

Olivia McDermott

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David Ainsworth

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The Restraint in Freedom in *Paradise Lost*

Abstract: *Milton attempts to explain in Paradise Lost that there is true freedom only in following the ways of God, and the freedom to disobey Him can only cause pain and suffering. There is free will and fate with God, and there are also irreversible moments in history God does not allow to change.*

Free will in *Paradise Lost* is centered on obedience and justice. God gives choice so that his creation may use their own judgment to act in obedience to God, or to act against him, but he does not give reasons for his commands. God tells his angels to worship him, but Satan chooses to rebel and war against God; more importantly, he never repents of his acts, but freely decides to suffer eternally for it. God commands Adam and Eve to not eat from the forbidden tree, but they freely decide to give into temptation from Satan, despite the multiple warnings, to eat from the tree, and this causes the fall of man. Unlike Satan, Adam and Eve seek forgiveness from God, which they receive, but also are judged for their actions. Ultimately, God uses Adam and Eve's fall for good, sending his Son down to be the sacrifice for men to be forgiven of their sins. Out of love for His creation, God sends resolutions to problems. God offers salvation and redemption from their falls. There are moments in history that God has designated as fixed, or unchangeable. It can be theorized that the fall of Satan and man are both fixed points, and despite initially being bad, are used for good by God. When characters in *Paradise Lost* are about to fall, God does not intervene. From a reader's viewpoint, God appears to be negligent. However, if

one takes the stance that God is all-powerful, all knowing, and perfectly good, God's actions must be seen as justifiable and reasonable. God has not made creation perfect, and their flaws bring about many problems, but God also wants to redeem from their flaws through His Son, Jesus. "Man shall not quite be lost, but sav'd who will, / Yet not of will in him, but grace in me" (*Paradise Lost* 3:173-174). God allows man and angels to share in freedom, but also share in his justice. He is fully aware of the future and the choices all make, but he does not stop them; therefore, free will can be seen as constrained, and the chosen decisions will ultimately fall into whatever fate God has assigned. As a just God, he must also offer free will: without free will, his justice would not be true justice; it would be tyrannous and unbalanced justice; therefore, he cannot be blamed for the disobedience of his creation, and all ultimately can follow the good or bad fate God has willed them.

Satan rebels against God, and is still allowed freedom with constraint. Disobedience equals suffering. Satan has self-awareness and is tortured by his decisions. Sin and Death now freely exist on Earth and Satan has the freedom to leave hell, wage war in heaven, and sneak into Eden where he successfully assists in the downfall of mankind. For someone who has been damned by God, he certainly is given an extensive amount of freedom. He has the freedom to be the evil being he is, but his freedom also allows God to constrain the amount of harm he can do. Satan's freedom leads to the temptation and fall of man; however, his works of evil allow for God to devise the eternal salvation of man through his Son. Freedom for Satan is more so a curse and a means for God to make him suffer, man to be redeemed, and for ultimately God to be glorified and victorious.

There is a law of love between the creator and his creations: "Freely we serve / Because we freely love, as in our will / To love or not; in this we stand or fall." (*Paradise Lost* 5:538-

540). The angels who remained with God know that servitude is a choice, and ignorance can be bliss. They understand that they have the freedom to serve or flee, but the consequences are not worth rebelling. God provides the choices, without giving any reason. Milton's God is not inconsistent, he is the author of all that is good, and has the power to decide what is or is not good within the bounds of his creation. God knows what is to come, and intervenes to serve justice and provide redemption. God justly acts out what He decrees. While Adam and Eve follow God, they are given freedom to rule over Eden. Their possibilities to grow are limitless: they have freedom to be responsible.

God's will, including man's freedom, must be also considered another example of justice. Adam and Eve live in union with nature and Heaven. Everything in life is going perfectly; they are free to bask in the goodness of what God wants to give them, and they have nothing negative or evil about them. They are allowed to bask in God's goodness and love. But, also established within Adam and Eve is the means to fall: "Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall." (*Paradise Lost* 3: 99). Adam and Eve are instructed to obey God's commands: to not eat from the tree of knowledge. Despite God warning them, their ignorance of the possible punishments plays a role in their choice to rebel. Adam and Eve do not have the ability to comprehend what exactly sin, death, and punishment are. God did not place within them the foreknowledge. Even while in the midst of being tempted by Satan, Eve states their punishment rather nonchalantly. "In the day we eat/ Of this fair Fruit, our doom is, we shall die." (*Paradise Lost* 9:762-763). After this remark, she eats from the fruit, and shows that God's warning held little value in her ignorant state. Their ignorance can be seen as a means for God to protect them from danger, and keep them within their assigned boundaries. Also, their ignorance can be seen as God wanting them to fall. The suggestion that they were fated to fall can be further confirmed by such

observations. God created and follows His own rules. God created man with the ability to withstand the fall, but through the freedom God gave them they fell and authored their doom. However, God cannot be blamed.

