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### **Satan's Revenge: An Unjustified Rebellion**

*Abstract: This paper analyses Satan's rebellion against God, focusing on its motivations, approaches, and consequences. While acknowledging the validity of Satan's sentiments, the paper argues that the manner in which Satan rebelled and the consequences, negate any justification for his rebellion. Through this analysis, the paper explores the complex ethical dilemmas inherent in narratives of rebellion and divine authority.*

Milton's portrayal of Satan in 'Paradise Lost' allows readers to sympathize with his character as he navigates themes of rebellion, authority, and revenge. Through Satan's persuasiveness and passionate convictions, Milton explores the complexities of his character and motivations. While Satan's rebellion against God may seem justified within the context provided by Milton, it is important to recognize that the basis of the rebellion alone does not render the rebellion itself justifiable. Although Satan's sentiments may be justified, the actions resulting from his rebellion cannot be justified solely based on these sentiments; therefore, his rebellion is not truly justified. The authority being rebelled at, the approach to the rebellion, and the consequences of the same are all important to be considered when deeming a rebellion unjustified.

In order to effectively conclude how Satan's rebellion is not justifiable and how, it is important to understand what rebellion, in the context to be discussed, consists of. Satan's rebellion against God refers to Satan's direct rejection of God's authority, and objecting to God's ways of ruling by repeatedly attempting to ruin God's plan and humanity. Satan plans to do this by doing evil and corrupting God's newest creation, humans. Fortunately, Milton does not leave

up for interpretation what Satan's motivations are. Satan's reason to rebel against God can be attributed to numerous factors; however, the catalyst of Satan's rebellion is the presence of the Son. To Satan, the Son's existence threatens his own in Heaven, as Satan is no longer God's predecessor. Satan's own envy and pride are the basis of his rebellion. Satan believes that ruling is his calling, as he says, "Better to reign in hell than serve in Heaven" (*Paradise Lost* 1: 263). Satan is clear in his arguments that he rejects God's authority.

Unlike many rebellions, Satan's is not against a government or monarchy, whose authority relies on titles, goods, or social contracts. Rebelling against a monarchy or government because of how their authority affects oneself is often easy to justify, as the people who rebel most likely know what is in their best interest if they rebel. However, Satan's rebellion is against God; this changes the way one must think of and consider authority. God's divine authority is often understood as the best authority to obey, there's an idea that "God knows what's best"—as Abdiel argues in book V of *Paradise Lost*—the divinity of God's authority, along with God's almightiness, make God reliable and they are the reason why angels and humans follow him. However, Satan does not agree with the conception that God's authority is reliable, therefore he must then show through his rebellion how God's authority is not reliable. Regardless, every rebellion is an inherent act of rejecting authority one cannot say that Satan's rebellion is not justified because God's authority is divine.

The fact that God's authority is more powerful than the authority of a king does not mean that it cannot be questioned or challenged. Unlike the rebellion of a kingdom against its queen, Satan's rebellion cannot be justified only by his freedom to rebel; Satan's rebellion must show how God's divine authority is not beneficial to those devoted to God. To rebel against God's

divine authority and be justified the rebellion must show what it would look like to exist without or beyond God's authority, more specifically, what a better existence devoid of God's authority would be like. However, Satan fails to do this because of both, his understanding of God's authority and will—which led him to being part of God's plan—and his prideful approach to rebellion—which, instead of focusing on implementing a new status quo or authority, only make being devoted to God more complicated.

Satan's understanding of God's authority, although divine, does not hold weight over his beliefs, as he feels he has been lied to and betrayed by God because of The Son. Satan feels The Son's position in Heaven undermines his own. Therefore, Satan's reasoning for rebellion is deeply intertwined with his personal qualities of pride and ambition. Satan feels betrayed because of his pride, he feels like he is owed a "better" position in Heaven and deserves more power. This sentiment and desire of power by itself cannot make Satan's rebellion unjustified, however, Satan's pride and ambition do not stop at being sentiments, they are also influences in Satan's way of rebelling. Satan's pride fuels his desire for revenge just as much as his understanding of God's actions and will: "The debt immense of endless gratitude/ so burthensome, still paying, still to owe; "*(Paradise Lost 4: 52-53)*. Satan's pride turns gratitude into a burden, and so it is reasonable to assume that Satan's pride and ambition are what truly drive him to rebel. Consequently, pride and ambition will shape Satan's rebellion.

Satan's way of rebellion is important to discerning how his rebellion is not justified, as reason alone does not justify a rebellion. Satan believes that countering God's will is the only way to rebel against him. As he says, "To do aught good never will be our task, / But ever to do ill our sole delight, / As being the contrary to His high will" (*Paradise Lost 1 159-161*).

However, as previously mentioned, God's authority and will are divine, and his power is almighty. Satan ignores that anything done is allowed by God, including opposing him. God allowed Satan to corrupt humans, as he is almighty and omnipresent; therefore, to rebel by opposing God, by doing evil, is not only futile to Satan's rebellion—as God is inherently more powerful, and doing evil will not make Satan more powerful—but it also strengthens God's plans of making Earth a harder testing ground for humans.

