

# Sympathy for the Devil

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The semantics of the word 'evil' holds a negative judgement. Used of persons, 'evil' suggests defect, that is, a qualitative shortcoming. Because 'evil' is a negative trait, to call someone 'evil' is to cast blame. I question whether 'devilish' must mean 'evil'—that is, 'defective and a cause of defect'? I ask, dear reader, because there is a difference between acting in an evil manner and challenging someone. When challenging someone one calls into question the person's ability to make the right choice with what they have in front of them. The difference between merely enforcing something upon someone against their will and challenging them is that, in the case where a person is being challenged, they still have the ability to use their own choice. If you challenge someone who has free will, that is not evil because the person being challenged still has a choice. The devil is portrayed to be evil, because the devil desires to limit a person's free will without considering their well being; instead there is a desire to enforce suffering upon such people. Is there something deeper one must consider before casting a judgment onto such characters? What we may forget to consider are the multiple layers each character has which instigate certain behaviors. One may want to consider the character's intentions, and how strongly they intend to affect the other characters; do they act in such a manner to enforce pain and suffering? These influences should be taken into consideration before judging a character's moral standing.

In fiction, many authors take the devil as the prime case of evil, or 'wounded nature'. Since 'nature' signifies the way of being, as opposed to a coming short of the way of being, a 'wounded nature' would signify the failure of such qualities and imply a coming short of nature: in this case, we consider the subject to be 'evil natured'. By 'wounded natured' one may represent the qualities in man which are not of good faith and cause discordance in humans'

relationships to one another and to the divine. Hence, the devil is a creature often associated with the negation of truth or destruction. In the Bible, the story of *Job* presents the devil as accuser for the sake of bringing justice to humans, who all obey the will of God defectively.

In the biblical story *Job*, the Lord wills only the good, but Satan demands Job's adherence to the good be tested. This is when Satan offers to make his test of negation. Satan presents himself to God, and God initiates a contretemp over Job by praising him to the accuser's face.

Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? (Job, 1:8)

Satan puts Job under assault, because he finds God's praises to be unsuitable. Thus, Satan asks God for permission to harm Job both emotionally and physically in order to prove to God that Job is not an "upright" and "blameless" man. Satan is eager to show that, were God to allow Job to suffer loss of what Job has from God, Job would turn his back on God and turn towards "evil" by cursing Him. Satan is the accuser of Job, and has a theory of who Job is as a person. The accuser's accusation is that Job worships not God, but the gifts God gives to him. This entails that Job makes himself—his comfort, his contentment—the measure of the Good. This is the accuser's theory of Job which is what he is searching to confirm before God through testing Job. Satan is keen on proving to God that he was right all along about Job's unfaithful character. Job does not have to be content in order for Satan to win, because even when discontented with life Job would prove his Love for God were he to stay faithful to Him through his suffering. Thus, Satan wins this discussion with God if Job curses God and turn towards evil. The test for Job is whether or not he is able to find a way to believe in God's goodness and existence if God no longer underwrites Job's welfare with resources and protection.

Satan is also under the impression that Job must be brought to justice; Job must be prosecuted for failure to honor and love the Giver of all goods for more than what He provides. Satan believes Job's lack of faith must be revealed, because human beings are a vanity of God's image and existence. Creating humans is a vanity of God, because Satan thinks they are just created for purposes of serving God. Satan is ready to prove that it isn't Satan who doesn't understand God's creatures, but God who doesn't know them. Satan wants to show God that when putting a human to justice one is able to uncover their malicious side, which does not justify God's unconditional love for them. Satan believes that as soon as Job has all his means of happiness taken away he will show God how ungrateful he is and that he has taken God's gifts for granted. Satan believes that there is no common good among God and humans, because humans lose sight of their contribution and allegiance to God. Humans contribute to an order of creation and the cosmos. They contribute to the cosmos by allegiance to the Good. An example Satan might resonate with is that of a dog, the owner, and treats. A dog will respond positively to its owner as long as there are treats involved as validation; the treats are a sign of appreciation towards the dog's obedience. Satan believes that humans, like the dog, do not have an understanding of faith at all when God is not giving them things, like treats, which enrich their lives.

The first test Satan forces upon Job entails taking away Job's property and children. Although Satan is confident that Job will abandon his faith in God's will being the Good, Job responds to these hardships by saying,

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord (Job, 1:21).

Although Job experiences great sadness from these important losses, Job turns to God as his Savior. In his times of need Job demonstrates his allegiance to God by turning towards his faith, and worshipping Him through his suffering and pain. Job acknowledges that the Lord both gives and takes away. Job shows both God and Satan that the God-given goods are appreciated, but are not the determining factor of his faith. Job recognizes that God can give as easily as He takes things away, but God is still Good and Almighty. “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (Job, 1:22). Satan’s first test ultimately failed. Satan believes his next test must be even more personal, and must affect Job physically, in order for him to truly feel forgotten by the Lord.

“Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But put forth your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.” And the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power; only spare his life.” (Job, 2:4-6)

In order to prove that Job is being dishonest with God, Satan feels the need to touch Job physically and take away everything Job considers to be good. As with the dog and the treat, Satan believes that if God were to take away a man’s “skin”, or immediate well being, that one would turn his back towards God and curse Him. Although personal possessions such as family, a home, and wealth influence one’s own well being, it is the destruction of one’s body which would urge Job to find God guilty for his sufferings. Physical suffering is what Satan believes causes man to question God’s good nature, since He is seen as the Protector of mankind. Satan assumes that humans do not grasp that God is Goodness Himself; rather, they take God as an instrumental good—as Protector of the Good—and they take their own integrity as the measure of the Good. So, for God to “touch” the goods of Job who is not in conscience convicted of loss of integrity, is to provoke an irresolvable crisis of the conscience. Although Job shows signs of

questioning his own life's purpose when enduring such misfortunes, "Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire?"(Job, 3:11), he does not end up turning against God. Merely questioning one's suffering is not the act of cursing God's judgment and knowledge.

