72, 58.
- 29 Oakley, 'Christian Theology', 442.
- 30 See Jensen, 'Unintended Consequences', 59–60.
- 31 Vere Chappell, 'Self-Determination', in *Early Modern Philosophy: Mind, Matter, and Metaphysics*, ed. Christia Mercer and Eileen O'Neill (Oxford, 2005), 127–40, 129, <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195177606.003.0009>.
- 32 Chappell, 'Self-Determination', 130.
- 33 Henrik Lagerlund, 'Introduction: The Mind/Body Problem and Late Medieval Conceptions of the Soul', in *Forming the Mind: Essays on the Internal Senses and the Mind/Body Problem from Avicenna to the Medical Enlightenment*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Dordrecht, Netherlands, 2007), 1–15, 11, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6084-7>.
- 34 Oakley, 'Christian Theology', 440.
- 35 Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, 2002), 55, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511490620>.
- 36 Richard F. Hardin, 'Marlowe and the Fruits of Scholarism', *Philological Quarterly* 63 (1984), 387–400, 389.

