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Prisoners of Fate:  
Man's Sudden, but Inevitable, Betrayal of God's Instruction

There can be no argument over whether or not the character of Eve in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* took the first step towards the fall of man, but what can be argued is whether or not she had a choice in the matter. Milton's portrayal of Eve is that of an *intentionally* incomplete creation, not an accident of free will. He presents us with a hierarchy consisting of God, Adam, and Eve, with Eve placed at the bottom and consequently the furthest removed from God. She 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. Eve's feminine beauty, her one and only strength over Adam, appears to not have been a gift from God, but a plague purposefully placed upon her to render her incapable of resisting Satan's foreordained temptation. Because of God's intentional placement of these major flaws in Eve's character, her decision to eat the fruit was not simply a matter of choice, but an inevitability. Eve did not fall; she was pushed.

Predestination is the idea that we as humans have limited or no choice in the matter of our salvation. With a theological debate dating all the way back to a disagreement between Augustine of Hippo and Pelagius in 412 AD, it has been interpreted and reinterpreted by nearly every religious denomination. John Milton presents his version of God in *Paradise Lost* as omniscient, or all knowing, which

suggests that He has predestined everything that has already happened and everything that will ever happen. However, Milton also seems to try and argue that just because God predestines the fate of all things, he is not *causing* specific situations to occur in certain ways, but simply *knows* what will happen before it does. This argument is logically unsound, as doing nothing to stop the Fall from occurring when He presumably had the power to do so places some, if not all of the blame on God's shoulders.

Even though Milton makes it clear that his God gave Adam and Eve free will, we also need to take into consideration that in creating Adam and Eve, God gave them their individual personality characteristics. Since it is theoretically impossible for free will and predestination to exist simultaneously, the fact that God foreknew exactly what He was doing in creating Adam and Eve the way He did cancels out their free will. Becca Ansonge makes a similar argument in "How Good Led to Evil and Evil Created Good: The Relationship between Good and Evil in *Paradise Lost*". She says that in *Paradise Lost*, "One of the main points is that all of God's creations have the ability to choose between good and evil. However, there also seems to be a deterministic level of creation" (Ansonge 5). This "deterministic" nature came into play in the creation of Adam and Eve, and directly led to Eve's decision to eat the fruit.

God in *Paradise Lost* is an omniscient character, which means, as He tells the Son in Book III, He clearly knew of man's "fall'n condition" long before the Fall actually occurred (*Paradise Lost* 3: 181). If we accept Milton's presentation of an omniscient God exacting His will on His creations, it's reasonable to conclude that He gave Adam and Eve the characteristics that He knew would ensure their specific reactions to certain situations. If He was indeed all knowing, God created Eve with the unmistakable

knowledge that she would disobey Him and eat the fruit, and therefore He deliberately placed the fatal flaws in her design. Therefore Eve was not just a creation of love as Milton's God would have us believe; she was an instrument being used to enact God's design. It was therefore intentional that Eve was bestowed with her tragic gifts of beauty, vanity, and curiosity, and also that she was kept at a considerable distance from divine influence. God was essentially giving her the tools that she needed to fall.

In his essay "On Bending", Jeff Davis poses the question, "God creates good—this much is certain—but does he also create evil, which is in all ways opposed to his ideals?" (Davis 1). Later, he states that "One is bound to assume, if he or she uses the God of *Paradise Lost*, that Lucifer was created good" (Davis 2). So, if God created what eventually became evil with the foreknowledge that it would do so, it's practical to assume that He did indeed create evil: a conclusion Davis himself arrived at as well. Ansonge similarly answers this question, "According to Milton, everything is made up of God's substance. Therefore, it logically follows that he must contain evil" (Ansonge 7). Consequently, not only is God responsible for the basic existence of evil in the temporal world, He is also responsible for the influence such evils had on His first human creations, partly because of the very manner in which he created them.

From the very nature of Eve's existence anyone could have predicted that she would indeed be "defective by design". She was not created from God Himself as Adam was, but from one of Adam's ribs. God, of course, had the ability and resources to create Eve from himself as he had done with Adam, but he specifically chose not to. Eve refers to Adam as "My Glory, my Perfection", suggesting that even she is aware of the fact that she was an incomplete creation and needs Adam to lead a fulfilling life (*Paradise Lost* 5:

29). The manner of her creation alone places Eve in a position of inferiority to Adam through no fault of her own. As further evidence for Eve's second-rate existence, Milton gives us the stories of both Adam and Eve's creations. Adam was created in the light of the sun, and recounts that immediately after waking, "Straight toward Heav'n my wond'ring Eyes I turn'd" (*Paradise Lost* 8: 257). Eve, on the other hand, awoke "Under a shade" and was drawn first to her own reflection (*Paradise Lost*, 4: 451). She needed divine guidance to lead her to Adam and to place her on the right track. Only moments after coming into existence, the blame could not possibly be placed solely on Eve for this display of her God given flawed nature. After all, when a young child behaves inappropriately, the blame is usually placed on the parents for not teaching them better behavior, and they are quick to do so. God corrects this first mistake of narcissism and confusion, but afterwards He leaves Eve to her own devices and fundamentally becomes a negligent parent.