Satan acts under the idea that humans who have been blessed by God's good will are in need of a test, since he believes they are not worthy of God's love. What Satan is unaware of is that Job might agree that he is not worthy of God's beneficence, but still be loyally grateful to God. Therefore, Job does not blame Him for his subsequent misfortunes. In the prologue, Satan questions whether or not Job is worthy of what God has provided for him, and is convinced Job must be tested by ensuring a life of misery contradicting all the good he had experienced at the hand of God. With God's given agency, Satan is allowed the power as the spirit of negation to taint Job's life with misfortune and disaster. In other words, God allows Satan to act, which authorizes Satan to bring forward his plan to destroy Job's current state of contentment. The reason, one may say, God permits Satan to act and allows Satan to go forward with his test is for the sake of Satan's truth seeking. God permits this, because he knows his servant Job to be the most upright man. Satan seeks the truth he believes is being hidden by the deception of Job's supposed faith.

Although Satan believes he is the one testing Job, one may question whether or not it is the slanderer who is the one ensnared by a test. "Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge?"(Job, 37:16). In the Bible, God is always recognized as being All-Knowing, and possessor of "perfect knowledge". When Satan attempts to prove Job is unfaithful, All-knowing God would already know whether or not Job would curse Him. God is sure that Job will not turn away from Him. "[...]there is none like him on the earth, a

blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil[...]”(Job, 2:3). By allowing Satan to touch and hurt Job physically God is letting Job carry out the divine action Satan is under the impression of carrying out by testing Job. In other words, God reverses the test to expose Satan’s own mistrust of God. From the perspective of *Job*, Job not cursing God presents Satan as a failed evil creature, because he seeks to put the Lord to the test by means of the Lord’s creature. Satan is the creature who ultimately fails.

*Faust*, like *Job*, begins with a Prologue in heaven; and in *Faust*, as in *Job*, the (fallen) messenger, the disobedient angel, discounts the character—and so, the strength—of the human protagonist’s creaturely reversion to God, and proposes a test designed to sever creature from Creator. In *Faust* as in *Job*, then, a painful human drama also enacts a heavenly drama and, again, in *Faust* as in *Job*, the “link” between the human and heavenly dramas is the spirit of negation, Mephisto, the Scoffer, in *Faust*, the *diabolos*, Accuser or Slanderer, in *Job*. Here, in the character of the link between the heavenly and earthly dramas, the prologues begin to diverge.

In *Job* Satan asks permission from God, because Satan recognizes that the Lord rules and can coerce even Satan, but finds appealing to the Lord would be in his favor. In *Faust*, God and Mephisto make a bet over whether or not Faust will settle for the pleasures of life or continue to reach for Knowledge, which is the inversion of how God and Satan interact with one another in *Job*. In both stories, God gives the devil figures the means and permission to visit Job and Faust, and test their devotion to and knowledge of the divinity. Both creatures are executing the will of God, while still harboring their own intentions. The Lord’s will for Mephisto is to serve the Lord directly by being as the Creator ordains. In other words, evil has not sprung from Mephisto himself; the Lord takes responsibility for creating all things including that which Mephisto is.

The devil figures do not hold the same power and knowledge as God, but are simply another one of God's creations which symbolize the element—feature of the creation as it comes from the Creator—of deception. The purpose of the devil figures pushes further than simply opposing God's actions; rather it enlightens those they affect with difficult truths, truths humans have difficulty facing.

The prologues take a turn away from one another when Goethe alters what it means to be a spirit of negation from what is exhibited by the Satan who attacks Job. Goethe takes elements of *Job* and inverts them to deepen the perception of the spirit of negation, and what he has to offer the humans he interacts with. Goethe changes Mephisto from accuser to a trickster and instigator. This spirit of negation is a spirit who challenges supposed God given boundaries which humans apply to their own lives. These supposed 'God given boundaries' are limitations people put upon themselves when interpreting God's will; the instigator challenges humans' faith by leading them to reevaluate what it is to give true—faithful—obedience to God. Mephisto negates sedimented notions in which humans indulge premature 'rest'. For example, Faust's faith in God is weak and perhaps even a sham, because of his disinterest in life, and disregard for all that has been handed to him. Faust believes that there is something greater for him than his painfully boring, all too human life on Earth. Faust's attitude towards the gift of intelligent and rational existence is questionable and worthy of criticism. Thus, we see the premature 'rest' Mephisto is meant to negate.

Faust: I have, alas, studied philosophy,  
 Jurisprudence and medicine, too,  
 And, worst of all, theology  
 With keen endeavor, through and through—  
 And here I am, for all my lore,  
 The wretched fool I was before. [...]  
 And see that for all our science and art



We can know nothing. It burns my heart.  
 Of course, I am smarter than all the shysters,  
 The doctors, and teachers, and scribes, and Christers,  
 No scruple nor doubt could make me ill,  
 I am not afraid of the Devil or hell—  
 But therefore I also lack all delight, [...] (Goethe, 94-95).

