

### Candle in the Dark

It remains a long-standing issue among Christian theologians: why is evil allowed to exist in a world governed by an entirely benevolent being? The Bible traces the evil nature of mankind back to the contexts of Genesis which details the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve who in their surrender to Satan doomed the future of mankind to original sin. The argument hardly ended with scripture, however, as philosophers and theologians alike continued to debate the problem of good and evil. An avid scholar and polemicist, John Milton, released in 1667 his own epic concerning the nature of evil, *Paradise Lost*. Throughout the poem, Milton addresses the problem of good and evil with a descriptive retelling of Satan's revolt and mankind's loss of Eden due to Satan's influence, and though it is debated as to John Milton's true views concerning the nature of morality, *Paradise Lost* seems to suggest that evil is somehow a necessary element in the universe as it gives meaning to the righteous acts and choices of all Creation.

There exist in *Paradise Lost* an abundance of parallels between Milton's characters, none being more prevalent than the similarities between the holy and unholy Trinities. Satan himself acts in direct opposition to God the Father (indeed, even his name means "adversary" in Hebrew), as he commits himself to perverting any creation of God's from the very start, stating, "To do aught good never will be our task, /But ever to do ill our sole delight" (*Paradise Lost* 1: 159-60). Whereas God is charged with the task of caring for the beings he has created, Satan seeks to destroy anything that God loves.

His adversity to good is made clear in his soliloquy as he looks out over the newly-created Earth: “all Good to me is lost;/Evil be thou my Good; by thee at least/Divided Empire with Heav’n’s King I hold/As Man ere long, and this new World shall know” (*Paradise Lost* 4: 109-12). The unholy Trinity is completed later in Book Two as Satan faces his own terrible offspring, Sin and Death. It is interesting to note here that the keys to the gates of hell—which connects the path of Chaos to the newly created Earth—are given to the every children of Satan for safekeeping, as Sin explains, “The key of this infernal Pit by due, /And by command of Heav’n’s all-powerful King/I keep, by him forbidden to unlock/These Adamantine Gates” (*Paradise Lost* 2: 850-53). The fact that a spawn of Satan should hold the key to her own escape seems to suggest the notion that God is well aware of evil’s necessity in his new world. Sin acts here in opposition to the Son as her purpose is to work in concordance with Satan to lure souls away from the glory of Heaven, taking a kind of vengeance for the punishment God has inflicted upon her:

But what owe I to his commands above  
Who Hates me, and hath hither thrust me down  
Into this gloom of *Tartarus* profound...  
To that new world of light and bliss, among  
The Gods who live at ease, where I shall Reign  
At thy right hand voluptuous, as beseems

Thy daughter and thy darling, without end (*Paradise Lost* 2: 856-57, 868-70).

Death completes the unholy Trinity as a counter to the Holy Spirit, serving to snuff out the blessed life God bestows on his creations. Death is an interesting figure within

*Paradise Lost* as when he is first introduced, there are implications that he is actually the most powerful within the Trinity, thus making him the true ruler of hell and the evils contained within it: “The other shape,/Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,/For each seem’d either; black it stood as Night,/And shook a dreadful Dart; what seem’d his head/The likeness of a Kingly Crown had on” (*Paradise Lost* 2: 666-9). There is also evidence that Death may be even more powerful than Satan as before the intervention of Sin, he mocks, “And reck’n’st thou thyself with Spirits of Heav’n. /Hell doom’d and breath’st defiance here and scorn, /Where I reign King, and to enrage thee more,/Thy King and Lord?” (*Paradise Lost* 2: 696-9). Though all three figures oppose one another, they create an alliance that shares a common goal: to corrupt any creation of God’s. The two Trinities stand as polar opposites of one another, yet it is to be understood that the powers of Heaven are vastly more powerful. Milton inserts a curious line in Book Two that seems to support the notion that the only reason Satan, Sin, and Death are even able to come into the world through Chaos is because God allows it to happen: “Sin and Death amain/Following [Satan’s] track, such was the will of Heav’n,/Pav’d after him a broad and beat’n way” (*Paradise Lost* 2: 1024-6). The very existence of the unholy Trinity gives significance to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit by enabling the ability to choose, contributing to the elements of free will as God has defined it.

