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## A PROBLEM IN VALUES: THE FAUSTIAN MOTIVATION IN KIERKEGAARD AND GOETHE

FORREST WILLIAMS

THE Faustian motivation in man has gripped the imagination of the Western world for many centuries and has furnished great minds with wonderfully rich material for creative expression.

Considering the divergence of the most mature elaborations of this perennially significant theme, it would be unwise to suppose that a common title demonstrates an identical meaning. Between the Renaissance puppet plays in Germany, Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, Goethe's *Faust*, the operas of Gounod and Berlioz, and Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus* there are more specific differences than similarities.

And yet a profound bond, which we may call "the Faustian motivation," appears to unite this variety of great works, and to men today as to men of centuries past the figure of Faust, in whatever specific guise he may present himself, strikes a resonant note of fellowship.

This Faustian motivation<sup>1</sup> may perhaps be generalized according to several characteristic features, although such a generalization could not claim to be more than approximative. In fact, the exact nature of the Faustian figure is the principal issue of the writings concerning Faust, and, as we shall see specifically with regard to Kierkegaard and Goethe, nothing less than the given work as a whole is capable of posing and answering this complex and vital question. Acknowledging that we are speaking abstractly, however, it seems plausible to say, first, that the impulsion or force

which drives the Faustian figure bears a closer relation to his person than do many other aspects of his activity. This personal character of the Faustian drive may be called its *intimacy* in order not to beg in advance the question of its exact relation to the self.<sup>2</sup> For this intimate force may appear to be, for example, an ordinarily neglected side of the self, or a surprisingly familiar external force, or divinity itself, or nature, or evil, or even so particular a thing as sensual passion. Secondly, therefore, this intimacy is largely *inscrutable* regarding its origin and its ultimate purpose. The Faustian figure must act according to a necessity whose true character is neither identifiable by his usual factual standards nor measurable by his usual moral standards. Faust is thus, thirdly, a divided man, driven by an *essentially ambiguous* force which presents itself simultaneously as an obligation in harmony with a subtle moral sensibility and as a rebellion against all justifiable behavior. Finally, there pervades this unstable and potent mixture a fourth characteristic—indeed, the essence of the Faustian figure by which we recognize him: the *exacting* character of the Faustian motivation which demands that he act in obedience to it. Precisely what are the actions which are dictated may be, in view of the other characteristics, discoverable only uncertainly and by immense physical, mental, and spiritual exertion. Each of these characteristics is, of course, interwoven with the others.

On second view such a description of

the Faustian figure remains dismayingly inadequate to his intricate nature, and a more informative description is quite conceivable. But we prefer to insist that reliable and precise formulations are *never* to be found in such descriptions, and we presuppose in the ensuing discussion that none of us expects to find adequate formulations of the Faustian figure apart from the masterpieces which have been devoted to him.<sup>3</sup> If we summarize, therefore, by saying that the Faustian motivation in general concerns an intimate yet inscrutable force which exacts action without distinguishing itself unambiguously from that which opposes it, we are perhaps able to express this complex theme without begging the question of its true significance to us in favor of any one of its principal creative formulations; but, by the same token, we permit ourselves only a vague and relatively unenlightening conception of the Faustian problem, like the critic who described Hamlet as an indecisive young man. We advance this abstract conception of the Faustian motivation only for the specific purpose of fixing a point of reference against which we may attempt to judge the import to us of two creative interpretations of the Faustian figure: the Kierkegaardian interpretation and the Goethean interpretation.

We must add that if the works of Kierkegaard and Goethe *are to constitute a genuine problem in values*, it is necessary to suppose that their literary and philosophical achievements have practical significance. When two great minds, such as those of Kierkegaard and Goethe, treat the Faustian problem, they are, we believe, taking in hand a major theme of our Western existence and an important determinant in our future and critically interpreting for us its meaning. Because we live today in the midst of dilemmas

which these men structuralized, evaluated, and expressed, a comparison of their analyses is not merely an intellectual exercise in comparative studies but becomes as well a practical problem in human orientation. None of us, to be sure, normally lives the dramatic career of a Kierkegaardian or a Goethean figure, and it may be that we do not ordinarily consider ourselves touched in any way by the Faustian motivation. Statistically speaking, some such question as the problem of taxes is perhaps more universal, and only snobbery would attempt to depreciate these facts. Yet surely we would be seriously mistaken not to see as well the universality and the practicality of reflective works such as those of Kierkegaard and Goethe. Indeed, what place the prosaic problem of taxes should occupy in our existence may be one of the many seemingly prosaic questions to which these writings are relevant.<sup>4</sup> For it is nothing less than an intuitable hierarchy of values which is made evident through concrete literary presentation.