Unlike Job, who acknowledges all that he has been given and the happiness in his life, Faust is convinced he has studied all that needs to be known by people, causing him to think he deserves more than what he considers to be a trivial life. Faust expresses that nothing has been handed to him, and he is not disdainful of gifts, especially when he describes acquiring these studies by his “keen endeavor”. He is ultimately disappointed in what he has acquired, for he believes these studies have held no substantial use for him. Faust thinks he is living amongst amateurs, and believes the enlightenment he needs to acquire leads beyond Earth and into the divine. In Faust’s view, the sum of his enormous learning is that he knows not one of these things matters, and, besides lacks wealth and glory. Thus, Faust turns to the conjuration of spiritual powers who reveal to him the knowledge and powers that are hidden. Faust acknowledges that he deserves to understand the knowledge which one can only obtain through the divine, because he is “smarter than all the shysters” and being left in the hands of those earthly authorities toward whom he feels entirely superior. Yet, like the people Faust refers to, he remains fundamentally ignorant. Faust has learning, but not knowledge.

Faust states that the worst study he has completed is that of theology, which is the study of the nature of God and religious beliefs. As Faust slanders such studies he shows the reader he does not necessarily believe in God, for he scorns knowledge and understanding as a gift which is the promise of faith. The only thing that inclines Faust towards any form of faith is his want for more delight and exhilaration from his mundane life. Therefore, Faust does not desire to

know, but rather desires the satisfaction of gaining something greater and more powerful than what his previous learnings provided. The role of Mephisto is not to punish Faust for his behavior and beliefs, but rather to play along with his beliefs in order to test whether or not he truly believes what he preaches in the beginning of the story. Faust's complaint is that human knowing is strictly limited in scope and in penetration; the promise of Knowledge is empty. Through the bet with God, Mephisto does have a chance of winning and taking Faust to Hell, but rather than causing destruction himself, Mephisto simply accompanies Faust on the journey Faust proposes as a search for the rewards of 'enlightenment'. Unlike the Accuser of Job, who tries to provoke a crisis of belief, Mephisto encourages Faust to find—not his Good, but his satisfaction--so that Faust's mind-heart-soul will 'rest' apart from God. This is a sign that Mephisto is simply testing the limits of endurance by a human rather than completely obliterating his life without giving the human agency of his own.

In the story of *Faust*, Goethe inverts the relationship in *Job* between God and Satan by creating a common understanding between God and the devil, Mephisto, concerning how Mephisto should interact with humans. "He serves you most peculiarly, I [Mephisto] think.[...] Though now he serves me [God] but confusedly, I shall soon lead him where the vapour clears"(Goethe, 87). This 'common understanding' between the Lord and Mephisto is apparent when *both* characters acknowledge Faust's peculiar way of serving the Lord. In *Job*, Satan and God do not have a common understanding, because God believes Job is a blameless man while Satan accuses Job's faith to be false. Mephisto is not accusing Faust of anything besides being lazy and uninterested in the duties he has in life, which seem so bland and unimportant to him. Faust is not truly in danger from Mephisto or under any assault, because Mephisto allows Faust

to make choices and does not hinder his ability to do so. Therefore, *if* Faust is in danger or under assault, he is in danger or under assault from himself. Faust has conjured a theory of Mephisto on their first interaction with one another, and all Mephisto does is entertain these theories. This is yet another reversal created by Goethe where, in *Faust*, the human protagonist entertains a false theory of the 'evil one', whereas in *Job*, Satan entertains a false theory of the human protagonist. Mephisto wins this bet with God if Faust is content with life. That is quite different from how Satan can win his bet with God.

Faust is not the one who is carrying out a test of Mephisto, but Mephisto is found as a convenient instrument by God for probing Faust. Mephisto and God also connect with one another through the existence of human beings. In the Prologue Mephisto and God converse with one another about Faust and his character which leads to them betting on whether or not Faust will succumb to Mephisto and his trick. God indulges Mephisto's curiosity. Mephisto does not believe that humans need to be brought to justice as if they are not who they portray themselves to be, but rather believes that humans need to be mocked. Both stories need characters like Mephisto and Satan, because as stated by God when speaking to Mephisto:

Appear quite free on that day, too;  
 I never hated those who were like you:  
 Of all the spirits that negate.  
 The knavish jester gives me least to do.  
 For man's activity can easily abate,  
 He soon prefers uninterrupted rest;  
 To give him this companion hence seems best  
 Who roils and must as Devil help create.  
 But you, God's rightful sons, give voice  
 To all the beauty in which you rejoice;  
 And that whichever works and lives and grows,  
 Enfold you with fair bonds that love has wrought,  
 And what in wavering apparition flows  
 That fortify with everlasting thought (Goethe, 89).

God acknowledges that he has never hated beings who were like Mephisto, and finds their role to be useful. God believes men too easily put aside their desires for activity, and become lazy beings who take life for granted. God trusts “this companion”—Mephisto—is the “best” creature to “roil”—agitate and disturb—Faust from his soon to be preferred “uninterrupted rest”. Having God acknowledge Mephisto as a helpful and beneficial creature—rather than destructive—consolidates the argument that Goethe ‘inverts’ the relation of Accuser to accused, who is put into the dock of suffering, as between Satan and Job. God recognizes that Mephisto is a creature of negation, but finds “beauty” in him as being one of “God’s rightful sons”. God sees Mephisto as the creature capable of disproving and exposing something for being false or untrue. Here is the beginning to Mephisto being recognized as the spirit of the negation of negation. God finds that the only way Faust will ever find the purpose he is searching for in life is if a creature like Mephisto causes disruption in Faust’s acedia, his spiritual or mental sloth.

