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### The Complexity of Balance

Abstract: This paper explores the Son and Satan, the stereotypical examples of good and evil, and how they stray from their known roles in *Paradise Lost*. It argues that good and evil cannot be purely separated into two beings and that everyone has some of each inside of them.

The Son and Satan are often used as foils for each other throughout *Paradise Lost* regarding their personal characteristics, however despite their stark differences, the result of their decisions or even the decisions themselves are often the same. Because of this, the Son is defined by Satan's actions and personality and vice versa. Milton does this as a demonstration to prove that one can never be truly good or evil, not even the Son or Satan, two characters that are often stereotyped as being one or the other.

Before I begin, it is important to clarify that this analysis is referring strictly to the Son from *Paradise Lost* rather than Jesus from *Paradise Regained*. While in biblical text, these two characters are the same, they can be interpreted very differently in Milton's writing. It can be argued that they are separate characters entirely due to the added element of humanity in Jesus, lack of recollection of the events in Heaven, and complete metamorphosis of being while becoming human. Therefore, in this essay they will be considered two different characters, and Jesus's actions in *Paradise Regained* have no effect on the analysis of the Son in *Paradise Lost*.

One of the comparisons that Milton makes between Satan and the Son is the idea of the perilous journeys they each agree to. Before each of their speeches demonstrating their

willingness to sacrifice themselves, however, there is a silence in hell, “none among the choice and prime/ Of those Heav’n-warring Champions could be found/ so hardy as to proffer or accept/ Alone the dreadful voyage; till at last/ Satan” (*Paradise Lost* 2: 423-427), and in heaven, “all the Heav’nly Choir stood mute,/ And silence was in Heav’n” (*Paradise Lost* 3: 217-218). While this may not technically be a result of either of their actions, Milton uses this to set up a comparison between the two scenarios.

In hell, while it is Beëlzebub, Satan’s right hand, who explains the idea to the fallen angels, it is revealed to be originally Satan’s plan, “first devis’d/ By Satan” (*Paradise Lost* 2: 379-380). Due to this, the credibility of his sacrifice diminishes considerably as it demonstrates a clear example of deception. However, he also makes it clear that he has no idea if he will return. In his speech to his fallen legions he says, “long is the way/ And hard, that out of Hell leads up to light” (*Paradise Lost* 2: 432-433) and that Chaos and Night “with utter loss of being/ Threatens him” (*Paradise Lost* 2: 440-441). While Satan is extremely manipulative throughout the poem, it makes sense to believe him in this instance. Up until now, no one has tried to escape hell or cross Chaos and for all Satan and fallen angels know, it could kill him. He is willing to sacrifice himself for the mission to better his comrades’ condition, exemplifying true selflessness.

The Son’s circumstance is completely different in heaven. Instead of the angels trying to come up with a solution for their sin, like in hell, God informs them that someone must sacrifice themselves for mankind’s future sin, “Die hee or Justice must; unless for him/ Some other able, and as willing, pay/ The rigid satisfaction, death for death” (*Paradise Lost* 3: 210-212). Similar to Satan, the Son steps up to accept the burden when all others are quiet. However, when the Son restates his promise to save humanity, he includes something that God did not mention,

So Man, as is most just,

Shall satisfy for Man, be judg'd and die,  
 And dying rise, and rising with him raise

His Brethren, ransom'd with his own dear life.” (*Paradise Lost* 3: 294-297)

The journey itself was set up as a test for the Son to demonstrate the kind of selflessness he must show as a human on Earth. Milton's God is omniscient; therefore, it cannot be considered manipulation as he knew that the Son was going to add his own terms. At the same time, the Son's clear adjustment of the original rules God set lessens the trust the reader has in him as a character and demonstrates that he is not as altruistic as he may try to appear.

