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Paradise Within

Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and Ancillary Creation

Abstract: This paper attempts to justify God's choice to allow for free will in the actions of beings lesser than himself through the exploration of said actions and God's reaction and inaction. Poetry is discussed as a human invention, and is integral to the discussion of the Paradise Lost series, but is therefore endorsed by God through the idea of the chain of command in relation to the idea of the great chain of being.

No idea is more central to faith than *deus vult* (literally "God wills it"): to believe in an all-knowing God is to believe that, despite working in mysterious ways, God intends for everything to be exactly as it is. However, some things, such as poetry, are created by man's free will, that despite God's knowing of this, the poet determines for himself what to write, and God endorses this by allowing it to happen. A related Christian theological theory is the great chain of being, which organizes all living and nonliving things into a hierarchy based on God's whim. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton projects his belief in the great chain of being in his use of humans inventions such as prose, rhyme, and meter, which reveals a motive in a bored God's seemingly pointless errand: to create an autonomous race of people below him in a chain of command capable of resisting Satan unassisted and, ultimately, of beautiful creation themselves.

The purpose of any chain of command is the same: to create something not specified by the superiors; this reveals poetry as a result and the intention of God's errand of creation. At the highest levels in mortal hierarchies, leadership decides the goals and sets missions, but, obviously, does not specify every single detail. Traveling down the structure, smaller and smaller intermediate goals and supplementary decisions are made, without direct supervision from above. These usually younger and less experienced people are responsible for creating and enacting plans, with duties assigned to them by their superior. For instance, a general in the military taking a city has no role or interest in determining how each room is cleared, so the purpose for him to have people below him is to supplement with their own techniques. These infantry grunts' purpose of existence is to supplement the guidance from above in taking each objective and adapting to changing circumstances. In Milton's *Paradise Lost* series, this parallel answers the question, "Why did God create humans?" The answer: for them to create something themselves. Although God does not actively interfere, actions by his creation are his intention, just as a leader intends for his soldiers to complete their tasks using the means they deem fit. Therefore, the purpose for Adam and Eve's creation is to create other humans of their own free will, who, as their subordinates, will create other things, eventually arriving to Milton's poetry, his calling and purpose..

Milton outlines the rank structure of God's theocracy in Adam's possession of Eve; Adam addresses her and all other things over which he wields authority, while acknowledging and reconciling the supreme goodness and universality of their almighty superior. To Milton, free will is not at odds with an all-knowing Lord, but rather a product of God himself. Being

“infinitely good” entails that He must be “[a]s liberal and free as infinite[;]” God must encompass every possibility to be infinite, and therefore free will is possible through Him (*Paradise Lost* 4: 414-415). Adam and Eve are players in a *Choose Your Own Adventure*-esque novel of unlimited scope, but enjoy their own “power and rule / Conferr’d upon us, and Dominion giv’n” (*Paradise Lost* 4: 428-430). God expects the two humans to make decisions, and more importantly, create.

Eve’s first reply to Adam’s first briefing, being significantly longer, is focused on emotion; she acknowledges her superior just as Adam himself did; her dissertation on emotion is entirely new, as God had hoped and even intended. Eve notices that she is physically weaker and less suited to reason than Adam, “[h]ow beauty is excell’d by manly grace / and wisdom, which alone is truly fair” (*Paradise Lost* 4: 473-475). However, Eve is not without inspiration herself. She begins to form her own identity when she discovers her reflection, “[a] shape within the wat’ry gleam appear’d / [b]ending to look on me, I started back” (*Paradise Lost* 4: 461-462). Her identity includes the origin of emotion, or at least the discovery and discussion of it. She was “[p]leased [her reflection] return’d as soon with answering looks / [o]f sympathy and love” (*Paradise Lost* 4: 464-465). In doing so, she creates something, if only thought, that is new to this world, and since it happens, God meant for it to happen; he wanted her to create this new philosophy of being in touch with one’s own emotion from his infinite self.

Adam and Eve write a song together, fulfilling only part of their heavenly mandate, which requires them to further create in the form of new life, of which to abstain rather than engage is a sin. They inquire of their Lord in prayer, “thou hast promis’d from us two a Race /

To fill the Earth” (*Paradise Lost* 4: 732-734). Milton has carefully used the word “from” rather than “to[,]” suggesting an obligation the first couple must fulfil rather than a gift from the the Almighty. To deliver, Adam and Eve “straight side by side were laid, nor turn’d I ween / Adam from his fair Spouse, nor Eve the Rites / Mysterious of connubial Love refus’d” (*Paradise Lost* 4: 741-744). This idea is an interesting one in that it is a departure from the traditional priorities of virginity and purity. The narrator asks rhetorically, “[o]ur Maker bids increase, who bids abstain / [b]ut our Destroyer, foe to God and Man?” (*Paradise Lost* 4: 748-749). If regarding this fictional epic as depicting actual history, we know that Adam and Eve would obviously have been successful in making children, and naturally, *deus vult*.

