The Power of a Promise: A Speech Act and the Foundation of Freedom in *Paradise Lost*.

by

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the central and decisive moment in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is a constitutive speech act, a promise, made by God to the Son. This promise establishes and defines both obedience and disobedience; disobedience, in turn, defines the parameters of ungodliness. Freedom is possible because of this speech act.

Free will was both philosophically and theologically under attack in the seventeenth century. The first three chapters serve to contextualize Milton’s work. Chapter 1 explores the thinking of Thomas Hobbes on freedom of the will. Chapter 2 describes some theological positions. Chapter 3 examines Milton’s theological attempt to address the role of the will in *De Doctrina Christiana*, an attempt which balances the omnipotence of God with freedom of the individual.

The second section deals with the issue of free will in *Paradise Lost*. Chapter 4 deals specifically with Eve’s enigmatic dream. The dream reveals that Eve’s identity is no longer linked to Adam but to the interdiction itself and to freedom. Chapter 5, central to the argument, examines the exaltation of the Son. In a world created *ex Deo*, all, to this point, has been extension of God. The possibility of disobedience severs the relationship of extension and replaces it with a relationship built upon promise. In the exaltation, God makes such a promise to the Son. The strange thing about this promise is that it does not concern the actions God intends to take but the possible actions of others. Such a promise creates the categories of obedience and disobedience--both of which depend on one’s response to the promise. By creating the possibility of disobedience, God severs the extended nature of things and establishes independence. Instead of creating *ex nihilo*, God creates the potential for “nothing” or the “not God” in order to confer freedom.
The last three chapters discuss the consequences of this promise. Chapter 6 examines Milton's physical universe as a concrete actualization of obedience and disobedience. Chapter 7 explores the process of choice through an examination of Satan's and Abdiel's responses to God's command. The final chapter revisits the actual falls of Adam and Eve.
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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the one who brought Nora through her journey through darkness. It is also dedicated to my children--Kaitlin, Nora, Isaac, and Clare. Of course, I also dedicate it to my long suffering and very patient wife, Virginia Gillese.
The Power of a Promise: A Speech Act and the Foundation of Freedom

in *Paradise Lost*

Introduction

This thesis essentially argues that the central and decisive moment in Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a constitutive speech act, a promise, made by God to the Son. This promise establishes and defines both obedience and disobedience; disobedience, for its part, defines the parameters of ungodliness. Freedom exists because of this speech act.

Free will was both philosophically and theologically under attack in the seventeenth century. Milton's approach to the problem in *Paradise Lost* is theologically grounded but philosophically daring: God utters a promise to the Son. The strange thing about the promise is that it does not concern the actions God intends to take but the possible actions of others. In making such a promise, God also creates the boundary for obedience and disobedience. Since, for Milton, everything proceeds from God, everything must be an extension of God. By creating the possibility of disobedience, God severs the extended nature of things and establishes independence. In other words, God establishes, through language, what is not-God so that freedom can emerge; instead of creating ex nihilo, God creates the potential for "nothing" or the "not God" in order to confer freedom.

The benefits of Milton's approach will become clear as this essay progresses. Theologically, God's actions in no way implicate God in the creation of evil, and they assert the goodness and omnipotence of God. The approach also helps Milton avoid Voluntarism. Philosophically, freedom now rests in language. Instead of arguing with
Hobbes that the will is or is not an entity that chooses, Milton suggests that freedom is a consequence of a promise: Freedom is an experience that occurs within language and between language users.

The essay extends across eight chapters that fall into two divisions. The first three chapters serve as a lengthy introduction and delineate the problems that confronted Milton and the context within which Milton found himself working. Chapter 1 explores the thinking of Thomas Hobbes on freedom of the will while chapter 2 explores the theological issues of free will. Chapter 3 explores Milton's theological attempt to address the role of the will in *De Doctrina Christiana*. This attempt depends upon an Aristotelian understanding of causality. Establishing a balance between asserting the omnipotence of God on the one hand and freedom of the individual on the other proves a struggle for Milton. I contend that while *De Doctrina Christiana* is an important attempt to come to terms with the problem, the response of *Paradise Lost* is a far more interesting exploration of it.