In so far as we sense in ourselves—or perhaps even more significantly, in our “cultural focus”<sup>5</sup>—an equivocal demanding force resembling the Faustian motivation, it becomes of the utmost importance to us whether we move, deliberately or instinctively, in the direction of, let us say, a Kierkegaardian resolution or a Goethean resolution. The problem of this discussion is, therefore, basically a practical one for the individual and for culture, concerning a multitude of decisions perhaps only gradually accumulated in the course of daily affairs, rather than a narrowly literary or philosophical one in a merely technical sense; and we may conscientiously take advantage of the enlarged perspectives of such men as Kierkegaard and Goethe, provided always our understanding of their works is ac-

tively continuous with our routine experience. With these qualifications and this purpose in mind, we propose, therefore, to pose a value-problem which appears to us to affect Western man and to attempt to clarify it by tracing out and comparing the interpretations of Kierkegaard and Goethe. We shall attempt to show, in conclusion, that these thinkers present us with radically different interpretations of the basic Faustian motivation which we have described, and consequently with radically different practical recommendations.

Three striking figures of our cultural history, Don Juan, Faust, and Abraham, seemed to Kierkegaard to represent crucial moments in human existence. Don Juan, the epitome of sensuality, represents for Kierkegaard the prototype of Aesthetic Existence in its erotic manifestation in which the characteristic *particularity* of the *aesthetic* dallies through constant variation with the characteristic *universality* of the ethical. The ethical life is represented by marriage, the rock on which the plundering galleon of aesthetic existence threatens to founder out of carelessness or eventual boredom. Marriage is the universalization through social objectivity of the erotic tendency. Thus it is that the marital relationship, unlike the aesthetic one, is *justifiable*, for all justification, Kierkegaard reminds us, resides in the universals of reason, law, institution. In marriage, the philanderer finds himself committed to an objective relationship with another, contracted without regard for the aesthetic reality of temporal change and fructifying only in the sacrifice of the particular contracting individuals for the sake of the promotion of social reality through reproduction.

Only when the "ethical universal," typified by marriage, has superseded the "aesthetic particular," typified by pleas-

ure, does Kierkegaard introduce the Faustian motivation, which emerges to disturb the outward equanimity of objective social status. The examples of romance and marriage, however, are only illustrative of the distinction between Aesthetic Existence and Ethical Existence, and their special relevance to Kierkegaard's life<sup>6</sup> should not cause us to forget that the distinction is a wider one which is capable of an indefinite variety of actual manifestations. Faust appears, therefore, as a *doubter of the universal*, an apostate against the spirit which is the home of the universal, and by implication a devotee of the flesh.

Kierkegaard's interpretation of Faust is here clearly more subtle than the popular view of Faust as a sensualist. At first sight, one might easily mistake a Faust for another Don Juan,<sup>7</sup> for a rebellious aesthete regressing to a prior stage of existence, and doubtless much infidelity to the universal is of this nature. Kierkegaard's very method, for the most part aesthetic in itself, in which he progresses through constant advances into subjectivity to increasingly subtle nuances of existence, lends itself only too easily to such a misinterpretation. However, if we have carefully "imitated" the "infinite movement" (a subjective, unmediated, spiritual act) of the leap from the region of aesthetic particularity to the region of ethical universality, we are bound to notice that the defection of Faust which turns him in some sense against society and its reliance on the universal is actually not a return but an advance purposively directed<sup>8</sup> toward a stage transcendent to the ethical stage. Faust's sensualism and "profanity," therefore, are no longer essential features of his character, as they are for Don Juan, but contingent manifestations determined teleologically by an end which is embodied in the third

of Kierkegaard's archetypal existences, Abraham. Kierkegaard's Faust, therefore, does not stand below the ethical, but between the ethical (e.g., Judge William of *Either/Or*) and Abraham.

