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Milton

Abstract: *My essay is engaging with the discussion about the Father's fault, if any, in the Fall of mankind. After exploring some other works in the research library as well as the Bible itself, I compiled this work. It is obvious that the Father is not complicit in the fall of man. No excuse of man can absolve him of his guilt.*

“I made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall,” explains God the Father to the Son in lines 98 and 99 of Book Three of *Paradise Lost*. Milton’s God, in *Paradise Lost*, has infinite power and foreknowledge, but he does not always exercise that power in every situation in Heaven and on Earth. Even when someone is about to directly act against him, he allows him or her to make the choice to fall. This presents a predicament: God is either neglectful of his creation by allowing it to be corrupted, or he is somehow justified by his power and knowledge in allowing corruption to overtake his creation without intervening. Under the assumption that God is infinitely powerful, infinitely good, and has infinite knowledge, he cannot be accused of being neglectful of his creation both because God sets the standard for justice and because Adam and Eve were both acting out of free will.

In *Paradise Lost* God is the maker and source of all things, including Heaven, Earth, angels, and men. All material substance actually flows from him in creation of the world. Because of the fact that he created the world, he gets the privilege and right of fashioning the world as he pleases. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul writes in

Romans saying, “Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?,” which aptly explains the fact that as Creator, God has the right to create as he so chooses (*ESV Romans 9:21*).

Milton’s God sets up an objective law for everything he creates to follow. This law is not explicitly mentioned, but it is hinted at throughout the poem, because the angels and humans must be held to a certain standard; otherwise, there would be no manner in which God could condemn anyone. In Book Two for instance, Mammon explains that the fallen angels cannot go back to Heaven saying that if they returned there would be, “Strict Laws impos’d, to celebrate his Throne / With warbl’d Hymns, and to his Godhead sing / forc’d hallelujahs while he Lordly sits / our envied sovereign,” which begins to give a picture of what God expects of his creation (*Paradise Lost 2:241-244*). All of creation was set up, by God, to glorify and honor him, and he decides how that actually plays out. The consequences for disobeying that law are always severe, but seem to depend on if one is self-tempted or tempted by others. Here, a problem seems to arise, and an analogy will help to make matters more clear: is God neglecting his creation in a manner similar to a parent who leaves their child in the kitchen with the eye of a stove on and asks the child not to touch the stove, knowing the child will try, and allowing the child to be burned anyway? While one with a human-centered view of the universe might answer yes, the objective answer must be no. Because of the fact that God is the First Cause and the Creator, he designs the parent-child dynamic. Not only this, but the parent-child dynamic does not even fit onto the relationship between God and mankind.

A problem that must be dealt with prior to discussing the responsibility God has to his creation is the problem of power and authority, which, once discussed, will shed

light on the nature of God's obligation or lack thereof to mankind. Power can be simply defined as the ability to produce an effect. This can look like getting people and things to do as one pleases. For Milton's God, it is clear that he has infinite power because he not only thought up everything, but also created it through the Son, and is able to do anything he pleases. Authority can be defined as the right to use one's power. God inherently has ultimate authority no matter how he is viewed. If God is seen as a first cause, he has ultimate authority because he is the ultimate source of all causation. If God is seen as a deity that has always existed and created the world, he has ultimate authority because he holds all power and designed existence itself. No one could have more of a right to use power than the person who created causation and created the things that are affected by causation. Normally with humans, when one has an increasing amount of power and authority, one must also be yoked with a measure of responsibility to use that power and authority in particular manners. But the same does not apply to God because he has not been made steward of powers, but is the creator and sustainer of all power.

Because God designed power, possesses it all, and sustains everything by his power, in addition to the fact that he is ultimately benevolent and good, he is not bound by the same standards of correlation that place demands of responsibility on humans. One could argue that God is like a negligent father because he knows that when Adam and Eve eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil they will die, is capable of preventing them, but fails to do so. The problem with this argument is two-fold, however, as it relies upon two assumptions that are fallacious. First, this argument assumes that humans either set the standard for how figures like fathers are to act or that God is necessarily bound to follow every command that he gives humans. Second, this

argument assumes that the ultimate good and purpose of creation is a human-centered sinlessness.

The first aforementioned assumption is, in turn, fallacious on two accounts. Milton's God is the first being; therefore, he sets the standard for being. God is the first Father; therefore, he sets the standard for fatherhood, and so forth. Humans cannot ever be in a position in which they set the standard for fatherhood, leadership, etc. that God would then have to be subject to. Human leaders get their power and authority from the people, and therefore, must act accordingly. They are simply stewards of power and are given it for the benefit of a body that they govern. God, on the other hand, derives his power and authority from himself because he is completely self-sufficient and, therefore, does not have to follow a human model. To use the Apostle Paul's thinking as an example, "For he [God] says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion,'" which explains that God will do as it pleases him to do and is not bound by any other law than that which he places on himself (*ESV*. Romans 9). The second reason that the first assumption is fallacious is that God is not bound to follow a law just because he gives it to humankind. For example, the God of the Bible (and by extension, Milton's God) would not have to follow any sort of ceremonial Levitical law, even though he asked the Israelites to observe them. By the same token, humans cannot look back and arbitrarily decide that God had a responsibility to stop the fall. Humans can say that would have been nice for humankind, but humans cannot say that that is objectively how God should have acted and he was neglectful for not acting as humans would have liked.