While Satan chooses to go on his journey without the knowledge that he would even live to see it through, the Son purposefully changes the arrangement so that he would live in heaven after his human death. Milton infuses both situations with aspects of deception and selflessness. Satan with it originally being his plan, but his willingness to sacrifice himself, and the Son with his manipulation of God's plan to save himself. These actions blur the lines of who is good and who is evil. By doing this, the reader is challenged to question what the concepts of good and evil truly mean.

Both the Son and Satan are also faced with choices regarding each other throughout the story and while they war against each other, their motivations each illuminate positives and negatives in both of their characters. Milton stresses multiple times the amount of jealousy Satan is feeling after the Son is announced as the new heir of Heaven, “he of the first,/ If not the first Arch-Angel, great in Power,/ In favor and preëminence, yet fraught/ With envy against the Son of God” (*Paradise Lost* 5: 659-662). However, it is also made apparent that the jealousy stems from deep insecurities about his abilities and his place in Heaven, “thought himself impaired”

(*Paradise Lost* 5: 665). These strong emotions influence his political thoughts and concerns he has regarding the new leadership.

Satan tells Beelzebub “new Laws thou see’st impos’d;/ New Laws from him who reigns”, clearly worried about the change in leadership. This evolves later into the argument that they are or will be no longer free as the Son will unjustly rule.

if not equal all, yet free,

Equally free; for Orders and Degrees

Jar not with Liberty, but well consist.

Who can in reason then or right assume

Monarchy over such as live by right

His equals, if in power and splendor less,

In freedom equal? or can introduce

Law and Edict on us, who without law

Err not? much less for this to be our Lord,

and look for adoration to th’ abuse

Of those Imperial Titles which assert

Our being ordain’d to govern, not to serve? (*Paradise Lost* 5: 791-802)

It is important to recognize that at this point in the poem, we are still being told Raphael’s point of view, an angel still loyal to God. He claims that Satan “allur’d them, and with lies/ Drew after him the third part of Heav’n’s Host” (*Paradise Lost* 5: 709-710). Therefore, we have no way of knowing which side is telling the truth, if either of them is. However, we know Satan cares for his comrades as he shows remorse in the Hell for their suffering and a third of the angels in Heaven, which itself is described to be “an Host/ Innumerable as the Stars of Night,/ Or Stars of

Morning, Dew-drops, which the Sun/ Impearls on every leaf and every flower.” (*Paradise Lost* 5: 745-747), follows Satan into war with God. Out of all of these angels, only one, Abdiel, disagrees with Satan. This evidence demonstrates that there is substance to what Satan is telling his angelic brethren. This may have stemmed from insecure jealousy, but the fight itself is more to protect the angels against an unjust rule from a new king that they are not familiar with and less about anger towards the Son himself.

The Son is very similar in the fact that he demonstrates he is quick to violence and never chooses to use mercy on his enemies, like Death and Satan. When agreeing to sacrifice himself for mankind, one of his first reactions is to describe how he will defeat Death in vivid war-like imagery, “Shall lead Hell Captive maugre Hell, and show/ The powers of darkness bound.” (*Paradise Lost* 3: 255-256) and “While by thee rais’d I ruin all my Foes,/ Death last, and with his Carcass glut the Grave” (*Paradise Lost* 3: 258-259). In the battle of heaven, the Son is quick to assume that God hates the rebel angels, “But whom thou hat’st, I hate, and can put on/ Thy terrors” (*Paradise Lost* 6: 734-735), but is more likely pushing his own beliefs because God never mentions anything of the kind. Because of his hatred for the rebel angels, the Son is also ready to violently cast them out of heaven when God asks him to take over the battle,

Rid heav’n of these rebell’d,  
 To thir prepar’d ill Mansion driven down,  
 To the chains of darkness, and th’ undying Worm,  
 That from thy just obedience could revolt,  
 Whom to obey is happiness entire. (*Paradise Lost* 6: 737-741)

The last time he automatically turns to violence is when God tells him what Satan will do in the garden and the Son's solution is to kill him immediately. This time, he goes so far as to chastise God for not defending his own image by killing Satan,

Or wilt thou thyself

Abolish thy Creation, and unmake,

For him, what for thy glory thou hast made?