We should pause here for an instant to note the practical significance of this distinction between the Faustian character and the Don Juan, and to observe the coincidence with Goethe's *Faust*. The usual hopelessness and sterility of rebellion against the universal as it appears in our society, both in individual form as the small-town scandal<sup>9</sup> or in the mass forms of antisocial institutions,<sup>10</sup> may often be due to the failure to realize that the potentiality, the *telos*, of the Faustian motivation properly understood does not lie in a permanent regression to the sensual particular but in a progression toward another kind of individuality. Thus, if the correct view of most "Faustian" rebellions *happens* to be that they are crimes against the universal committed by the aesthetic or egoistic individual, this *need not* be the case. Failure to recognize the possibility of a true Faust is the chronic blindness of the extreme conservative.

That the sensuality which we ordinarily associate with the Faustian figure is contingent or provisional is an important point of agreement between Kierkegaard and Goethe. If we do not allow ourselves to read into Goethe's Faust Marlowe's Dr. Faustus,<sup>11</sup> whose nature is so much more familiar to the English-speaking world, we can see, as will be indicated more fully later, that the struggle of Goethe's Faust is not essentially one of sense versus intellect. (This very misinterpretation was, of course, an especially convenient one for nineteenth-century Idealist critics.) The life of pleasure in Goethe's work not only fails

to be Mephistopheles' trump card, but Faust soon tires of this game, and the belittling fiend rapidly finds himself helping to promote a tragedy far exceeding sensual proportions. Thus, just as the Kierkegaardian Faust's apostasy against the spirit is outwardly deceptive, so the Goethean Faust's affair with Marguerite conceals beneath its scandalous exterior a genuine love. Goethe's Faust, like Kierkegaard's Faust, is not an irresponsible philanderer in the erotic sense or in any other sense when he breaks the laws of society.

Returning to Kierkegaard's analysis of Faust, however, few additional points of agreement between Kierkegaard and Goethe can be found. In fact, Kierkegaard explicitly objects to Goethe's interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

We have observed that Kierkegaard's Faust does not carry within himself, or within the context of his existence, the explanation of his actions. This is a fundamental point of contrast with Goethe's drama, whose Faustian context (provided, of course, we perceive its total expanse) is capable of revealing a complete philosophy. To understand Faust is, according to Kierkegaard, a movement toward Abraham in whom alone Kierkegaard finds, if he finds at all, the culmination of existential thought.

The most informative discussion by Kierkegaard of the Faustian problem occurs as an extended "digression" in "Problem III" of *Fear and Trembling*.<sup>13</sup> Faust is the doubter of the universal. But, objects Kierkegaard, 'whereas again and again it is repeated that every age has its Faust,'<sup>14</sup> the *poets* inevitably fail to perceive the inner nature of this doubter.<sup>15</sup> Thus, we have advance notice from Kierkegaard himself that our discussion of Kierkegaard and Goethe is

likely to present us with alternative interpretations and alternative resolutions of the Faustian problem.

Criticizing Goethe in particular, Kierkegaard writes:

Even in Goethe's interpretation of Faust I sense the lack of a deeper psychological insight into the secret conversations of doubt with itself. In our age, when indeed all have experienced doubt, no poet has yet made a step in this direction. So I think I might well offer them Royal Securities to write on, so that they could write down all they have experienced in this respect—they would hardly write more than there is room for on the left hand margin.<sup>16</sup>

And to remedy the errors of the poets, Kierkegaard suggests "a little alteration,"<sup>17</sup> by which Faust would be not only "the doubter *par excellence*" but also "a sympathetic nature."<sup>18</sup>

It is this "sympathetic nature" of Faust, attaching him to the ethical universal at the same time as he stands ethically guilty of doubt, that causes the torture of his existence.

The commandment of the ethical is:

"Thou shalt acknowledge the universal, and it is precisely by speaking thou does not acknowledge it, and thou must not have compassion on the universal."<sup>19</sup>