The second section deals with that exploration in *Paradise Lost*. Chapter 4 deals with Eve's enigmatic dream. The dream disturbs the reader because he or she experiences the dream only through the various voices that interpret the dream: Satan's, the narrator's, Adam's, and Eve's. The experience of the dream indicates that Eve's identity is no longer linked to Adam but to the interdiction itself and to freedom.

Chapter 5 presents the crux of the argument and examines the exaltation of the Son. In the exaltation, God utters a promise to the Son which depends upon the actions of others. Such a promise creates the categories of obedience and disobedience—both of which depend on one's response to the promise. In a world created *ex Deo*, all, to this
point, has been extension of God. The possibility of disobedience severs the relationship of extension and replaces it with a relationship built upon promise.

Chapter 6 examines Milton's physical universe as a concrete actualization of obedience and disobedience. Heaven, for its part, is the actualization of the promise. Chaos remains the realm of possibility throughout the poem. Hell is the actualization of disobedience and falls outside the parameters of God: Hell is actualized negation. The Paradise of Fools is neither a rejection of the promise (disobedience) nor an abiding within the promise (obedience): it is the drifting of human thought without the correction of discourse.

Chapter 7 explores the process of choice through an examination of Satan's and Abdiel's responses to God's command. Three conditions emerge for a choice to be an authentically free choice: an awareness of the import of the choice confronting the individual, a rejection of some state of affairs, and an embracing of an alternative position.

The final chapter is about the actual falls of Adam and Eve. I argue that the three conditions for a free choice are fulfilled but that each rejection of God is inarticulate. The reader senses the inadequacy of their rejections and feels compassion. As a result, our experience glimpses that most enigmatic of consequences of the interdiction: grace. Milton does not portray a stern God intent on justifying himself; he creates a portrait of a God who recognizes the need for compassion.

In short, Milton argues that belief in free will is intellectually and theologically viable. Our freedom rests in our response to a promise. The exercise of freedom depends upon our awareness of the promise, a rejection of either an alternative to the promise
(disobedience) or of the promise itself (abiding within), and an *acceptance* and
*affirmation* of either the promise itself (abiding within) or the alternative to the promise
(disobedience). Adam and Eve fulfill these requirements, and their falls are authentically
free as a result. However, their rejections of God are confused and their motives muddled;
this confusion helps the reader to understand how “Man therefore shall find grace, / The
other none” (3, 131-2).
Chapter 1: Hobbes: An Alternative Understanding of the Will

In the coming pages, I will explore how Milton's *Paradise Lost* not only argues for the existence of freedom of the will, but also specifically responds to Thomas Hobbes's negation of freedom of the will. In the seventeenth century, the concept of freedom of the will was under attack for a number of theological and philosophical reasons. Milton's *Paradise Lost* engages this debate and, I argue, introduces fresh insights and fascinating possibilities. However, before I can meaningfully examine Milton's position, some time must be spent with his direct and indirect intellectual opponents: namely, the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes and the theology of certain Calvinist theologians. This chapter delineates the position of Thomas Hobbes on freedom of the will.

The Nature of Hobbes's Determinism

The determinism of Thomas Hobbes's philosophy radically departs from the tradition of predestination established by John Calvin. Both writers' theories fundamentally deny freedom of the will, but the manner in which they achieve this denial is markedly different. Calvin's predestination depends upon his theory of the depravity of the will; Hobbes's determinism negates the will as a distinct faculty or entity altogether. Hobbes relegates the notion of the freedom of the will to an illusion or misuse of language.

Calvin and Freedom of the Will

Calvin’s denial of freedom of the will results from his notion of the depravity of the will consequent to the Fall in Eden. Calvin divides the soul into the faculties of the intellect and of the will, and the will functions to choose or reject that which the understanding has evaluated. Calvin, however, concludes that the Fall results in a depravity which taints sense, will, and reason—the corruption is comprehensive. In Calvin’s *Institution of the Christian Religion* we find, “the whole man from the head to the foote is so overwhelmed as with an overflowing of water, that no part of him is free from sinne, & that therefore whatsoever proceedeth from him is accompted for sinne” (book 2, chapter 1, section 9). Free will falters under the burden of this comprehensive corruption. In terms of morality and God, this burden renders fallen humanity incapable of reorienting life towards God: “With such bondage of sinne therefore as Will is deteined, it cannot once moue it selfe to goodnesse, much lesse apply it selfe” (book 2, chapter 1, section 9).

