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Eve: Humanity's First Scapegoat

Abstract: While society traditionally blames Eve for the fall of man, Milton implies that God created a flawed Eve whom he designed to sin. Throughout the story, all characters treat Eve with disrespect as Adam's "weaker" except Satan, who exploits the flaws and characteristics God instilled in her. God enables Satan's wicked behavior and, because of his obsession with free will, damns all humanity.

For centuries in western culture, people have generally held Eve responsible for the fall of man, so to assume Milton would project the same sentiment in *Paradise Lost* is expected. Milton, however, rarely presents his arguments explicitly. Instead, his writing encourages readers to contemplate beyond the surface of the text. Throughout the story, Eve is disrespected and dismissed, and her alleged character "flaws" are shown to be part of her design by God. Through major plot points preceding Eve's submission to temptation, *Paradise Lost* indicates that the behaviors of Adam, the Angels, and even God all but guarantee the fall of man, regardless of Eve's own contribution to the original sin. Despite the blame Eve receives, God created her with innate flaws for which she cannot be held responsible.

It is apparent at first reading that God prefers Adam to Eve. God tells Raphael to speak solely to *Adam* after *Eve* has a nightmare caused by Satan to warn *Adam* about the temptation that will occur. Rather than address her directly, Raphael tells Adam to "warn

thy weaker” (*Paradise Lost* 6: 908-909). Eve eventually leaves Adam and Raphael to tend to the garden, claiming that she would rather hear from Adam what he learns from Raphael. The text states, “hee, she knew, would intermix / Grateful digressions, and solve high dispute / With conjugal Caresses, from his Lip / Not Words alone pleas’d her” (8: 54-57), but one might also sense her potential frustration in Raphael’s focus on Adam because, as the quote says, Adam pays attention to her, even if it is in a more sexual context. Raphael excludes Eve from the conversation entirely, while Adam had already engaged with her before the conversation with Raphael by attempting to answer her questions about astronomy, even if he did not know the answer. Because Eve, as is later shown in the temptation scene with the serpent, desires respect, power, and knowledge, her leaving the table could be seen as an act of resistance against the exclusion she experiences. This resentment towards exclusion not only creates a window of opportunity for temptation but also creates one within an Eve that had not yet fallen. Her characteristics at this point reflect a nature free of sin, and her behavior at this point cannot be seen as immoral.

The angels do not learn their lesson in ignoring Eve even after she is tempted and sins. When Adam and Eve are to exit the Garden of Eden permanently, the angel Michael comes to talk to Adam. Michael tells Adam to follow him while Eve falls into a deep sleep because Michael “drencht her eyes” (11: 367). Michael takes Adam on a walk to discuss the future of humanity and how death will function as he, Eve, and their descendants progress through their lives. When they return, Eve awakens after dreaming an insightful dream that had given her information similar to what Michael gave to Adam, but Michael nonetheless excluded Eve like Raphael did. Although sin had already

entered the world at this point in the story and Michael's behavior consequently had nothing to do with Eve succumbing to temptation, this plot point further illustrates the blatant favoritism that God and the angels had for Adam. Had the angels treated Eve with the same respect and included her, she could have potentially avoided temptation entirely. The only character who speaks to her as an equal worthy of respect rather than Adam's "weaker" is ironically Satan when he praises her beauty and panders to her desire for knowledge. If the "good" characters of the story respected Eve and spoke to her directly and without condescension, Satan's words would most likely have no effect on her, but that is not what happens.

All knowledge Eve receives for most of the story is indirect, learning all information from Adam. Not long after Milton first introduces Eve, she asks Adam, "But wherefore all night long shine these, for whom / This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes?" even though Adam does not truly know and must ask Raphael for further information (4: 657-658). It makes sense that Eve would find the idea of knowing good and evil like a god irresistible. Satan was the only character with extended knowledge that offered Eve information directly. Without the respect of angels and forced to trust Adam's word despite his own lack of expertise that requires him to consult Raphael for further information, Eve is left to seek knowledge herself in her quest to understand the world around her.

Eve is clearly inquisitive and curious about the world. The first thing Milton writes about Eve after she is created is her exploration of the garden, ultimately leading her to water to gaze at her reflection. Upon seeing herself, Eve smiles, admiring her appearance. She tells Adam about her reflection in the lake, "There I had fixt / Mine eyes

till now, and pin'd with vain desire / Had not a voice thus warn'd me, What thou seest, / What there thou seest fair Creature is thyself" (4:465-468). At this point, Eve has had such little exposure to the world that her behavior and personality could not be anything but what was instilled in her by God at the time of her creation. When she first saw herself, she was entirely without sin. Her admiration for her own beauty, which feels somewhat narcissistic and vain, is God given, much like her curiosity.

If she immediately is drawn to both knowledge and her image, she is already set up to give in to the temptation at the tree. Had God not made Eve this way, she would not have responded so strongly to Satan's temptation. When Satan, as the serpent, tempts Eve, he calls her "empress of this fair world" (9: 626). He also implies that she, not Adam, is more accurately created in God's image when he says she bears the "fairest resemblance of thy Maker" (9: 538). She reacts to the serpent's praises with modesty, but when Satan says that eating the fruit provides godlike knowledge, she gives in to temptation. Her vanity is at play because if she was being honest when she tells Satan, "Serpent, thy overpraising leaves in doubt," she should have realized that he was being deceitful when he went on to say that the fruit will not cause her to die (9: 615). Eve's attraction to knowledge as well as her beauty leaves her vulnerable to Satan's flattery.