But Faust's sympathetic nature, his compassion, will not permit him to speak of the precariousness of the reality in which others live with such apparent confidence. Were Faust to speak he might "frighten men up in dismay" and "cause existence to quake beneath their feet."<sup>20</sup> Thus, whatever Faust does, whether he remains silent or speaks out, he is a criminal against the universal. By speech or by silence Faust's doubt places his judgment above that of the universal. His compassionate silence lacks the warranty of any validation. Until a "trans-ethical" ground is reached, Faust is rid-

den with the suspicion, doubtless shared by his neighbors, that his attitude may be a regressive phenomenon,<sup>21</sup> e.g., pride.<sup>22</sup> We may conjecture (although Kierkegaard does not say so directly) that what others implicitly doubt concerning the value of the universal but have not the strength of doubt to acknowledge explicitly to themselves, they betray to Faust's keener awareness by their unguarded talk. The true Faust, on the other hand, suffers his own silence, or, if he speaks words, speaks only to confuse<sup>23</sup> (which is another mode of silence). Faust thus sacrifices himself daily through silence and ironic chatter to the universal upon which mankind, from the man-in-the-street to the speculative philosopher,<sup>24</sup> professes to base its existence.

Thus far, the Kierkegaardian Faust is a figure *withdrawn*, a doubter "holding secret conversations with himself." This movement of withdrawal must be understood to be *essentially subjective*, and not merely strategical, for it is a movement complete only in Abraham, the epitome of subjectivity whom Kierkegaard as a literary man cannot even understand but can only admire.<sup>25</sup> Now, the partial rejection of the universal by Faust in favor of what appears to be the assertion of his own particularity becomes the paradoxical affirmation by Abraham through his own particularity of a particularity not his own, i.e., God. Viewed from the vantage point of Mount Moriah, the Kierkegaardian Faust appears as an existence who contradictorily *would not* acknowledge the ethical universal through the universal of language precisely because he was still attached to the objectivity of the universal. Abraham, too, is silent, but he is silent because in his complete subjectivity he *cannot* speak.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the quasi-subjective character of Kierkegaard's Faust is confirmed by the totally subjective character of Kierkegaard's (or Abraham's) resolution of the Faustian motivation. By an "infinite movement," i.e., a subjective, unmediated, spiritual act, Faust's ethical guilt vanishes—in religious guilt, or sin.<sup>27</sup> Justification before nature, other individuals, or objective society is now not merely improbable, undesirable, or contrary to will, but a *fortiori* impossible, since the supremacy of the particular is affirmed over the very grounds of all justification, the universal and its objectifications in nature, man, and society. The absolute for which the Faustian figure strives can be had only through pure subjectivity, apart from nature and history.<sup>28</sup> This is the leap of faith, an unqualified plunge into the absurd at the expense of the ethical, viz., in the concrete example of Abraham, at the expense of the resolution to sacrifice the life of his son<sup>29</sup> who was to be the seed of a multitudinous society.

In his last years Kierkegaard seems to have become sceptical regarding even Abraham;<sup>30</sup> but if there is in Kierkegaard's thought any answer to the problem of the Faustian motivation, that answer lies in Abraham's absolute faith in the Absurd. Thus, it is Faust *in retrospect*, Faust as "propaedeutic" to the religious state of pure subjectivity, who appears in Kierkegaard's thought. Or, as Kierkegaard phrases it, the suspension of the ethical is teleological.<sup>31</sup> Thus, Kierkegaard's criticism of the poets who do not know "the secret conversations of doubt with itself" is predicated on the belief that the Faustian motivation is *essentially an inward movement*, a torment whose origin is essentially inward and whose resolution must be, after Abraham, essentially inward. We might say, in effect,

that the Faustian motivation for Kierkegaard follows upon what transpires to be an orientation of interest away from nature and society toward an incomparable world of subjective reality. We have already noted, moreover, that this reorientation is not simply the characteristic movement of detachment or perspectival withdrawal which *accompanies any reorganization of values*, but that it is *intrinsically* subjective. This is, indeed, the guise in which the Faustian motivation commonly presents itself. But it is not the only plausible interpretation of it.

It is not only Kierkegaard's view, but probably the prevailing view in Western thought that the Faustian motivation constitutes an essentially subjective problem requiring a tragically subjective outcome. The great poetic work of Marlowe, and the slighter yet moving opera of Gounod, together with a modern penchant for introspection which no doubt has been partly responsible for the present appreciation of Kierkegaard, all contribute to this belief. Unfortunately, this subjectivism which gathered its forces in the nineteenth century under the banner of Romanticism so affects our twentieth-century critical interpretations that it has been inordinately difficult to recognize an objectively-oriented rendition of the Faustian problem.<sup>32</sup> Goethe's *Faust* was assumed by many readers of Goethe's time and later to be a poem based upon the subjectivism of Kantian and post-Kantian idealism. Since Goethe's drama presents quite a different philosophy than German idealism,<sup>33</sup> it does not fit German idealism at all well, and Goethe has consequently been charged with misunderstanding "true philosophy" and distorting its basic structure.<sup>34</sup> But even to those who have attempted to accept Goethe on his own terms, there has often seemed to be no more than a

subjective problem romantically resolved in sheer hopelessness for Faust through the prison scene which concludes Part I with Marguerite's salvation and Faust's agonized flight with Mephistopheles. Yet Goethe offers a genuine objectively-oriented alternative to the problem in values which turns on the Faustian motivation.