Adam and Eve’s voices join again in Book 5, praising their Lord, but also pleading for deliverance from their fear in a beautiful poem of their own construction; this reveals Milton’s view that poetry (or something else of one’s own creation) is the appropriate way to communicate with God because He rewards Adam and Eve with a visit from Raphael to warn them of their impending doom, knowing full well that they will fall. There are scores of poetic devices in this song, however, common practice dictates that a few be directly quoted. One of the clever constructions that the couple uses is anaphora, repeating the word “him” in “[h]im first, him last, him midst” (*Paradise Lost* 5: 165). Of course, Milton could have written “first, last, and midst[,]” however, the emphasis on God’s omnipresence would be lost. Alliteration is present as well, in the phrases “[w]orship wave” and “[m]elodious murmurs” (*Paradise Lost* 5: 194, 196). The repeating consonant sound give an interesting depth to the “waves” and melody. A device that is quite interesting is the rare rhyme without a vowel, where in unison Adam and

Eve use the words, “climb’st . . . fall’st . . . fli’st” (*Paradise Lost* 5: 173-175). Their creativity is, to Milton, a testament to their purity of heart, so God allowed them “[f]irm peace recover’d soon and wonted calm” (*Paradise Lost* 5: 210). Then, “[w]ith pity Heav’n’s high King . . . to him call’d / Raphael” to uncover the evil lurking in Eden, but only as an extraneous kindness to His doomed creation, and all in His divine plan.

The final two books, though not having been separate for the initial publication of the poem, are not extraneous; rather, this knowledge is useful in that the thematic developments Books XI and XII create were originally thought completed and later needed to be more explicitly stated; Milton emphasizes the choices Adam and Eve have: “The [w]orld was all before them, where to choose / [t]hir place of rest, and Providence thir guide” (*Paradise Lost* 12, 646-647). Though perhaps in some small way to please the masses with a happy ending, the two books are spent in nearly their entirety on Michael’s foretelling of the already-known-to-the-audience Bible. Perhaps the unrealistically simple Adam’s existence, who accepts every statement blindly, is a dig targeting the critics of *Paradise Lost*’s first edition, because both the group of readers and mankind’s first dope do not understand that to truly have faith is to think for oneself, as Milton would argue. Adam’s line, “[w]ho for my wilful crime art banisht hence” is particularly suspect (*Paradise Lost* 12, 619); would not the crime be of both Adam and Eve? Milton might be excusing Eve for her role, for she at least questioned her beliefs; Adam did not.

Satan’s role in Milton’s poems is complicated, and as the epic hero, didactic in his failure; Aaron Tinker’s exposition on the highest-ranking devil is correct in its claim, but incomplete insofar as his tragic flaw of hubris, and his own agency in God’s chain of command.

In Tinker's "Better to Reign: Satan as a Tragic Hero[,]" he defines the tragic hero and contends that Satan is the tragic hero of *Paradise Lost*, while outlining Satan's motivations and choices throughout the poem. However, in addition to the ubiquitous-among-epics hubris, Satan exhibits hubris and plagiarism in creation: rather than to create something new as Adam and Eve do, he only emulates the kingdom of heaven above. Despite his belief to the contrary, Satan is not separate; he has not "Divided empire with Heav'n's King" (*Paradise Lost* 4:111). Rather, he is a cog in the machine, fulfilling through his own free will the role that God had set out for him. Perhaps having a villain to tempt the first man and woman is necessary to make both right and wrong choices be possible. For Satan, it is not only therefore "[b]etter to [r]eign[,]" but also necessary and endorsed by God (Tinker, 1). God had intended for the angel to rebel with the other demons and to do something he could not himself do, create a kingdom in opposition to Heaven, while making his own poetry in dialogue.

In *Paradise Regained*, Milton's Jesus struggles to create a plan for himself to save the human race; although given his mission back in *Paradise Lost*, God expects his son to figure it out, proving His intention is to have His work supplemented by His creation. God himself describes his son and his task: "This perfect Man, by merit call'd my Son, / To earn Salvation for the Sons of men" (*Paradise Regained* 1, 166-167). Jesus has already earned his position, and will earn his success through his own trials as a human. It is important to note the emphasis on the human Jesus own agency and intrepidity. Milton's God elaborates, "To conquer Sin and Death the two grand foes, / By Humiliation and strong Sufferance" (*Paradise Regained* 1, 159-160); It is not through divine intervention or providence on his son's part that will allow Jesus to

succeed. His own efforts will bring him victory over Satan and his children, the purpose of which being to demonstrate the ability of a human “of female seed” (*Paradise Regained* 1, 151). Jesus is the model human, perfect in every way, but pure in that he has no divine knowledge and must create, without God’s intervention or oversight but with God’s endorsement, using the limited but effective means available to a human: dialogue, and in this case, poetry.

Milton’s organization of rank in his theocratic kingdom allows for people other than God to have the latitude to create; rather, he argues that this ability is not only an ability but an obligation and the purpose for which all of us were created. Additionally, this mandate extends to our own beliefs, for to truly have faith is not blind ignorance but questioning, and “suffering for Truth’s sake[,] . . . [to] possess / [a] paradise within thee” (*Paradise Lost* 12, 569, 587). To remain in Eden is to believe simply because one is told to, which is the sin Adam alone committed. However, to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Life is to have true faith, for God intended for Adam and Eve to fail, for us to know good and evil and to form our own beliefs, and create “the paradise within thee, happier far” (*Paradise Lost* 12, 587).

Works Cited

Milton, John. *Complete Poems And Major Prose*. Ed. Merritt Hughes. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1957. Print.

Tinker, Aaron. "Better to Reign: Satan as a Tragic Hero." *The Edifice Project*.