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2 John Calvin, *Institution of the Christian Religion*, book 1, chapter 15, section 7, translated by Thomas Norton (1587), “there are in the soul of man two parts, which shal serue at this time for our present purpose, that is to say, Understanding & Will. And let it be the office of understanding to discern between objects, or things set before it, as egh of them shall seeme worthie to be liked or misliked: and the office of Will, to choose & followe that which understanding saith to be good, & to refuse & flie that which understanding shal disalow.” I have chosen this translation for two reasons: this translation would have been readily available in Milton’s time, and this translation reveals a distinctive approach to reading. For example, compare Norton’s and Henry Beveridge’s translation of a passage from book 2, chapter 3, section 5. Norton translates, “that man, since he is corrupted, by the fall, sinneth in deede willingly and not against his will nor compelled, by a most bent affection of minde, and not by violent compulsion, by motion of his owne lust, and not by forraine constraint: but yet of such peruersnesse of nature as he is, hee cannot but be moued and driuen to euill.” Beveridge translates, “Man, since he was corrupted by the fall, sins not forced or unwilling, but voluntarily, by a most forward bias of the mind; not by violent compulsion, or external force, but by the movement of his own passion; and yet such is the depravity of his nature, that he cannot move and act except in the direction of evil.” Norton’s “bent affection of minde” becomes Beveridge’s “forward bias of the mind”; “peruersnesse” becomes “depravity,” and so on.

3 See also *Institutes*, book 2, chapter 2, section 12: “in the peruered and degendred nature of man, there shine yet some sparkes that shewe that he is a creature hauing reason, and that he differeth from brute beasts, because he is endued with vnderstanding: and yet that this light is choked with great thickenesse of ignoranace, that it cannot effectuallie get abroad. So will, because it is vnseparable from the nature of man, perished not, but was bounde to peruerse desires, that it can couet no good thing” See also *Institutes*, book 3, chapter 3, sections 1 and 2.
chapter 3, section 5). Except through the intervention of grace, humanity is predisposed to sin. For Calvin, God alone can transform the will towards good. Yet, even in the state of depravity, the will remains voluntary. The motivation to sin or to commit acts of evil is internal; the will assents to sin (it is not compelled):

that man, since he is corrupted, by the fall, sinneth in deede willingly and not against his will nor compelled, by a most bent affection of minde, and not by violent compulsion, by motion of his owne lust, and not by forraine constraint: but yet of such peruersnesse of nature as he is, hee cannot but be moued and driuen to euill. (book 2, chapter 3, section 5)

Thus, by necessity the will draws itself toward evil, but the will retains the freedom to draw itself (and remains culpable as a consequence).

**Hobbes’s Innovation**

In contrast to Calvin, Hobbes departs from the religious arguments and takes a radically different approach to the subject. Hobbes negates the will itself as an entity and reduces freedom of the will to a misunderstanding of language. The notions of a “will” and a “free will” arise from an analogy that develops between willing and understanding. In this analogy, the understanding judges the truth of the information presented to it by the senses. In a similar way, the will judges what action to pursue on the basis of the judgement of the understanding. Hobbes casts this analogy into doubt by attacking the two aspects that it is built upon: 1. how the understanding understands; 2. the nature of the relationship between willing and understanding. Finally, Hobbes redefines the notion of will itself: Instead of seeing the will as an entity or faculty that chooses, Hobbes portrays the will as the final appetite that determines choice.

Focusing primarily on Hobbes’s *Human Nature: or the Fundamental Elements of Policy,* I will explore how Hobbes differentiates thinking and the thinker (the thinker
experiences thinking; he or she does not initiate or control it), severs the supposed relationship between reason or understanding and the act of willing, and then relegates what has traditionally been understood as a faculty (the will) to an illusion of language.