Rather than being opposing forces, Mephisto aids God when he creates situations in which people need to seek out further guidance from God, and a deeper understanding of their faith—knowing what exceeds the reach of human inquiry—in God. Mephisto stirs up situations in which people need to employ their faith in different ways. With this understanding of Mephisto, we are able to recognize that the purpose of his role is not to destroy, but to provoke the search for enlightenment through a being like God. Goethe is quite clever, because he is suggesting that this entire ‘game’ between God and Faust comes about when God decides to be the one who wants to play. “Enough—I[God] grant that you[Mephisto] may try to clasp him[Faust], [...] lead him down, if you can grasp him[...] (Goethe, 89). It is not that Mephisto chooses to meet Faust and bring about darkness for the sake of bringing about that which is

judged as ‘evil’; rather, Mephisto validates God’s idea to test Faust. Mephisto could gain only one thing, were Faust to turn himself completely towards all the illusions and desires Mephisto shows him and to abandon all desire to know God: he could gloat over being right, whereas God was wrong. If Mephisto were acting purely for the sake of causing destruction and condemning Faust to eternal damnation, he would not have been motivated by God’s will. So Mephisto’s action is not what one might expect from a creature inspired by seeking revenge on God’s creation.

The lack of honesty—connotated with the devil—when communicating with others makes the devil seem unreliable, and pursuing unspoken desires. Mephisto does have characteristics which can be seen as selfish, sly, and clever, but never in the dialogue between him and Faust is he dishonest about who he is or the consequences that may occur from embarking on their journey. No one, except for Faust himself, is leading Faust astray. Unlike Satan, who does not give Job the choice whether or not he would accept Satan’s challenge, Mephisto gives Faust a choice whether or not he will embark on their journey together.

Mephisto: I’m not one of the great,  
 But if you want to make your way  
 Through the world with me united,  
 I should surely be delighted  
 To be yours, as of now,  
 Your companion, if you allow;  
 And if you like the way I behave,  
 I shall be your servant, or your slave  
 [...]  
 Here you shall be the master, I be bond,  
 And at your nod I’ll work incessantly;  
 But when we meet again beyond,  
 Then you shall do the same for me (Goethe, 181).

Although Mephisto makes his company sound appealing and a “delight”, he still makes it apparent that it is Faust who is the one to set this adventure into motion. “if you allow”, “if you

want to make your way”, “if you like the way I behave”, “I shall” are all statements made by Mephisto knowing he cannot act unless Faust accepts his offer. Mephisto also makes clear that Faust will not have complete power of the devil forever by saying “To be yours, as of now”, since he later makes it clear they will switch roles once Faust finds contentment. In the beginning, Faust does question Mephisto’s intentions, but only because Faust knows Mephisto is the devil.

Faust: No, no! The Devil is an egotist  
 And would not just for heaven’s sake  
 Turn into a philanthropist.  
 Make your conditions very clear;  
 Where such a servant lives, danger is near (Goethe, 181).

Faust has preconceived notions and theories about who Mephisto is, and finds he is an “egotist”. Faust believes that wherever devil is “danger is near”. Faust has the notion that Mephisto is like Satan in *Job*. What Faust does not know is that Mephisto shows up with the intention of doing the Lord’s will.

Before Mephisto comes to Faust, Faust was ready to take his own life, because of the lack of interest he was evoking from his day to day tasks, and lack of patience in attempt to gain eternal truth.

Faust: I welcome you, incomparable potion,  
 Which from your place I fetch now with devotion:  
 In you I honor human wit and art.  
 You essence from all slumber-bringing flowers,  
 You extract of all subtly fatal powers,  
 Bare to your master your enticing heart!  
 I look upon you, soothed are all my pains,  
 I seize you now, and all my striving wanes,  
 The spirit’s tidal wave now ebbs away (Goethe, 117).

Faust is ready to drink the potion which is meant to take away his life in order to escape the constant doleful and tedious ways of life. Were it not for Mephisto, Faust would have given into his sadness and constant lamentation when brought to reflect on his plight. With Mephisto's offer, Faust feels as if there is nothing left to lose, and therefore follows him in hopes of finding something other than what he already has. Faust has not been coerced into agreeing to Mephisto's terms, but because of his ungratefulness towards life and what it has to offer, he does not find there is anything Mephisto can take from him which has not already been taken. This brings to light Faust's inability to think through his actions, and proves that Mephisto is not to blame for the tragedies which occur during their journey, since Mephisto proposes but Faust disposes.

Eventually, Faust chooses to give over his power to Mephisto, since he believes to have attained all that a human can, and has no hope that further effort in this life can satisfy his longing to be fulfilled. Faust has agreed to place himself under Mephisto's guidance, and has therefore agreed in advance to everything Mephisto may choose to bring about in pursuit of the "wager". By giving Faust a choice, Mephisto challenges the reader's preconceived notion that all devil characters force ill fates upon their target. There is no conversation between Satan and Job; that is, Job merely suffers Satan's actions. By contrast, Faust agrees to, and cooperates with, Mephisto's plan, while Mephisto persuades Faust. Therefore, Faust cannot be called Mephisto's "victim" nor can Mephisto be called Faust's tormentor. Instigator that he is, Mephisto is sure Faust will be willing to accompany him on a journey, which is when the reader begins to recognize Mephisto as the joker. Mephisto's behavior is very unlike the behavior of the devil figures we're accustomed to; Faust, on the other hand, suffers not from Mephisto, but from

acedia. Faust is on the brink of suicide because his *human* longing—that is, the plight, bare in Faust, of the finite being who wills to escape finitude—can find no satisfaction in the human world around him, while he remains a human being and not God-like. He has no desire for life, because “the god” indwelling in his heart—his soul, his will—cannot move except *within* the bounds given by Nature and natures:

Faust: Though all is still, no rest is mine  
 As dreams enmesh my mind in dread.  
 The god that dwells within my heart  
 Can stir my depths, I cannot hide—  
 Rules all my powers with relentless art,  
 But cannot move the world outside;  
 And thus existence is for me a weight,  
 Death is desirable, and life I hate (Goethe, 175).