The Faustian motivation in Goethe's drama arises subjectively chiefly in the sense already acknowledged above that any alteration of perspective on values must involve an inward spring of rebellion. But hardly has Goethe's Professor Faust recognized the obscure force which changes his life and nearly destroys it at once, then the exigencies of this force which we have called "intimate, inscrutable, ambiguous, and exacting" turn Faust to the radiant moonlit sky *outside*<sup>35</sup> and to the book of Nostradamus and its sign of the Macrocosm, symbol of the great cosmos. The significance of this second act by Faust, like the first one, is its *outward* orientation, aimed at the experience of nature such as both experience and nature were vigorously conceived by the Renaissance man.

It must be clearly understood that Faust's going over to magic implies his going over to nature. . . . Some readers, who have not observed this relation, have been mightily disturbed that Faust, just after his ecstatic yearning for nature should turn to such a guide book and be diverted by it from disporting himself amid the beauties of the moonlit night. As always, however, Goethe knew what he was about, and the misinterpretations (this one and also the more subtle ones) rest to a large extent on a misunderstanding of the word "nature" as it is here used. One should not lightly assume that the nature Faust yearns for and turns to is the Rousseauian, romantic, sentimental nature of flowers, birds, bees, scenic landscapes, spring-time, young love, and dewy grass in the morning—the nature that imbues the conventional poetry of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. . . . Actually, it should be

quite clear and unmistakable what Goethe meant by "nature" in this first monologue, not only from the tight linkage of magic, nature, book of Nostradamus, macrocosm, and Earth Spirit, but even from the descriptive adjectives and associations that accompany his use of the word. From the five references to "nature" we know that the poet here envisions her as a living being furnishing the environment for man, as the teacher of man, the unfolders of the powers of his soul, and the revealer to him of the colloquy of spirits. Her symbol, the sign of the macrocosm, reveals her forces round about, and its graphic lines show her actively creative before the soul's eye of the magus. But intellectual vision is no substitute for direct intimate contact, and the references to nature culminate in Faust's yearning address to her as the great mother, the all-nourisher, of whose breasts he finds himself deprived while languishing in vain. This is the nature which was traditional from remote antiquity through the Middle Ages, and was particularly elaborated in the Renaissance; it is the great nature sought with equal fervor by philosopher, scientist, magus, and poet; it is not the limited nature of landscape beauty for transcendentalists, aesthetes, and vacationists.<sup>36</sup>

It would be difficult to imagine a more thorough contrast to Kierkegaard's interpretation of the Faustian motivation. Goethe's Faust attempts to dominate the Earth-Spirit by sheer will-power, an effort which proves premature—and, what is most important for our comparison with Kierkegaard's Faust, premature for the reason that Goethe's Faust is insufficiently experienced in the real ways of the universe. To put it as bluntly as the Earth-Spirit does, if less poetically,<sup>37</sup> Goethe's Professor Faust needs to get around.

Thus, although Kierkegaard's Faust might well have echoed the opinion of Goethe's Faust regarding his objective existence: *That is your world! That's called a world!*<sup>38</sup>—he would have meant something different by the exclamation. Kierkegaard's Faust begins by doubting the value of his objective world and ends



by doubting the worth of the world itself; Goethe's Faust doubts the value of his objective world and ends by attempting to embrace the whole of experience within the necessary limitations of human existence. Thus, the contrast between Kierkegaard's Faust and Goethe's Faust becomes almost total at the point of resolution: the former seeks salvation through intensity at the expense of objective reality, the latter is saved through an expansion of the self to the measure of all objectivity.