Consequently, it could be argued that, because God is more powerful than Satan and God's will is to do good, the only way to rebel against him would be to counteract God's will by doing evil. However, this argument, rather than justifying Satan's approach, highlights Satan's goal; it highlights that Satan's rebellion is a battle for power rather than a rebellion against tyranny. Satan does not need to oppose God's will in order to create a more egalitarian place among angels. The reason Satan counteracts God's will does not stem from a lack of ways to rebel, it stems from his prideful nature, as he is not actually concerned with equality or better leadership.

One of the first instances in which it is clear how Satan's pride influences his rebellion, and therefore prevents it from being justified, is the council of fallen angels. In this council, Satan proposes they all talk and argue, providing a sample of equality. Later on, in *Paradise Lost*, he says, "Natives and Sons of Heaven possessed before/ By none, and, if not equal all, yet free, /Equally free; for orders and degrees" (*Paradise Lost* 5: 590-591)". There is clear evidence highlighting Satan's understanding of concepts such as equality and power dynamics; in fact, he claims that it is one of the reasons for his rebellion. As Jeff Davis theorizes on "On Bending" Satan's rebellious form does not only stem from pride and envy, but also disappointment (Davis

2). Satan, throughout his rebellion forgets to address the same reasons he was disappointed in God's way of ruling in Heaven and consequently the value and practice of equality are hindered in his rebellion by his pride and ambition, although he allows the fallen angels to speak, he does not actually share his authority with them, potentially leading the fallen angels to feel just as he did towards God.

In the fifth book of *Paradise Lost*, we are told, through Raphael, about Abdiel, an angel loyal to God who responds to Satan's claim of equality among all, angels, and God, by asking if every angel must then reign. The importance of Abdiel's skepticism lies in Satan's response. Because Satan is prideful, instead of engaging with the idea that all angels are be equal besides God, he decides to attempt to prove a prideful point: he is an equal to God. In this instance we see Satan's true objective, his goal is not to create a Heaven or hell that is more egalitarian than God's, his goal is to prove himself to be an equal to God. Satan's rebellion is self-serving and because of this he becomes a tyrant, as he is not as powerful as God, the only way for him to attain more power is through exploitation, lies and corruption.

Satan only makes his rebellion less justifiable by gathering support through persuasion and deceptive ideals. Portraying his rebellion as an egalitarian movement allows Satan to gather support that he otherwise would not possess if he were to be truthful about his motivations—for him, and only him, to be an equal to God. Satan is not truthful, because claiming that he is fighting for all angels to be equal to God feed the fallen angels' pride, he must paint God as the sole tyrant and himself as the savior in order to use their power without being questioned. Satan attempts to do the same in *Paradise Regained* by tempting Jesus with all the power in the world

to defeat tyranny and injustice. He hopes Jesus' fall signifies the equivalence of his and God's power.

Satan's basis for rebellion is justified; it is justified to start a rebellion because of anger at the almighty God—who seems to use his power carelessly—however, his basis for rebellion alone is not enough to justify his actions. Even if argued, as Mariah Lawrence does in “Falling Pawns: An Argument Against God and His Conniving Ways as Evidenced by Satan and Eve,” that God is not benevolent and just, Satan's rebellion is still not justified. In Lawrence's paper she writes that God is “like a toy maker who creates a doll that cannot stand on its own, and then destroys it when it will not stand after he places it on its own two feet” (Lawrence 3) if we relate this to Satan's rebellion, Satan, instead of rebelling against God through helping the doll stand on its own he destroys the doll, as if God's plan wasn't for the doll to be destroyed already.

Satan's rebellion surged from his dislike of God's ruling in Heaven, more specifically from God's creation of The Son and disruption of the “order” of Heaven, which for Satan was not just. Although Satan claims that his rebellion stands for equality and Satan even shows his understanding of what a democracy might look like, he does not actually approach his rebellion in any democratic or egalitarian capacity, in fact, he becomes the sole ruler of Hell and rules above fallen angels, the same way God does in Heaven.

While Satan's feelings of betrayal and fear of tyranny lend credence to his cause, they are overshadowed by his own deceptive tactics, turning him into a tyrant, what he claims he is against. Satan's rebellion, rather than a noble quest for equality or justice, is tainted by his selfish desires for power and revenge. Rebelling against divine authority complicates the way in which one might justify Satan's rebellion. Justifying a rebellion against rulers such as politicians and

monarchs presents different dilemmas than justifying a rebellion against God. And although a rebellion against God could have been justified if Satan had found a way to implement a new type of authority or status quo that worked independently of God's own—and therefore highlighting how God's divine authority is not favorable for most—Satan's choice to counteract God's goodness with evil not only fails to achieve the idea of justified rebellion but also serves to fulfill God's greater plan. Satan's rebellion is not justified because Satan constantly allows his pride and ambitions to dictate his actions, from deceiving his own council to corrupting humans.

Works Cited

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