Faust’s fundamental attitude is longing which—because it cannot satisfy within the constraints of a “given” life—leads him to disdain that life. “Existence is for me a weight”, which is why Faust does not fear the thought of death, and does not consider the possible negative outcome, after death, of wagering his soul to Mephisto. Faust declares his discontentment with life because his will “cannot move the world outside” Faust as it moves the world inside Faust. Death is a more desirable outcome than to depend upon the experience—to be shaped by things outside one’s power—of life.

Before bargaining over his life with Mephisto, Faust suffers from the despair he feels for life. Faust expresses how he feels his achievements are empty, and is consequently bored with everything which surrounds him.

Faust: But therefore I also lack all delight,  
 Do not fancy that I know anything right,  
 Do not fancy that I could teach or assert  
 What would better mankind or what might convert.  
 I also have neither money nor treasures,



Nor worldly honors or earthly pleasures;[...]. (Goethe, 95)

Faust recognizes that he “lacks all delight” in the studies he pursues, and does not have any interest in knowing anything “right”. Since he has no interest in knowing whether his knowledge asserts truth Faust lacks interest in teaching others and asserting any further thought in reference to what he has learned. Faust lacks the motivation to use his knowledge for the betterment of mankind. Faust has no “worldly honors”, because there is no enthusiasm influencing him to be successful or to have the desire to be recognized for his learning. Therefore, Faust does not have earthly pleasures, because he does not seek anything past his immediate reach. This is what initiates his desire for knowledge and recognition from a higher entity which is above humans, who he despises being a part of. This enlightenment Faust is searching for is knowledge which exceeds his past inquiries of the human nature. The knowledge he wants is that which is carried through the Gods, and the knowledge which they have that makes them greater than mortals.

Faust: Uncharted orbits call me, new dominions  
 Of sheer creation, active without end.  
 This higher life, joys that no mortal won!  
 You merit this— but now a worm, despairing?  
 Upon the mild light of the earthly sun  
 Turn, bold, your back! And with undaunting daring  
 Tear open the eternal portals  
 Past which all creatures slink in silent dread,  
 The time has come to prove by deeds that mortals  
 Have as much dignity as any god,[...]” (Goethe, 117)

Faust is so intent on attaining knowledge of “uncharted orbits” and “this higher life”, he misses the beauty and lessons he can attain while living his own life on Earth. Faust is under the impression that he has reached his greatest potential in life and becomes bored with himself. Faust’s constant reference to “worms” implicates the life of scholars. The scholars are “worming” their way into vast libraries filled with decaying corpses (books) of once

living-thought. Faust carries a self righteous attitude with him, because he feels the need to “prove” that “mortals have as much dignity as any god”. He is so blind to everything around him because of his despair that it takes a force as extreme as Mephisto to open Faust’s eyes to the things he can be grateful for, and not taking the agency he is given on Earth for granted.

Fortunately, Faust’s journey with Mephisto opens his eyes to new understandings of the world he previously neglects to take part in, which encourages Faust to desire the good nature of mankind. In the last analysis of the journey Mephisto experiences with Faust, Mephisto leads him towards the enlightenment, but guides him down a path which involves events including temptation and hardship. Once experiencing the troubles of these events, Faust understands the selfish aspects of his human nature. Mephisto convinces Faust to give life another chance, and teaches him to appreciate life. Mephisto stretches the God-given boundaries on mankind, and forms a space where exploring the opposition of the good can teach humans more about themselves. When relating the good and the bad to this story one may think of it in a subjective way, because the goal is to experience different things and understand the consequences and outcomes which follow. Therefore in *Faust*, Goethe allows for conversations between Faust and Mephisto about the good and the bad in relation to Faust’s experiences, and allows Faust to reach conclusions in front of the reader. Other readings, like the Bible, propose a more objective stance: the good is determined by God, whereas the bad is solely related to Satan and his rebellious rejection of God’s good.

Before the journey begins Mephisto predicts how Faust will react to everything Mephisto provides him with.

Mephisto: Through life I’ll drag him at a rate,  
Through shallow triviality,  
That he shall writhe and suffocate;

And his insatiability,  
 With greedy lips, shall see the choicest plate  
 And ask in vain for all that he would cherish—  
 And were he not the Devil's mate  
 And had not signed, he still must perish (195).

Mephisto is aware that Faust is impatient and is not easily satisfied. He believes Faust will “writhe and suffocate”, because Mephisto will drag him through the “shallow triviality” of life. He recognizes Faust's greed, and expects to win the bet with God because of this trait. Mephisto plans to present all the vain pleasures of life to Faust, and believes he will accept them. By doing so “at a rate”, Mephisto plans to use Faust's impatience against him in hopes of having Faust settle for something with less hesitation. This entire prediction is nothing more than what Mephisto is expecting to foresee on their journey together. Although, Mephisto's prediction is not absurd, he does not allow for this prediction to get in the way of Faust's choices further down the road. Mephisto attempts to grant Faust the fulfillment of certain pleasures which would entrap him in “shallow triviality”, but it is still Faust who has the agency to decide what he will accept from Mephisto.