**Material of Thought**

Before we can understand the distinction between thinking and the thinker, we need to know what constitutes the object of thinking. Chapters two and three of *Human Nature* explore the workings of the mind from the perspective of the “imaginative power.” What distinguishes Hobbes’s understanding of the imaginative faculty is that the conceptions it contains are the result of the actions of the object being perceived, not the object itself:

Originally all conceptions proceed from the action of the thing itself, whereof it is the conception: now when the action is present, the conception it produceth is also called sense; and the thing by whose action the same is produced, is called the object of the sense. (iv. 3)

The key word of this passage is “action,” which occurs three times. The “object of the sense” is merely “the thing by whose action” the sense perception is instigated. One perceives not the object, but rather the action of the object.

The imagination is a passive recipient of these sense impressions. The mind does not constitute the object, but the motions that the object generates constitute the mind or, at least, the imaginative aspect of it. In defining the power of imagination in chapter 3, Hobbes uses the provocative illustration of a pool of standing water:

As standing water put into motion by the stroke of a stone, or blast of wind, doth not presently give over moving as soon as the wind ceaseth, or the stone setteth: so neither doth the effect cease which the object hath wrought upon the brain . . . that is to say, though the sense be past, the image or conception remaineth. . . . (iv. 9)

Because the reasoning behind Hobbes’s position is more clearly stated in the philosophical writings, I will not explore the debates on free will between Hobbes and Bishop Bramhall in this chapter.
The brain is here represented as a pool of standing water—passive and still. Movement in the water can be generated only by an external body or by an external force such as a stone or the wind. Once moved, the effect of movement remains. And so the image or conception contained in the mind is likened to the ripples in “standing water put into motion.” Clearly, an external object causes the image that remains in the brain. Equally clear is the distinction between the object itself, the movement of the object which generates the effect, and the effect itself: a ripple is neither a stone nor a “throwing.” The remains of this effect constitute the imagination: “this obscure conception is that we call phantasy, or imagination: imagination being, to define it, conception remaining, and by little and little decaying from and after the act of sense” (iv. 9). Thus, the materials of thought are not things but the remainders of impressions of motion.

Memory as a Bridge Between Perception and Thought

Hobbes proceeds to establish a link between these remainders of impressions of motion and thinking proper: that link is memory. Memory serves as the bridge between sense perception and thinking proper. Hobbes portrays “remembrance” as an awareness of past conceptions, just as sense perception is an awareness of conception (iv. 12). “Remembrance” prompts an awareness of an internal dimension just as the world provokes us to an awareness of an external dimension. Hobbes goes so far as to refer to this awareness of previous conceptions as “a sixth sense, but internal, (not external, as the rest) and is commonly called remembrance” (iv. 12). The traditional five senses allow us to perceive; “remembrance” allows us to be aware of the act of perception. To be aware of perception is to be aware of a past and is the first step towards experience.
“Remembrance,” as the enabler of experience, grants the possibility of thought; “remembrance” links the sense perceptions and the cognitive aspect of the mind.

In Chapter 4 of *Human Nature*, Hobbes explicitly connects “experience” and “remembrance.” Hobbes understands experience as consisting of experiments. By experiments he means, “The remembrance of succession of one thing to another. . . .” (iv. 16). In other words, experience simply consists of units of experiments—what we would term memories.

Both discussion and ratiocination serve to counter the otherwise random portrayal of human experience that Hobbes has, thus far, created. Hobbes himself comments on this apparent randomness:

> Seeing the succession of conceptions in the mind are caused . . . it must needs follow, that one conception followeth not another, according to our election, and the need we have of them, but as it chanceth us to hear or see such things as shall bring them to our mind. (iv. 19)

Hobbes perceives a solution in the human creation of language through which humanity “beginneth to rank himself somewhat above the nature of beasts” (iv. 19). Language initially arises as a mnemonic device (iv. 19), is purely conventional (iv. 20), and consists of two types of names: 1. the objects themselves, or the conception of the object, 2. privation (iv. 20-21). Ratiocination follows the act of naming and essentially amounts to organizing language into units whose truth or falsity can be asserted or confuted. As a result of ratiocination, language shifts from mnemonic device to medium; ratiocination exists through the combining of words into statements.
The Driving Force Behind Thought

