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Is God Complicit in the Fall of Man?

Abstract: In this paper, the motives of God are explored in relation to the degree of responsibility He should share with Adam and Eve regarding their crime of disobedience.

Quotes and summaries from Paradise Lost as well as Thaddeus Parker's paper, Evil as Justification for Redemption, are used to argue the idea that God should share blame in the loss of Paradise.

Throughout *Paradise Lost*, there exists an essential question: is Milton's God to blame for the fall of man? Although placing the blame on Milton's God may not be the most popular choice, Milton gives the reader sufficient evidence to support this argument: God's inaction regarding Satan's exit from Hell, His allowance for Satan to tempt Eve, and His initial creation of a race He knows will fail and the choice to redeem that fallen race. This evidence, presented clearly by John Milton, strongly supports the belief that God should share in the responsibility of the fall.

God's inaction plays a major role in the loss of Paradise, the fall of man. As He watches Satan escape from Hell, Milton's God comments on the escape to the Son about what they see:

Only begotten Son, seest thou what rage
Transports our adversary, whom no bounds
Prescrib'd, no bars of Hell, nor all the chains
Heapt on him there, nor yet the main Abyss

Wide interrupt can hold. (*Paradise Lost* 3:80-84)

It seems strange that an all-powerful God, like Milton's God claims Himself to be, would choose to weakly restrain His greatest enemy. Although there is the slight chance that God is not as powerful as He claims, let us agree to accept that He *is* all-powerful. Logically then, the only conclusion is that God actively or passively wants or allows Satan to escape, for if He wanted Satan to stay in Hell He could surely make it happen. God's refusal to stop Satan's flight from Hell and successful journey to Eden consequently relieves Satan of His punishment. Although Satan is the initial rebel, he is allowed to escape his punishment while the lesser devils remain in Hell. God seems to let up on Satan in order to secure the success of man's fall. Not only does the inaction passively allow the temptation, it aggressively contributes to the success of Satan, His arch-enemy. This inaction lays a solid foundation for the argument supporting God's responsibility in the fall of man.

God purposefully misses His chance to stop Satan as he leaves Hell. Furthermore, He does not even provide a reason for His inaction; Satan has already rebelled and been put into Hell—actions which could be seen as divine interference in Satan's life—so a non-interference policy based on the fallen angel's free will is invalid. Milton shows the reader the multiple instances where God could intervene and save His creation from temptation—any action towards Satan to subdue him and eliminate his temptation of Adam and Eve would not in any way infringe upon their free will. Creating sufficient chains to hold Satan when the rebel angels are first banished to Hell is one of the first ways God could have stopped the overwhelming temptation of Eve; however, He does nothing. When Satan enters the garden the first time as a toad to plant the seed of deception into Eve's dreams, God does nothing. Similarly, when Satan re-enters as a serpent to successfully tempt Eve—an event God is well aware of—He does

nothing. If an individual knows about a murder before it happens, and they do nothing, are they not considered an accomplice in the crime? So it should be with God in Adam and Eve's crime of disobedience—the temptation itself is not a crime. Despite His knowledge of the impending tragedy, He does nothing to stop the events that lead up to the temptation and fall, clearly implicating Him in the cause of the tragic event.

Milton, intentionally or unintentionally, destroys the argument claiming God's unwillingness to interfere in the lives of His creation because of free will or because of a general aversion to interference in the lives of Adam and Eve. When God talks to the Son about the fall of man and the necessity for a price to be paid for their disobedience, Jesus volunteers, saying, "Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life" (*Paradise Lost* 3:236). Milton further explains that God's righteous anger will fall on Jesus and this will redeem the fallen creatures. If God can justify His lack of interference before the fall, how can He justify interfering after the fall has happened?

The only logical conclusion is God's desire for praise and glory. God's obsession with His own glorification is evident from the first glimpse Milton gives of his God:

What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
 When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)
 Useless and vain, of freedom both despoil'd,
 Made passive both, had serv'd necessity,
 Not mee. (*Paradise Lost* 3:107-111)

God justifies His gift of free will towards Adam and Eve based on what He gets from their freely given praise; the well-being or best interests of Adam and Eve play no part in His decision. Likewise, after Jesus volunteers to save the fallen creation, God tells the angels, "Adore the Son,

and honor him as mee” (*Paradise Lost* 3:343). Although this command does not explicitly say God should be honored for Jesus’ sacrifice, God still includes Himself in the speech. God is not the one who volunteers to give His life, but He denies His son the opportunity to be praised alone without shamelessly mentioning Himself. Multiple lines in the epic poem of *Paradise Lost* speak of the glory and praise of God, spoken by several characters and God Himself: “in Mercy and Justice both,/Through Heav’n and Earth, so shall my glory excel” (*Paradise Lost* 3:132-133). Clearly Milton’s God is not a humble deity, but one preoccupied with His own reputation as all-powerful and worthy of praise simply because He is God. His failure in creating an obedient race a second time, at first glance, seems like a terrible way to improve one’s reputation; however, the improvement upon His reputation does not come from creating but saving.