God not only creates Eve in a way that is conducive to sin but also provides no true support in preventing the fall of man. On the contrary, God's action— and inaction— benefitted only one person: Satan. When Satan first seeks to tempt Eve, the angels catch him, and a fight between them is about to happen. God, however, sends down golden scales that measure how the fight between the two would result in order to

warn Satan that he would lose. After seeing the scales, Gabriel says, “Satan, I know thy strength, and thou know’st mine, / Neither our own but giv’n; what folly then / To boast what Arms can do, since thine no more/ Than Heav’n permits” (4: 1006-1009). This exchange benefitted Satan only, as angels cannot feel pain and would easily win the fight. Because of God’s interjection in Satan’s favor, Satan is able to retreat and further strategize ways to tempt man successfully. God never provides such a device to Adam and Eve that would indicate the consequences of their decisions, yet Satan, who rebels against God and now is trying to convince humanity to do the same, is given a warning. Such enabling behavior by God indicates that his intentions are not just to give Adam and Eve free will but for them to fall.

One could claim that sending angels such as Raphael who warn Adam and Eve is God’s way of assisting them; however, God’s motive in sending Raphael is not to help Adam and Eve. God tells Raphael to warn Adam that they will be tempted not to prevent the fall but “Lest willfully transgressing he pretend / Surprisal, unadmonisht, unforewarn’d” (5: 244-245). God clearly states His motive to protect Himself and denounce His responsibility in man’s fall. God, knowing all that will happen before it does, makes no real effort to save humanity. God’s actions, through how He created Adam and Eve, His angels, and even Satan, essentially guarantees the fall of man.

While Eve’s responsibility is debatable for some, many people have no empathy for Satan’s role in the fall of man; however, God’s behavior implies that it was his plan all along for man to fall. If that is the case, then Satan is not truly responsible either. God created Satan knowing he would rebel and enabled his behavior. Early in his paper “Milton’s Satan and Eve’s Temptation”, Tucker Godek writes:

Milton makes Satan's reasoning appeal to human hearts and minds through rhetoric so convincing that it commands respect or even awe. However, the relationship between Satan and Eve is born from revenge and ends in the loss of Paradise, which perverts the agency Eve claimed with Adam and turns her life into one imbued with sin and its constraints (Godek 1-2).

Godek is correct in his argument that Satan does not truly respect Eve or have her best interest at heart, but what he does not recognize is that God, Adam, and the angels do little to protect her best interests. On both sides, intention and action seem incongruent. In God's case, it would not make sense for a perfect and righteous being to enable Satan's behavior unless his intention the whole time was for Eve to sin.

At first glance, it appears Eve is responsible for death entering the world; however, the decisions of God and His angels only made the conditions for sin to thrive even stronger. Regardless of whether Eve gave in to temptation or not during the time in which *Paradise Lost* is set, she or Adam would have eventually sinned due to the nature in which God created them. Because Eve lacks any sort of divine sovereignty over herself in how she was created, she could not be able to revert the conditions that God had set in place, yet she becomes a scapegoat for the downfall of humanity. After she sins, Adam tells her, "Out of my sight, thou Serpent, that name best / Befits thee with him leagu'd, thyself as false / And hateful" (*Paradise Lost* 10: 427), and later in the stanza, Adam says:

To trust thee from my side, imagin'd wise,
 Constant, mature, proof against all assaults,
 And understood not all was but a show

Rather than solid virtue, all but a Rib

Crooked by nature, bent, as now appears (10: 881-885).

By calling Eve a serpent, Adam compares her to Satan. Not only that, but Adam goes on to say that the rib God used to create her was flawed. If Eve's rib is "crooked by nature," she cannot be blamed for sinning; it is not as if she created herself. Adam, in this passage, blames God for the downfall of man. He goes on to question God's methods, saying:

... O why did God,
 Creator wise, that peopl'd highest Heav'n
 With Spirits Masculine, create at last
 This novelty on Earth, this fair defect
 Of Nature, and not fill the World at once
 With Men as Angels without Feminine,
 Or find some other way to generate
 Mankind? (10: 888-895)

At this point, Adam and Eve have sin within them, and much of what Adam is saying could be rooted in an inability to take responsibility leading him to accuse God without reason. His point, however, has merit when God had demonstrated before the fall that his intentions seem to harm humanity, whether it is through assisting Satan with the golden scales or openly acknowledging that his warning to Adam about the temptation was only to protect himself from blame.

Eve cannot be held responsible for the events that led to her temptation and sin. God places her "flaws" in her to give her free will, but He makes very little effort to protect her from making a serious mistake. God's behavior made it very easy for Satan to

interject, which renders God suspicious. It appears that God wanted Eve to sin, so humanity has to rely on God for salvation. God's obsession with free will and "authentic" love may give humans a sense of autonomy, but it resulted in the damnation of most people.