The subjectivist interpretation of Goethe's Faust seeks nourishment principally in Part I of the drama. But Goethe's *Faust* is a single drama consisting of two organically related parts,<sup>39</sup> and the conclusion of the Faustian venture is not the desperate prison scene in which Marguerite dies, but the victory of Faust in which he dies with the concrete vision of a creative mankind voluntarily co-operating in the maintenance of its structure against the constant and necessary ravages of process and cycle. The "intimate and inscrutable force" which impels Goethe's Faust is a subjective will only in its biographical causation, and by its very thirst for the fullness of experience reveals itself in the course of Faust's gigantic quest as rooted in the objective cosmos itself. Faust becomes precisely the Microcosmic reflection of this dynamic Macrocosm.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Goethe's Faust is so little an anticipation of the Biblical Abraham that he is to be found in the Renaissance among the Michelangelos, Cellinis, Leonardos, Brunos, etc.<sup>41</sup>

Faust has at the beginning of the drama arrived at the preliminary position [of realizing his limitations as a result of his humiliation by the Earth-Spirit], misunderstands it as being the end rather than the beginning, and is turned back in his attempt to reach ultimates by means of sheer force of will and desire

without adequate preparation. Then, however, he is helped forward in his plunge into the fullness of life, with its heavy accompanying portion of evil and tragedy. . . . By the beginning of the second part Faust has at length reached the point of wisdom of Cusanus and Pico, where he can draw the proper conclusions of his not-knowing. He turns his back on the sun, on the quest for ultimates, no longer in rebellious frustration or in impotent yearning, but now in calm realization both of his human limitations and of the rich possibilities the world offers in compensation.<sup>42</sup>

And Professor Jantz adds parenthetically:

The factor of resignation here should not be overstressed; Faust gains as well as loses.<sup>43</sup>

In Kierkegaard, on the contrary, the factor of resignation is precisely that which is stressed when the ethical universal and all its attendant objectivities of the world and society are accepted despite the Faustian drive to transcend them. And a "plunge into the fullness of life" would not be a *forward* movement for Kierkegaard's Faust, but a backward one, or at least a standing-still. At the very best, the Kierkegaardian Faust's relation to objectivity is skeptical and ironic, manifested by silence or deceptive speech, and entirely incapable of comprehending the new-found wisdom of the Goethean Faust at the opening of Part II, stemming from the Renaissance thought of Cusanus and Pico.<sup>44</sup> Whereas Kierkegaard's resolution of the Faustian problem lies in Abraham, who would face the Absolute directly,<sup>45</sup> the lesson of Part I of Goethe's *Faust* is that "we have our life in many-hued reflection."<sup>46</sup> For Goethe's Faust, dedication to our real world is the only avenue to an apprehension of the Absolute: this is a participative, immanent relationship. For Kierkegaard's Faust, a leap to pure subjectivity is the only way to the Absolute: this is a transcendent, one-to-one relationship. The

Kierkegaardian Faust would appear to the Goethean Faust of Part II as a man gone utterly berserk, preferring to be destroyed by the direct rays of the sun than—what is much harder for a Faust—to perceive its light in the natural world.

The vast historical, even epochal, scope of Part II of Goethe's *Faust* leaves no doubt that here the Faustian motivation finds its origin and its purpose in the experience of the total objective cycle of the universe. Thus, Goethe's Faust plunges into experience of every kind, social and political action,<sup>47</sup> history,<sup>48</sup> military ventures,<sup>49</sup> and finally the labor and pain of reconstruction<sup>50</sup> in which he dies.

Great imaginations like those of Kierkegaard and Goethe do not fail to give us internally coherent visions of the meaning of reality and its demands upon us. We must judge for ourselves which of these visions is nearer the truth of the Faustian problem. The subjective side of the problem has been traditionally the better known and perhaps receives its most adequate formulation in Kierkegaard's radical subjectivism, whose importance to the issue at hand derives from its unremitting compression of the Faustian problem into the most subtle and transcending reaches of private existence. Its objective side as developed by Goethe is an alternative resolution whose great significance derives from its vast accounting of objectivity. The one brings a type of unity to the Faustian man through the elimination of experience and understanding, the other through unconditional commitment to experience and understanding. The "sympathetic nature" which Kierkegaard detects in the Faustian character, by which Faust retains an allegiance to objective reality, is the supreme handicap to the Kierkegaardian existential-

ist.<sup>51</sup> Goethe, on the other hand, far from failing to discern this Faustian allegiance to objective reality, as Kierkegaard charges,<sup>52</sup> discovers it to be in fact more integral to Faust's predicament and *salvation* than any "deeper psychological"<sup>53</sup> insight into the secret conversations of doubt with itself."<sup>54</sup>