While Davis and Ansorge both seem to agree that God is responsible for the initial creation of evil, the two split over the issue of how exactly Adam and Eve arrived at a fallen state. Ansorge reasonably argues that God played a hand in their misfortune by intentionally placing them in harm's way. She argues that, "If Adam and Eve had lived in Eden without the constant temptation of the Tree of Knowledge or any understanding of "evil", they would have been living in a state of pure goodness and evil would not have existed in their reality" (Ansorge 3). Davis, on the other hand, places an emphasis on choice, reasoning that, "God is adamant about allowing all his animate creations to make their own choices and decide for themselves to whom they will offer worship. It is his "high Degree / Unchangeable, Eternal" (*Paradise Lost* 3: 126-127), which serves the purpose, he claims, of ensuring that his followers are true" (Davis 7). But if God's will is indeed

“Unchangeable” and “Eternal”, then it had nothing to do with free will. Could there really have been any “choice” for Adam and Eve if Milton’s omniscient God placed the Tree in Eden knowing full well that it would lead to his children’s demise?

The manner of Adam and Eve’s individual downfalls seems to parallel that of their creations. Adam’s creation placed him closer to God than Eve was allowed to be, since he was created directly from God. Likewise, Eve’s fall seems to place her closer to Satan, as Satan intentionally came directly to her and not Adam. Also, just as Eve was created from Adam, Adam’s fall is “created”, in part, from Eve’s actions. This is where one can blatantly see that God, by neglecting to create Eve with prevention of the Fall in mind, has doomed Adam as well. Because of Adam’s preordained love for Eve, he has no choice but to eat the fruit and remain with her. Davis again argues for choice, saying, “The freedom to choose drives this conflict, gives good and evil their dynamic natures, allows the shift from one to the other, and even allowed evil to come about in the beginning, with the fall of Lucifer” (Davis 7). However, it seems more plausible that it was simply the act of God’s creation of Adam and Eve, not his giving them a choice, that allowed evil to exist. There is no “choice” in *Paradise Lost*, except on the part of God. Since God created Eve as perfect to Adam, Eve is able to easily convince Adam to eat the fruit. He knowingly brings upon his own demise because “his Love/ Had so enobl’d, as of choice to incur/ Divine displeasure for her sake” (*Paradise Lost* 9: 990-992). As a result of God’s disregard to create Eve in a way which would have prevented her vulnerability to Satan, the Father of man has also fallen.

When we first meet Adam and Eve, they are in the middle of an interaction that serves as an interesting and insightful glance into the balances of their relationship. Eve’s discontentment with the work bestowed upon her by God is our first sign that she is not

as in touch with the will of her creator as she should be. Adam takes responsibility for her faults and tries to teach her to be thankful and pious, but Eve seems to agree simply because she loves Adam, not because she truly understands or appreciates the situation. Eve appears to have been created with an inclination to question the ways of the world and therefore the ways of God. It seems that Adam, because of God's decision to create him without that same tendency, has a natural advantage over Eve which gives him a closer connection with God as well as authority over Eve. Eve obeys everything Adam asks her to do without question, telling him, "what thou bidd'st/ Unargu'd I obey" (*Paradise Lost* 4: 635). She is described as behaving towards Adam with "meek surrender" and acting with "submissive Charms" (*Paradise Lost* 4: 494-498). She is shamelessly being presented as the weaker character.

In the aforementioned scene, Eve's personal relationship with God is deliberately portrayed as weak, especially when compared with the relationship Adam shares with the creator, and it seems that God wants it that way. God undoubtedly knew how he would need to treat Eve to ensure her development into sin. Some could attest that Eve is still at fault, because as it is stated in *Paradise Lost*, she was given "free will". However, as Anson argues, "On one level, it seems that Adam and Eve have free will, but the situation is unfair since they don't understand the consequences of disobeying God" (Anson 6). This is especially true for Eve, as Adam, not she, is generally the one that receives communication from the Divine.

After only having witnessed one instance of communication between Adam and Eve, it becomes evident that because of Eve's inherent low position on the totem pole she must treat Adam as Adam is expected to treat God. This only further illustrates Milton's

hierarchy- Adam is expected to answer to God- the company executive- but Eve is one rung down the ladder and only expected to answer to Adam- her immediate superior. Incidentally, this is not only the first time the reader meets Adam and Eve, but is also the first scene Satan sees when he is introduced to the Mother and Father of mankind. Satan's decision to go after Eve instead of Adam could very well have been sparked after witnessing this interaction of blatant inequality. It soon becomes more evident that even Eve herself is aware of her subsidiary existence. She opens her story of her own creation by addressing Adam as,

O thou for whom  
And from whom I was form'd flesh of thy flesh,  
And without whom am to no end, my Guide  
And Head...(*Paradise Lost* 4: 440-443).