Evil within *Paradise Lost* seems to be necessary not only for all Creation to appreciate the good, but also to give mankind an alternative choice to God’s law, providing an essential element of free will. It is implied within the confines of the text that God is not looking to control his creations outright, but would rather leave them the choice to fall or to follow His ways: “I made him just and right,/Sufficient to have stood,

though free to fall...I form'd them free and free they must remain" (*Paradise Lost* 3: 98-99, 124). It can be determined then that for free will to exist there must be a choice other than God's to be made, and that for freely thinking individuals to continue existing, the decision to do good cannot be forced. Hence the sudden release of Satan from his adamant chains in Book One:

Chain'd on the burning Lake, nor ever thence  
Had ris'n or heav'd his head, but that the will  
And high permission of all-ruling Heaven  
Left him at large to his own dark designs,  
That with reiterated crimes he might  
Heap on himself damnation, while he sought  
Evil to others, and enrag'd might see  
How all this malice serv'd but to bring forth  
Infinite goodness (*Paradise Lost* 1: 210-218).

So is it then the ruling class of Heaven that consciously released Satan to his own devices? Since God is all-powerful, it would seem that He is the only being that could release the demons from the bonds that hold them to the lake of fire, and since He sees all of time in an instant, the implication with the release of Satan would be that God Himself deems evil in the world necessary. This seems to again be reiterated by the very existence of the Tree of Knowledge. Had God not wanted to leave Adam and Eve the choice to be obedient to Him, the Tree bearing the forbidden fruit would not have come into being in the first place. Without it, the two would have been able to continue their prelapsarian lives of naivety, Satan having little or no room corrupt. The nature of their

good deeds and worship would remain very much diminished and even taken for granted as they would have no other option but to follow God's law. It can be argued then, that when Adam and Eve pray for forgiveness after giving in to Satan's temptation, the fact that they made the choice to do so gives true significance to their actions, instilling them for the first time with true virtue. Before, their choice to not eat the fruit was not a free-thinking, conscious one, but rather it was the only choice that adhered to God's law, which at the time was the only option they knew; thus the continuous decision to stay away from the Tree of Knowledge is insignificant because they were never presented with any sort of alternative. In Book Four, Adam first explains to Eve the warnings concerning the Tree as it has been related to him by God:

he who requires  
From us no other service than to keep  
This one...  
not to taste that only Tree  
Of Knowledge, planted by the Tree of Life,  
So near grows Death to Life, whate'er Death is,  
Some dreadful thing no doubt; for well thou know'st  
God hath pronounc't it death to taste that Tree  
The only sign of our obedience left  
Among so many signs of power and rule  
Conferr'd upon us (*Paradise Lost* 4: 419-21, 423-30).

Their ignorance of evil lessens the value of their perfect cohesion with God's command. The sincerity of their prayers in a world containing the existence of evil and sin then is

what grants fallen mankind a renewed chance at Paradise as the Son explains in Book Eleven, “so Death becomes/His final remedy, and after Life/Tri’d in sharp tribulation, and refin’d/By Faith and faithful works, to second Life,/Walk’t in the renovation of the just,/Resigns him up with Heav’n and Earth renew’d” (*Paradise Lost* 11: 61-6).

Therefore, through the release of Sin and Death into the world, Adam and Eve are granted a greater eternal Paradise in Heaven due to their freely choosing the ways of God and asking for His forgiveness. As they had previously been without free will, their goodly deeds were the only thing they knew, but to freely follow the ways of God even with the knowledge of evil, Adam and Eve earn their eternal salvation.

God’s allowance of evil and suffering to exist in a world formed by such an omnipotent, benevolent being has been a puzzling conundrum for millennia. The implication of Milton’s work pertains to the necessity of evil in order to glorify the good so that future generations of man will be capable of making the right choice. *Paradise Lost* presents its own argument of a necessary evil that is required so that the future of mankind may see both and know that God’s way is the proper choice to make. Evil is necessary for the continuation of the human race because it is the choice between the two that gives meaning to man’s free will. Milton probably says this best in his piece of literary censorship, *Areopagitica*, “when God gave [Adam] reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had been else a mere artificial Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions” (Hughes edition, 749). For the world to function, for goodness to flourish, there must be darkness before there can be light, just as the passage in Genesis states, “And then there was light” which would seem to imply that there was

indeed something else before light's existence. Whether chaos, darkness, or something else entirely, mankind is free to choose.