During Faust and Mephisto's journey one can examine certain incidents where Goethe's *Faust* is presenting Mephisto as a spirit of negating Faust's negations. Mephisto eventually tempts Faust with pleasures—erotic love and magical powers— by offering him a potion which would make every woman look as beautiful as Helen. It begins when Mephisto takes Faust into the witch's kitchen, and Faust expresses how he resents sorcery and magic. “How I detest this crazy sorcery! I should get well, you promise me, in this mad frenzy of a mess? Do you need the advice of hag fakirs?” (Goethe, 235). At first, Faust detests the idea of sorcery and what it could do to him. Mephisto quickly steps in and expresses how Faust may live another way by, “Living

simply and keep all your thoughts on a few simple objects glued; Restrict yourself and eat the plainest food; [...]That is the surest remedy: At eighty, you would still be young” (Goethe 237). Mephisto plays on Faust’s impatience and fear of dying before he has found all the answers he is in desperate need of finding. Faust’s response is, “I am not used to that and can’t, I am afraid,[...] For me a narrow life like that’s too small” (Goethe, 237), in which Mephisto responds, “We need the witch then after all” (Goethe, 237). Although Mephisto has clearly played on Faust’s insecurities—his lack of patience and need for quick enlightenment—Mephisto provides an alternative to Faust that is not magic. It is Faust who inevitably turns to magic, and allows this to dictate the rest of his decisions.

Now that Faust has consented to using magic, Mephisto uses erotic love to mislead Faust into finding fulfillment in a woman. Mephisto sits Faust in front of the magical mirror in order to have Faust become enamored with the image of the woman who appears in the mirror. “The fairest image of a woman! Indeed, could woman be so fair?” (Goethe, 243). Mephisto recognizes Faust’s interest in the image of a beautiful woman, and begins to play on Faust’s vanity and validate his desires.

Mephisto: For now, stare to your heart’s content!  
 I could track down for you just such a sweet—  
 What bliss it would be to get her consent,  
 To marry her and be replete (Goethe, 243).

Mephisto makes it clear to Faust that he could aid Faust in finding this beautiful woman who would provide “bliss” by her consent to be his. Mephisto sees the opportunity to use this image of a beautiful woman to his advantage after watching Faust become so bewitched by the image in the mirror. Mephisto quickly offers Faust a potion which he says would allow him to have this woman he longs for so dearly. Although Faust is hesitant at first, he accepts the potion and

drinks it. Mephisto then says, “You shall soon see alive and warm. You’ll soon find, with this potion’s aid, Helen of Troy in every maid” (Goethe, 257). Faust is not agreeing to do any of the specifics of the journey, but is agreeing with Mephisto to every particular Faust undertakes with Mephisto’s aid. Faust sees all earthly wisdom as vain and empty, and his past attempts to conjure spirits of his own have been unsuccessful, because he can’t control them. This is not satisfying for Faust since he is unsuccessful. Thus, he looks for something that is satisfying. Mephisto’s bet is that he can make Faust settle on something earthly by free will, which will eventually make Mephisto Faust’s God. Interestingly enough, Faust chooses to follow this earthly desire Mephisto has presented to him.

After taking the potion, Faust crosses paths with Margaret—also known as Gretchen—and is consumed by her beauty.

Faust: By heaven, this young girl is fair!  
 Her like I don’t know anywhere.  
 She is so virtuous and pure,  
 But somewhat pert and not demure.  
 The glow of her cheeks and her lips so red  
 I shall not forget until I am dead.  
 Her downcast eyes, shy and yet smart,  
 Are stamped forever on my heart;  
 Her curtness and her brevity  
 Was sheer enchanting ecstasy! (Goethe, 257).

Faust is taken aback by Margaret’s beauty, and will not forget her until he is “dead”. He feels extreme passion and desire for her, and feels this way because of the potion Mephisto had offered him in the witch’s kitchen. One can make the argument that Mephisto sets Margaret up, because she has no control over whether or not she wants to be a part of Faust’s journey towards contentment. Mephisto sets up Faust for a learning opportunity that is not enlightenment, but rather an occasion for him to say this experience with Margaret is his highest moment of good

other than the Lord. Faust is set up by Mephisto by being offered the potion, so that every woman looks like Helen, but is not forced to do so. This is a huge temptation for Faust, and, unfortunately, embodies itself in Margaret, who is the one to suffer greatly. Since Faust chooses to drink the potion, and chooses to pursue Margaret, Faust becomes Margaret's undoer. Through his free will, Faust inevitably is the one to ruin Margaret's life. Although this is very bad for Faust and Margaret, one can argue that it was not Mephisto who directly destroyed Margaret's life. Mephisto simply recognized Faust's desires for pleasure through the presence of a woman, and gave him the option to seek out his desires through Margaret.

As time continues, Faust makes clear to Margaret his love for her, and the two fall in love with one another. Faust becomes frequently more persistent with his pursuing of her, and influences Margaret in order for her to stay with him.