We can learn, therefore, from both Kierkegaard and Goethe that the initial stage of the Faustian problem involves an act of rebellious assertion, a commitment to what seems to be one's own inward exigency in the face of an objective society. Kierkegaard's Faust "is the doubter *par excellence*,"<sup>55</sup> and Goethe's Faust exclaims, "That's called a world!"<sup>56</sup> The popular interpretation of this rebellion as fundamentally sensual is shown by both Kierkegaard and Goethe, in terms of their respective analyses, to be mistaken. Kierkegaard's Faust has the choice either of remaining silent and thus "saving" the universal which he doubts,<sup>57</sup> or leaping to the subjectivity of Abraham. Goethe's Faust may either incur the damnation of sinking below his capacities,<sup>58</sup> or finding his salvation in the strenuous processes of a creative existence in a dynamic cosmos.

But when one comes to make precise the exact senses in which this Faustian force is, as we have phrased it, "intimate, inscrutable, ambiguous, and exacting," the disparity between the two elaborations of the meaning of the Faustian theme becomes even more apparent. According to Kierkegaard, the intimacy is the permanently subjective character of the motivation, the inscrutability is its Absurdity with respect to the universal, the ambiguity is its demonic potentiality, and the requiredness is the requiredness of the leap to the supernatural. According to Goethe, the intimacy rests on the organic relation between microcosmic

man and macrocosmic nature, the inscrutability on our fragmentary view of the whole, the ambiguity on the necessary place of destruction in all true process, and the requiredness on the immanent rightness of the creative universe.<sup>59</sup>

At present, the Faustian motivation in our society appears to incline toward a subjective interpretation and resolution.<sup>60</sup> Both alternatives, however, seem

to us to be "genuine options," forced, live, and momentous, constituting a choice in present and future values between the exclusive intensity of the Kierkegaardian Faust and the intensive inclusiveness of the Goethean Faust. Though we may live up to neither, it would be difficult, and unwise, to avoid this problem in values as individuals in a culture of indeterminate future.

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#### NOTES

1. The term "motivation" is intended in the most neutral sense possible and is not to be taken necessarily as a psychological category, since an interpretation at this juncture would beg the very question which the Faustian works attempt to answer, each in its own way.

2. See preceding note.

3. Major and debatable metaphysical and aesthetic principles are implied in such a presupposition, no doubt.

4. The example is even too easy to relate to these works: Kierkegaard imagines himself being introduced to the "knight of resignation" and exclaiming, "Good Lord, is this the man? Is it really he? Why, he looks like a tax-collector!" (*Fear and Trembling*, tr. W. Lowrie [Princeton, 1941], p. 53); and Goethe's Mephistopheles advises a typically modern "solution" of state finances to the Emperor (*Faust*, ed. Witkowski [Leiden, Holland, 1949], ll. 4728-5064).

5. The term is borrowed from Professor Bertram Morris.

6. It is fundamental to existential methodology that its analyses be carried out with reference to situations close to the person; in Kierkegaard's case, his love for Regina and their broken engagement was such a situation.

7. Viz., Valentin's (understandable) misapprehension of the fundamental nature of his sister's relationship to Faust and his shortsighted condemnation, in Goethe's *Faust*, ll. 3620-3775.

8. In Kierkegaard's terms, "a theological suspension of the ethical" (*Fear and Trembling*, "Problem I," pp. 79-101).

9. We confine ourselves to the erotic thread which runs through these stages of existence, but once again must caution that the Faustian motivation shows itself in many other ways, e.g., political arrogance, avant-garde poetry—in short, wherever a seemingly arbitrary exception is made to the lawfulness of the universal according to the conditions described.

10. Perhaps nationwide contests, crime movies, cartels, are illustrations from our present American scene.

11. The pursuit of sensual pleasure is one of the few provisional points of contact between the two dramas. Goethe's *Faust*, however, cannot be captivated by the senses, as Mephistopheles soon discovers to his combined chagrin and admiration.

12. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 168.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 166-73.