While it is true that God wanted His creation to have free will, He does not prepare them as well as he could have to withstand temptation. God simply tells Adam:

“But of the Tree whose operation brings
 Knowledge of good and ill, which I have set
 The Pledge of thy Obedience and thy Faith,
 Amid the Garden by the Tree of Life,
 Remember what I warn thee, shun to taste,
 And shun the bitter consequence: for know,
 The day thou eat’st thereof, my sole command
 Transgrest, inevitably thou shalt die.” (*Paradise Lost* 8:323-330)

Although He goes on to elaborate shortly by promising “woe and sorrow” (*Paradise Lost* 8:333), how is Adam to know what death or woe or sorrow is? Adam even says, “So near grows Death

to Life, whate'er Death is/Some dreadful thing no doubt" (*Paradise Lost* 4:425-426). Besides offering insufficient proof of their punishment, God tests Adam and Eve's obedience to Him, knowing they will fail. If their creation alone was unnecessary, why also unnecessarily test them? Satan, enemy of God, questions His actions as well. Although God's testing of Adam and Eve help Satan in his endgame, he recognizes the pointlessness of the test: "Knowledge forbidd'n?/Suspicious, reasonless. Why should thir Lord/Envy them that?" (*Paradise Lost* 4:515-517). Furthermore, why should the punishment be so harsh? The entire race of angels is not punished because of Satan's rebellion, so why then should the whole of the human race be punished for the actions of two? The system God sets in place fails and His beloved creation is judged and punished to an absurd extreme, a punishment that seems arbitrary. Although they suffer unspeakable pain, God's only preoccupation is His own image. He knows that once Adam and Eve fall, He then has the option of granting them mercy. He also makes it clear that they in no way deserve His mercy, giving himself full credit in their redemption.

God's decision to create Adam sets a tragic story in motion. This is the most important aspect supporting God's complicity in Adam and Eve's fall. His actions lead the reader to question why God created man in the first place. Although He claims, "Necessity and Chance/Approach not mee," (*Paradise Lost* 7:171-172) it seems as though He very strongly desires something from His creations, a desire that closely approaches the threshold of necessity. In fact, Milton gives the reader a glimpse into God's reasoning via a conversation between Raphael and Adam:

But lest his heart exalt him in the harm
 Already done, to have dispeopl'd Heav'n,
 My damage fondly deem'd, I can repair

That detriment, if such it be to lose

Self-lost, and in a moment will create

Another World, out of one man a Race. (*Paradise Lost* 7:150-155)

Raphael presents the idea that God now desires to create a replacement race for the angels who rebelled against Him. Because God is truly all-powerful and omnipotent, He should be able to create a perfect race of men, even an obedient one that still possesses free will. Adam and Eve, as all readers know, do not prove to be perfect or obedient; since we have agreed not to doubt His power, there must be another explanation.

God accurately predicts that this new creation will disobey Him just like Satan and the now fallen angels. This knowledge helps prove God's competence and power. Ulterior motives must then be explored. The difference between His fallen angels and Adam and Eve appears in the source of each race's fall. God realizes Satan's rebellion comes from his own self-temptation: "The first sort by thir own suggestion fell,/Self-tempted, self-deprav'd" (*Paradise Lost* 3:129-130). Therefore, the fallen angels cannot be redeemed; because of the nature of their rebellion, God knows they will never be willing to be saved even if given the opportunity. Adam and Eve, however, with the help of God's actions and inaction, fall because of external temptation: "Man falls deceiv'd/By th' other first: Man therefore shall find grace" (*Paradise Lost* 3:130-131). Pride then seems to be the great motivator; not pride in His ability to create perfect beings, but pride in rescuing His fallen creation and sparing them from the hellish fate of the fallen angels. God, knowing the end result of every action and inaction ever committed, participates in some way at every step of the process that leads to the loss of Paradise. His initial, selfish motivation that led to the creation of man is more than enough evidence in of itself to prove God is indeed complicit in the fall.

Thaddeus Parker in his essay “Evil as Justification for Redemption” argues that evil is necessary for redemption. He writes, “God is both allowing Satan the chance to do harm to Adam and Eve while also supplying power through the Son to redeem mankind. It is through the Son that God will provide redemption. It is through allowing evil to pose a relevant threat to mankind that God will justify redemption” (Parker 5). However, the argument must look further back than the interaction between evil and redemption. Redemption is not a required act regardless of the existence of evil or not. As a supposedly constant God, Milton’s God should not be allowed to withhold interference until it achieves the maximum good for only Him. Would Adam and Eve have lived happily if evil had not entered their lives, even if that means they would not have been redeemed? Of course they would have lived well. And the reputation of God would have been restored from the blow dealt by the fallen angels. The dramatic effect of a heroic redemption from the “necessary” evil was too alluring for God to ignore.

Parker also claims “a possible explanation for why God allows evil to succeed” is so that “good may succeed in the end” (Parker 7). It is not good that succeeds in the end, but God through His son. Although redemption can be seen as a “good” act, it is not “good” that is given glory or credit for the act. While evil is necessary to have good things to compare it to, one must look at the motivations that go deeper than that. In this case, needing evil to have good is not a good enough excuse to pardon God from His share of responsibility for the fall of Adam and Eve.

Milton’s God jumps too quickly from the unavoidable fall of man—an event He cannot, based on principle, interfere in—to His Son’s interference in their lives to bring Him glory. At no point in Milton’s elaboration of the first book of Genesis does God say anything about what is best for His creation, only what is best for Him from His creation. His own glorification serves

as His motivation for allowing, and in some ways causing, the fall of Adam and Eve. Not only does He let Adam and Eve fall so they can be redeemed, but also the rest of mankind, a punishment He does not mention when warning the first man of the consequences of disobedience. He both allows and causes the fall with less than pure intentions, alternating action and passivity, and an inconsistent stance on divine intervention. God therefore is clearly complicit in the fall of Adam and Eve.