So should thy goodness and thy greatness both

Be question'd and blasphem'd without defense. (*Paradise Lost* 3: 162-166)

Like Satan, he doesn't hesitate when it comes to violence, but every time it is in defense of Heaven or humankind against what he perceives as the enemy. Both characters are associated with destruction in *Paradise Lost*, but both are defending what they believe in. Their actions are seen as cruel and possibly evil by today's standards, but their motivations can be understood. It is reminiscent of the phrase to do "bad things for good reasons" and questions whether one entity, like Satan or the Son, can be simply good or evil.

In opposition to the war discussed above, both the Son and Satan also demonstrate that they are capable of mercy, whether or not they choose to use it. While God is Satan's main antagonist, he cannot physically face him so he instead sets his sights on Adam and Eve, in the hopes that he can punish God if he ruins his favorite creations. However, both times before Satan approaches Eve (once while she is sleeping and the other to convince her to eat the fruit) he has a long monologue which each time consists of self-doubt. The first, in Book 4, Satan struggles with the idea of the possibility of repentance, "is there no place/ Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?" (*Paradise Lost* 4: 79-80) and in Book 6, he doesn't want to destroy the beauty and happiness that he feels in Eden,

for the time remain'd

Stupidly good, of enmity disarm'd,

Of guile, of hate, of envy, or revenge;

But the hot Hell that always in him burns,

Though in mid Heav'n, soon ended his delight" (*Paradise Lost* 9: 464-468)

While Satan does push past these doubts and carries out his plan for revenge, it is significant that they continue to come back throughout the course of the poem. His reoccurring internal struggle even when faced with his enemies demonstrates that he is not comprised of only evil and is capable of goodness or mercy.

The Son, on the other hand, is shown capable of mercy through his actions using it. Although God told the Son to punish them, as he did with the angels in heaven, the Son instead begs for mercy on their behalf, "Let mee/ Interpret for him, mee his Advocate/ And propitiation" (*Paradise Lost* 6: 32-34), and asks for the punishment to be lessened, "Which I/ To midigate thus plead, not to reverse" (*Paradise Lost* 6: 40-41). It is these interactions that put the earlier violence of the Son into perspective. While it is clear that he does not use mercy on Satan, he shows that he is capable of it by giving it to Adam and Eve even though they have transgressed against God. These two characters demonstrate that everyone has the ability to be kind or good, and that means that they cannot be simply good or evil.

However, it is through this inability of being a pure idea that maintains the balance in the world as Milton sees it. Many scholars agree that good and evil must exist, but some think that it must be in one form or the other. Troy Farsoun says in his paper, "Candle in the Dark", "Satan himself acts in direct opposition to God the Father (indeed, even his name means "adversary" in Hebrew)" and "Whereas God is charged with the task of caring for the beings he has created,

Satan seeks to destroy anything that God loves.” He argues that Satan represents evil because God is the ideal of goodness. This is disproved by the arguments above because while Satan makes the conscious choice to go against God, his actions and thoughts counter him embracing that evil as his whole being. Kori Hensell supports my claims in “The Shifting Concept of Good and Evil in *Paradise Lost*” where they say, “By inferring that God uses evil to construct good, it is deduced that God must have evil in him, much like in Genesis when he creates light out of darkness.” Not even God is purely good or evil, so it is impossible for any of his creations to be, countering Farsoun’s claim.

Through these comparisons it is easy to argue that either Satan or the Son is the hero depending on what you want to use to define a hero. Satan demonstrates humanity through his selflessness and inner conflict, while the Son bestows mercy on Adam and Eve. However, neither is the hero or the villain in this story. By using the classic representations of the two ideas, Milton demonstrates that everyone is flawed, and no one is completely good or evil.