Margaret: It makes my heart so sore  
 That, when he only comes our way,  
 I feel I do not love you anymore;  
 And where he is, I cannot pray.  
 It eats into my heart. Oh you,  
 Dear Heinrich, must feel that way, too.  
 [...] I must go.  
 Faust: Will there never be  
 At your sweet bosom one house of rest  
 When soul touches on soul and breast on breast?  
 Margaret: Had I my own room when I sleep,  
 I should not boldt the door tonight;  
 But Mother's slumber is not deep, [...]  
 Faust: My angel, if that's what you dread,  
 Here is a bottle. Merely shake  
 Three drops into her cup,  
 And she won't easily wake up (Goethe, 331).

Margaret shows signs of being conflicted with the way she feels for Faust. "It makes my heart so sore", she states, and admits to not being able to be herself when she is around Faust. She can no

longer pray, and feels it better for them to go their separate ways. Since Faust is so enamored with Margaret he is not willing to let her go, and influences her to stay with him by slipping her mother some potion which would allow them to be together in the night. Faust is selfish because of his desires, and does not consider that by envisioning Margaret as the earthly desire he chose to run after he is pressuring her to validate this feeling he so longs for, even if that means causing her pain and her own undoing.

Margaret mother dies from the sleeping potion Faust had suggested Margaret give her in order for them to be together. Soon after Margaret finds she is pregnant with Faust's child, and her brother—Valentine—condemns Faust for what he has done to his sister. Faust is challenged to a duel by Margaret's brother, and Faust and Mephisto kill her brother in combat. Before Valentine dies he says to Margaret,

Valentine: I tell you, do not bawl at me.  
When you threw honor overboard,  
You pierced my heart more than the sword.  
Now I shall cross death's sleeping span  
To God, a soldier and an honest man (Goethe, 353).

Valentine makes it clear to Margaret that what distinguishes them is their honor. Valentine believes as soon Margaret became pregnant and allowed Faust into her life she turned her back against God. "Since after all you are a whore, be one with all your might" (Goethe, 351). Margaret has now endured a lot of suffering, which one may argue was not just since she, like Job, never proved to be an immoral person. Although Faust has felt sadness due to Margaret's constant suffering, it is she who must unjustly endure the hardships which have befallen her through Faust's choices. Mephisto's choices are to Faust's choices as Faust's choices are to Margaret's choices. Although Mephisto, through Faust, instigates the relations that culminate in

certain choices presented to Margaret, she is always free to not accept what is being offered.

Now all Margaret is left with is her unborn child, her shame, and Faust. Margaret feels ashamed of herself for sinning and turning her back against God with her most recent infidelities. Faust's actions have negatively affected Margaret, rather than Mephisto being the immediate destroyer, which supports Mephisto as being a trickster and not like Satan who chooses to wreak havoc on mankind.

As Margaret makes her way to the Cathedral to pray she is confronted by an evil spirit who recognizes her sins, and questions her actions.

Evil Spirit: How different you felt, Gretchen,  
 When in innocence  
 You came before this altar;  
 And from the well-worn little book  
 You prattled prayers,  
 Half childish games,  
 Half God in your heart!  
 Gretchen!  
 Where are your thoughts?  
 And in your heart  
 What misdeed?  
 Do you pray for your mother's soul that went  
 Because of you from sleep to lasting, lasting pain?  
 Upon your threshold, whose blood?  
 And underneath your heart,  
 Does it not stir and swell,  
 Frightened and frightening you  
 With its foreboding presence?  
 [...] Wrath grips you. (Goethe, 355).

This evil spirit is the accuser of Margaret and her misbehavior. It shames her for only leaving half her heart open for God's presence, and the rest to childish games. It recognizes her guilt for taking part in the death of her mother, but accuses her for not feeling more guilt about the situation. It accuses Margaret for not praying enough for the salvation of her mother's soul, and



insinuates that there is no room in her heart for remorse. “Wrath grips you”, says the evil spirit as if foreshadowing the rest of Margaret’s suffering. The evil spirit shows Margaret that no matter what she does, from now on, her heart is spoiled because of her sin. It is not Mephisto who accuses Margaret of her wrongdoings, which still maintains his image as the trickster. The evil spirit takes over when Margaret is being self-condemned for her sins, and not the devil figure—Mephisto—who has been proven not to be the spirit of negation and destruction that Satan is. Mephisto’s intentions are still focused on Faust, and not on Margaret’s undoing. It is Faust who initiates this path towards Margaret’s undoing.

Overall, Mephisto brings around to Faust’s attention and puts within his grasp various goods—erotic love, magical powers—but none of these things in themselves are evil, and all he wants is that Faust be content; but Faust turns each of these occasions into an occasion for misfortune for him, for Margaret, or for Margaret’s mother and brother. Margaret comes into the arms of Mephisto only as the occasion to seduce Faust from his commitment to unending exploration. If we take it that Mephisto is a trickster, then he is about pulling one on human beings, but all exercises of illusion can only occur when the one who is being deceived cooperates. Faust and Margaret must accept the illusion. Satan tries to terrorize Job into settling his connection with God, but it does not work because there is no cooperation from Job. You can preserve your notion of Mephisto as a spirit of negation, but he isn’t a spirit of annihilation or destruction. The negation Mephisto is negating with Faust is that Faust’s knowledge is—from an absolute standpoint—an illusion. Although Mephisto is out to destroy Faust (due to his own personal wants), his *role* is to supply the occasion for the human beings to say “Yes” or “No” to the right thing.