14. Also the contention, and the *raison d'être*, of our discussion.

15. *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 167-68. The "problem in values" which forms the subject of this discussion is precisely the problem of who is closest to the truth and value of the Faustian figure, the poetic philosopher Kierkegaard or the philosophic poet Goethe.

16. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 168.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

21. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 172.

22. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

23. Note in Goethe's *Faust* as well, Wagner's frequent misunderstandings of Faust's remarks which Faust does not really try to correct (see esp. ll. 522-605, 1011-1146).

24. For Kierkegaard, Hegel would be the prime example of the speculative thinker upon whom Faust would take ironic compassion.

25. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 174.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

27. "... in this case his doubt is cured, even though he may get another doubt" (*ibid.*, p. 173).

28. Contrast the words of Goethe's *Faust*: "Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben," (l. 47270) and "Da wär's der Mühe wert, ein Mensch zu sein," (l. 11407).

29. The crowning moment of the ethical universal of marriage (see above).

30. Kierkegaard wondered whether God could really return Isaac to Abraham, and Regina to Kierkegaard.

31. Cf. *Fear and Trembling*, "Problem I," pp. 79-101.

32. To acknowledge here a debt to the teaching and writing of the American Goethe scholar, Professor Harold Jantz, can only be a poor expression of the extent of this obligation. Although Professor Jantz is in no way technically responsible for the opinions on Goethe's *Faust* advanced in this discussion, these views are expressed in the hope that that they reflect some of his critical achievements.

33. Cf. Harold Jantz, *Goethe's Faust as a Renaissance Man: Parallels and Prototypes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), esp. chap. i. This will be our guide for the remainder of our presentation of Goethe's conception of the Faustian figure (henceforth abbreviated as *Goethe's Faust, Etc.*).

34. For a recent example, see Nicolai von Bubnoff, "Goethe und die Philosophie seiner Zeit," *Zeitschrift für Philologische Forschung*, I (1947), 541-88.

35. Goethe, *Faust*, II. 386-97.

36. *Goethe's Faust, Etc.*, pp. 60-61. (All quotations from this work are by permission of the publisher, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.)

37. Goethe, *Faust*, II. 486-98, 501-9, 512-13.

38. *Goethe's Faust, Etc.*, p. 60; also, Goethe, *Faust*, I. 409.

39. Cf. *Goethe's Faust, Etc.*, p. 137.

40. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 107.

41. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 41.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

45. See above.

46. *Goethe's Faust, Etc.*, p. 120; cf. Goethe, *Faust*, I. 4727.

47. Cf. Goethe, *Faust*, II. 4728-6172.

48. Cf. *ibid.*, II. 7005-10038.

49. Cf. *ibid.*, II. 10345-10782.

50. Cf. *ibid.*, II. 11045-11586.

51. To what degree this is true of contemporary existentialism is a more difficult question. Heidegger's *Dasein*, Sartre's *engagement*, and Jaspers' *Weltorientierung* are "publicly oriented" categories. And the last philosopher, at least, is clearly indebted to Goethe's thought.

52. See above; also, *Fear and Trembling*, p. 167.

53. Cf. Walter Kaufmann, "Goethe versus Shakespeare: Some Changes in Dramatic Sensibility," *Partisan Review*, XIX (1952), 621-34, in which Goethe's *Faust* is clearly visualized as more than a psychological work, viz., this excellent comparison of Goethe to Dostoevsky: "But if we would find passion, not less intense for being free from terror, and scope and unity outside the pale of dogma, nor purchased by a sacrifice of vision—one world in which our modern multiplicity is *formed*—then we should look to Goethe" (p. 633).

54. *Fear and Trembling*, p. 168.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Goethe's Faust, Etc.*, p. 60; Goethe, *Faust*, I. 409.

57. "I would consider still another case, that of an individual Faust who by being hidden and by his silence would save the universal" (*Fear and Trembling*, p. 166).

58. But the Prologue to Goethe's *Faust* shows that the emphasis is not on *whether* Faust will be saved, but *how* he must save himself despite, and even because of, Mephistopheles (II. 308-11, 315-18).

59. Cf. Goethe, *Faust*, Prologue and concluding scene.

60. Where the objective vision on which were closed the eyes of Goethe's Faust has inspired contemporary thought at all, as in the social philosophy of the late John Dewey, it has been with a disregard for the past and an ignorance of history which does not accord with the fulness of Goethe's philosophy and Faust's experience.