Eve has openly attested to her rank beneath her husband, something that she will soon venture to change. In addition to simply placing Eve in an inferior position, God rarely makes the effort to speak directly to Eve, automatically forcing her to receive messages from Adam. Even when God sends Raphael down to Paradise to deliver the warning, he instructs him to specifically "Converse with Adam" instead of to make sure both Adam and Eve receive the warning (*Paradise Lost* 5: 230). One could argue that Eve left the conversation with Raphael of her own free will, but if we agree with Milton's concept of an omniscient God, He created her knowing that she would do so, and therefore predestined her failure to receive Raphael's warning. Eve's ultimate displeasure with her low position is a dangerous weakness, because along with her beauty, Satan uses it to appeal to her. He tells her of the advantages he gained by "vent'ring higher than my Lot"

(*Paradise Lost* 9: 690). If God had taken the time to treat Eve on the same level as Adam, Satan would not have been able to win her over with this argument. Milton's omniscient God had to have been aware of this fact, yet He did nothing to prevent the temptation. In this and many other aspects, it seems that even though Eve is heavily flawed, God, not Eve, is directly responsible for the Fall.

Nearly every description of Eve throughout *Paradise Lost* has something to do with her physical beauty. She is tagged with phrases like "Eve with perfect beauty adorn'd", while Adam is generally given titles regarding his closeness to God or strength of faith (*Paradise Lost* 4: 634). However, it becomes clear throughout the story that Eve's "gift" of beauty was actually intended to be a curse from God that would help to push her towards sin. Not only does Eve's vanity become a major weakness in Eve herself, but it begins to affect Adam as well. Despite Adam's strength of character, Eve's beauty is so great that he becomes as enticed by it as she is proud of it. Eve's ill-fated beauty eventually becomes Adam's one and only flaw as his infatuation for her affects his ability to make sound judgements. When Eve asks to separate from Adam in Book IX, he agrees to let her go largely because he is obsessed with possessing her companionship. He fears forcing her to stay will drive her away from him, telling her "Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more" (*Paradise Lost* 9: 372). His burning affection for Eve comes back to bite him again after Eve has eaten the apple. Eve knows that she can use Adam's feelings for her to her advantage, and does so to bring Adam down with her. Eve is not only "defective by design", but seems to cause defects in those she touches. Therefore God is not only responsible for Eve's imperfections, but for the trouble it caused in Adam as well. Although Eve's beauty is indeed disadvantageous to Adam as well as to Eve



herself, perhaps the worst danger it poses in *Paradise Lost* is enabling Satan to use flattery to draw Eve into sin.

Eve's first large step towards disobedience occurs when she seeks to overturn the order of things and persuades Adam to let her wander away from him so they can separate their work. This is the first time in the story that Eve seems to be the one in charge of the situation, and because of her specific God given traits, (or lack thereof), it ends horribly. Eve ironically predicts that it is improbable "A foe so proud will first the weaker seek", identifying herself as the "weaker" one (*Paradise Lost* 9: 383). Her words are soon disproven as Satan enters the scene plotting his ambush, looking specifically for Eve, for he too has realized that she is inferior and will be easier to persuade, and admits that Adam's "higher intellectual more I shun" (*Paradise Lost* 9: 482). He then proceeds to appeal to Eve's major weaknesses, her vanity, and "Into the Heart of Eve his words made way" (*Paradise Lost* 9: 550). If not for the curse of beauty bestowed upon her by God and the vanity that came as a result, she would not have been as susceptible to these flattering arguments. We do see Eve use her power to reason when considering the serpent's suggestion, but it actually seems to work against her, as she speculates, "How dies the Serpent? Hee hath eat'n and lives" (*Paradise Lost* 9: 764), but her negative qualities overcome her ability to think logically. The lack of difficulty Satan has convincing Eve to disobey God's direct orders is the direct result of God's neglect to save the Mother of Mankind. Had God not treated Eve with such secondary concern or bestowed such great beauty upon her, she would never have sought to uplift her status and would perhaps not have been tempted to eat the fruit.

It's easy, even for a modern reader, to place the blame for the Fall solely on Eve, and it must have been particularly easy for someone in Milton's time to do so. However, after a logical reading of *Paradise Lost*, it can be clearly seen that God should take the blame. He was at the very least aware of what he was doing when he created Eve and, considering his position, did not do much to prevent the worst from happening. By not taking action, God shifts the fault to Himself. Perhaps this was what He wanted; He did not want His new creations to be damned for all of eternity, and so by placing at least some of the blame on Himself He ensures the rise of the Son and the eventual salvation of man. Perhaps this is proof of Milton's belief in the concept of the "Fortunate Fall".

Whatever the circumstances, God knew what he was doing when he created Adam and Eve. It is therefore unfair to characterize Eve as a "cheap knock-off" or to accuse her of being the sole agent in causing the condemnation of humankind. She was undeniably flawed, but these flaws were purposefully placed in her character by her Divine Creator. Without such flaws imbued in these first human beings, God's plan would not have been able to succeed.