Whose fault but his own? ingrate, he had of mee,
 All he could have; I made him just and right,
 ... So were created, nor can justly accuse
 Thir maker, or thir making, or thir Fate;
 As if Predestination over-rul'd
 Thir will, dispos'd by absolute Decree
 Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
 Thir own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
 Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,

Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown. (*Paradise Lost* 3:97-119)

God knows the past, present, and future. Adam was not aware of what it meant to be disobedient to God until after the fall. The fall brought along the knowledge of good and evil that the name of the tree suggests. Free will allows mankind to use their innate reasoning to follow God, and when Adam and Eve fell they made the free decision to do so; thus, God cannot be blamed for their actions. God cannot be a crutch for Adam and Eve to rely on. If God constantly intervened in every problem, then there would not be a true loving relationship between God and His creation.

“Though I uncircumscrib'd myself retire,/ And put not forth my goodness, which is free/
 To act or not, Necessity and Chance/ Approach not mee, and what I will is Fate” (*Paradise Lost*

7:170-73). This shows that God is giving humanity a chance to make their own decisions. God can do *anything* but he restrains Himself in order to let His creation have free will. This distance God drives between man and Himself is one reason why God has been blamed for being a self-serving God. But God wants humanity to have free will, and He leaves it alone for the good of them. If God were constantly intervening in everyone's life every single moment, then God would not be allowing free will. He intervenes when He deems it to be absolutely necessary, and any other time is simply not needed. To refer back to the original statements of this paper, God must be seen as perfectly good, and His actions to be justifiable and right. God established the way the world was supposed to work, and even if it contains flaws, it is still how God wants it to be. God's guidelines apply to those on Earth and in Hell. God has corrections for bad things that happen, but God cannot be blamed for what occurs.

The theory of fixed points, or divine destiny in history, helps better clarify the justification of God allowing and restricting free will. Fixed points is an idea that in the timeline of creation there are events, both good and bad, that no one can change. These events are fated, and God Himself will not allow them to be altered in any way. The fall of man and the fall of Satan can both be seen as fixed points. These points may be moments of terrible causality or death, or could be good things, such as the Son coming to Earth to save mankind. God's intention with fixed points is so that history can go as fated, and free will can still reign in the times of non-fixed points. With this, God can use these moments to show off His glory. God can turn the bad events into good, such as He did with the fall of Adam and Eve. With this theory, God will not change what He has willed to be fixed:

I form'd them free, and free they must remain,

Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change

Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree

Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain'd

Thir freedom, they themselves ordain'd thir fall. (*Paradise Lost* 3:124-128).

God allowed man freedom, but with the fall came along with a series of inevitable future repercussions.

Free will is constrained; Adam and Eve must fall because it is a fixed point. Their fall brought sin and death into the world, but also allowed for the Son of God to come down and save mankind from their sins. Everything that happens brings about God's wrath and love. If God told Adam and Eve and the angels what the future held for them, then God would be breaking His own rules. If Satan knew ultimately that his fall would be used for God's glory, mankind's redemption, and his eternal damnation, then the chances are that his awareness would prevent him from living out what is fated. If the vision Adam sees of the fallen world after their sin was shown to him and Eve earlier, then their knowledge of this would prevent Satan from successfully tempting Eve. God's decision to not warn them from the consequences of their actions suggests the truth in the fixed-point theory. God gives enough information He deems necessary to allow history to go as designated. He also wants His creation to love Him for whom He is, not what He does when trouble arises.

Our freedom cannot undo what God wills, it can only bring upon peace in the midst of a fallen world. Not obeying God brings chaos and calamity, slavery not freedom. And ultimately, those who choose to not follow God will be sent to Hell. Hell wins for those who choose not grace.

So Heav'nly love shall outdo Hellish hate,
 Giving to death, and dying to redeem,
 So dearly to redeem what Hellish hate
 So easily destroy'd, and still destroys

In those who, when they may, accept not grace. (*Paradise Lost* 3:298-302).

Freedom comes from understanding one's place in the social hierarchy God has created. Also, it is worth noting that God reasons with mankind. When mankind falls (and they frequently do) God has established a deeper and more personal connection with man through the Son and His grace. Milton attempts to show readers in *Paradise Lost* that there is freedom in the grace of God. Accepting the divine love of God allows all the pains and sorrows in life to have a solution, and that there is a life of purpose when one follows God. The individual decision to use their reason to live for God and to enjoy their daily life is what Milton considers as true freedom.

Dream not of other Worlds, what Creatures there
 Live, in what state, condition or degree,
 Contented that thus far hath been reveal'd

Not of Earth only but of highest Heav'n. (*Paradise Lost* 8: 175-178)

The warning Raphael gave Adam is truly a message of how everyone should live. Simply and utterly for God and the treasures He has for those who love Him. There is no absolute freedom to do whatever one pleases with no consequences, but only freedom to follow God, repent of transgressions, or freedom to receive his just wrath.

Works Cited

Hughes, Merritt Y. "Paradise Lost." *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*.

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