The second assumption is fallacious because it assumes that the ultimate purpose of the universe is the ultimate glorification of humankind. The problem with this assumption is as blatant as claiming that the world is at the center of the solar system: that is not the way it is. As Raphael tells Adam and Eve in book eight: “whether Heav’n move or Earth, / Imports not, if thou reck’n right; the rest / From Man or Angel the Great Architect / Did Wisely conceal,” which essentially informs Adam and Eve that the heavenly bodies were not created for their edification and glory, but for God’s (*Paradise Lost* 8:70-73). Milton’s God set up the universe for *his* ultimate glorification, not for man’s. If the purpose for the universe and the thread that made everything tick were the glorification of man, then it would be horribly wrong for Milton’s God to be so negligent as to allow humankind to be tainted with sin. God would be bound by glorifying man to the point at which he would need to defend their honor at all costs. But again, as the Apostle Paul asked in the Bible, does what is made get to tell the potter that the potter made it wrong? If one made a plate to break in a celebration, would it not be ridiculous for the plate to say that the potter was negligent in allowing it to break? This assumption is in the same vein of thinking. Because of the fact that Milton’s God has ultimate power and authority he can create the universe in any manner he chooses and that is the standard to conform to. The reason that people often have a problem with reasoning like this even in everyday life is that it is a serious knock at the pride of humanity. Humanity is not as great and wonderful if God gets to act however he pleases. Humans do not like that, but one must consider that just because one is not fond of the way in which God has decided to act does not mean that it is wrong. In addition to the fact that God did not make the

universe to glorify mankind, God is also not complicit in the Fall of man because he neither ordained their sin, nor created them imperfect.

As quoted at the beginning, God in *Paradise Lost* created Adam and Eve with every perfection needed to withstand temptation, yet with the free will to fall. As Maggie Espino argues, in her paper “Eve: ‘Defective by design’ or Disobedient by Decision,” “... though Eve was created to be subordinate to Adam’s authority, she was not created fundamentally defective,” which aptly states the situation that Eve, the first to fall, finds herself in (Espino 1). Had God created Adam or Eve as inherently evil, broken, or designed to fail, he would be complicit in their fall. Prior to the fall they were free to do as they so chose, even if that meant choosing to be enslaved to sin. Had God chosen to intervene and stop Satan from entering the garden, or tempting them, they truly would not have had free will. Free will is the option to choose, but post-Fall, Adam and Eve have no more free will. As Christ tells to a group of Jews who had recently converted, “everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin,” explaining that the crippling effects of sin effect and lay claim to absolutely every aspect of life, completely wrenching away a person’s ability to not sin (*ESV* John 8:34). Had God interceded and taken away their ability to choose evil, they would be in the same situation they were in post-fall, except with the inverse problem. Not all see the problem in this manner, however, and others have spoken out against the idea of free-will to claim that Eve had no choice in the matter.

Some attempt to attribute to God the fault of the fall of Adam and Eve because of his foreknowledge. In “Prisoners of Fate: Man’s Sudden, but Inevitable, Betrayal of God’s Instruction,” Jessica Morgan claims that Eve “is treated with less care and concern from God and the Archangels when compared with Adam, and as a result feels a strong

desire to acquire an importance of her own,” which aggressively clings to the victimization of Eve (Morgan 1). The problem with this line of thinking, however, is fundamentally a poor assumption about the purpose of gender roles in the Garden. The Bible speaks of gender roles in unchanging, uncompromising, and unapologetic terms. Certain religious rituals from the Jewish faith were fulfilled in Christ, but when one views something like the gender roles of men and women, they were set up by God in the garden to image the relationship between the Son and the Father, and Christ and the Church. Additionally, the gender roles of men and women are moral commands and duties, not ceremonial laws fulfilled by Christ. Morgan’s view of gender roles is one that seeks to claim that the role given to women by God is oppressive, which simply is not the case.

Morgan’s argument is an exercise in attacking a straw man (a logical fallacy), however, because it is not at all the case that Eve’s role is oppressive. Eve is not furthest from God because of the position in creation she is given; she is simply to act toward Adam in a different respect than he is to act toward her. He is not fundamentally better than she, but as the covenant head, is the leader and is in direct contact with the messengers of God. To argue that Eve must seek to acquire importance of her own is to argue that the manner in which God created her is not sufficient. But this is to call God, the perfect, good, omnipotent Creator, a liar, which proves a difficult pill to swallow. That Eve did not like the position she was in is evident by the fact that she sought to be her own God by eating the Apple. But Adam had an equal discontent with his gender role as leader because he openly shirked his duty and allowed Eve to go off on her own and to be tempted. Neither Adam nor Eve care to respect their gender roles, but again, just

because one does not happen to like the manner in which God ordered the universe, is not evidence enough to cite that creation is faulty.

Milton's God is not negligent to allow Adam and Eve to fall, despite his authority and power to be able to stop it. As God explains in Book Three, Adam and Eve were created in such a way as to be sufficient to stand, but free to fall. Not only this, but they were specifically given a warning that they were not to eat of the tree. In addition, they were warned that there was a tempter who had their ill will in mind. Adam tried to get Eve to stick with him in the garden so that they could exhort each other to obedience if they were to be tempted, but Eve was for more concerned with exercising her freedom to be alone. Even after Eve had fallen, Adam could have said no himself. Milton's God could have simply said, "do not eat the fruit on that tree," and that would have been enough. One does not always get the privilege of knowing why one's authority commands one to act in a certain way, but one always has the responsibility to obey.