Eventually, Margaret drowns her illegitimate child, is convicted of murder, and sent to prison. When Faust hears of this, he panics and longs for her freedom. “Handed over to evil spirits and judging, unfeeling mankind! And meanwhile you soothe me with insipid diversions[...].” (Goethe, 401). Faust feels guilty for what he has caused Margaret to endure, and is angry with Mephisto for not helping him set her free. “Meanwhile you soothe me” says Faust, and is disgusted by the thought of getting attention he does not deserve after all Margaret has suffered through. He tells Mephisto to help him set her free, but as they find her, Margaret says,

Margaret: I may not go; for me there is no hope anymore.  
 What good to flee? They lie in wait for me.  
 To have to go begging is misery,  
 And to have a bad conscience, too.  
 It is misery to stray far and forsaken,  
 And, anyhow, I would be taken (Goethe, 417).

Gretchen no longer wants to live or take part in this guilty conscience she has entertained for a long time. There is no longer any form of Earthly solace for her. “What good to flee?”, Margaret knows that the longer she runs from her guilt the worse it will become, and her punishment more grave. “I would be taken”, could allude towards the conversation between her and the evil spirit, who made it clear the only place good enough for her and her sins was in Hell alongside all that manifests itself in opposition to God. In offering her freedom, Faust offers her nothing. Although it seems that Margaret will perish in Hell, as Faust and Mephisto escape the guards Margaret asks for forgiveness from the Lord.

Margaret: Thine I am, father. Save me!  
 You angels, hosts of heaven, stir,  
 Encamp about me, be my guard.  
 Heinrich! I quail thee.  
 Mephisto: She is judged  
 Voice: (*from above*) Is saved (Goethe, 421).

Since there is nothing left on Earth for Margaret she asks the Lord to forgive her sins and save her from perishing. Mephisto believes she will perish, since he does not give her much second thought to begin with: the reason being that Faust is his main concern. The voice from above contradicts Mephisto's statement by saying Margaret is saved, and saves her from her suffering.

At this point one may be able to identify a parallel between Margaret and Faust. They are playing for the same stakes, but are experiencing different wagers. The stakes for Margaret are that she makes Faust her God and allows him to say what her good is. This leads her to the murder of her mother and family and the reason why she gives up their child. The wager for her is whether she will accept the salvation of the false God—Faust— or hold out for the salvation of the real God. Her false God is not Mephisto since Mephisto is not the one who ultimately leads her astray. Faust offers her life and a guilty conscience, and the Lord offers her death but salvation.

The stakes for Faust have to do with whether or not his lust for the good achievable by action is pure, and with whether he can be bought off by Mephisto instead of staying true to pursuit of an achievement he cannot reach himself in his limitedness. The question is whether or not he is able to hold out for the unlimited—God—or settle for the limited goodness which Mephisto offers him. Both Faust and Margaret eventually find peace and salvation in God. Mephisto has conjured up an illusion thinking that Faust will delusively accept it. Faust embraces the vision of the future in which everything—like human achievement— goes on and on. Faust doesn't come to rest and is saved, because the bet is in favor of the Lord. Although Faust reaches his highest moment of content while in the presence of Mephisto, he is not able to claim Faust for himself.

Faust: Through all the world I only raced:

What I might crave, I laid my hand on,  
 What would not do, I would abandon,  
 And what escaped, I would let go.  
 I only would desire and attain,  
 And wish for more, and thus with might  
 I stormed through life; first powerful and great,  
 But now with calmer wisdom, and sedate.  
 The earthly sphere I know sufficiently,  
 But into the beyond we cannot see;  
 A fool, that squints and tries to piece those  
 shrouds,  
 And would invent his like about the clouds! (Goethe, 459).

Faust acknowledges his past ways, and how racing through the world would not fulfill his search for knowledge and happiness. He kept looking for more, and was never satisfied. He now acknowledges that when he stormed through life he had no chance of attaining what he desired, but with wisdom and patience he can understand the world sufficiently better than before. Faust now knows he can no longer look into the beyond and expect to “see”. Those fools who squint—as he did in the beginning of the story—put in a lot of effort to obtain knowledge which is beyond their own comprehension. It was important for Mephisto to take Faust on this journey, because he is able to appreciate the earthly knowledge which humans are able to obtain, and to avoid those desires which cause suffering and pain, like with Margaret. Mephisto does the opposite of destroy Faust, but rather enables him to address all the resources which surround him while on Earth; Mephisto shows Faust that there are different ways one can fulfill oneself, and although some may be influenced by certain desires, contentment can also develop through a person’s ambition to succeed positively.

Originally I questioned whether ‘devilish’ must mean ‘evil’—that is, ‘defective and a cause of defect’? As shown through my analysis, Goethe reinterprets the already established idea of evil, which is seen in Satan in the story of *Job*. Satan was not interested in merely challenging

Job's adherence to God, but rather in proving Job's faith to be faulty. In doing so, Satan wanted Job to turn his back towards God, and appeal to evil. Without allowing Job to act with free will, Satan assaulted Job and used harm to inflict suffering. The importance of the new interpretation Goethe has provided is that the devil—Mephisto—no longer represents the destruction of humanity and the source of suffering for the sake of suffering. Goethe alters Mephisto by highlighting the importance of challenging: without the element of challenge humans lose interest in life, because there is nothing stimulating their current state. Although Faust is an extreme example of suffering from acedia, Faust represents the premature rest Goethe fears will appear in humans who find they have no purpose. Goethe's Mephisto helps elevate human behavior rather than destroying its potentialities. In consequence, the argument leads us to question how this interpretation of evil may develop the way we praise and blame. Is it possible to speak of useful evils? If so, is it possible to speak of advantageous evils? And again, if so, is it possible to speak of evils that serve the good? And finally, if it is possible, is it also sometimes necessary?

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