Hobbes, having established how the mind acquires conceptions and how the mind subsequently names and organizes those names, divides knowledge into two types: original and scientific. Hobbes asserts that original knowledge is "nothing else but sense, or knowledge original . . . and the remembrance of the same; the other is called science or knowledge of the truth of propositions. . ." (iv. 27). Moreover, both types of knowledge are simply different types of experience:

the former being the experience of the effects of things that work upon us from without; and the latter experience men have from the proper use of names in language: and all experience being, as I have said, but remembrance, all knowledge is remembrance. . . . (iv. 27)

This formulation is important because it brings in the term "remembrance," and because it emphasizes "experience" as opposed to thought. "Remembrance," to reiterate, is that which allows us to be aware of sense perception and is the "sixth sense" for Hobbes. "Remembrance" grants us the possibility of a past and a future. For Hobbes, "knowledge" does not constitute the contents of "remembrance," but "knowledge" is "remembrance." Moreover, Hobbes presents "ratiocination" more as the effect of language than as an activity. In the same way that original knowledge is the experience of effects of things from without, scientific knowledge appears to be an effect of language: "from the proper use of names in language" (iv. 27). The conclusion of a given proposition rests in the words themselves; we experience the conclusion as we experience any other thing. That is, words are tied to the conceptions they represent; this link is their function and the nature of their being. A proposition generates "remembrance" of these conceptions. This "remembrance" constitutes an experience no less legitimate than sense experience. The
essential difference between the two experiences is that scientific knowledge is an internal experience whereas sense experience is an external experience. The conjoining of words into propositions, given that the words are adequately defined, creates an experience whose conclusion is contained within the words themselves. If words are properly understood, correct thinking results. By having the mind experience language internally in a way akin to the way the mind experiences external things, Hobbes creates a sense of the objective. Thinking, in other words, is not subjective. Thinking is rooted in language, is the experience of language.

On the Passions

Understanding how the mind works is only part of the picture of Hobbes’s account of human agency; to understand Hobbes’s position on the will, we must turn to the passions and their relationship to thought. I have, thus far, discussed how the mind is confined to the realm of the conceptions which act upon it. These conceptions are of three kinds: 1. those generated by the actions of things outside of the mind; 2. the decaying conceptions remaining within the mind, a result of previous actions of things outside of the mind; 3. the conceptions generated by words or language. The mind receives knowledge, and the conclusions we draw follow experience (be it external or internal), naturally and necessarily. Yet, we do not act upon these conclusions. The conceptions themselves produce a physical reaction around the heart which instigates motion. If the reaction aids the vital motion around the heart, we experience pleasure; if the reaction hinders the vital motion, we experience pain:

conceptions and apparitions are nothing really, but motion in some internal substance of the head; which motion not stopping there, but proceeding to the heart, of necessity must there either help or hinder the
motion which is called vital; when it helpeth, it is called delight, contentment, or pleasure, which is nothing really but motion about the heart, as conception is nothing but motion in the head... but when such motion weakeneth or hindereth the vital motion, then it is called pain...

(iv. 31)

This motion “is also a solicitation” (iv. 31) to draw towards the object of desire or to retire from the object of displeasure. This “solicitation” generates movement: “this solicitation is the endeavor or internal beginning of animal motion...” (iv. 31). The conception itself, however it arises, generates desire or aversion through the motion around the heart. The result is that one is drawn to his or her conception; he or she desires the object of conception whether or not it is physically present.

Redefining the Will

Hobbes ultimately redefines the will as simply a moment immediately preceding movement. Hobbes is perfectly aware that human action is more complex than a simple transition from conception to desire to movement. Deliberation is the succession of appetites and aversions that precede any given action. Hobbes states that only two possibilities exist. The first possibility is that I immediately act upon the desire. In the other possibility, my appetite is succeeded by another conception which creates the feeling of aversion (iv. 67-8): “And to that fear may succeed a new appetite, and to that appetite another fear alternately, till the action be either done, or some accident come between, to make it impossible; and so this alternate appetite and fear ceaseth” (iv. 68). If the action is performed or not performed (no accident has interfered in the process but a decision has been made), “the last appetite, as also the last fear, is called will, viz. the last appetite, will to do, or will to omit” (iv. 68). The last desire or fear that precedes any given action is the “will.” “Will” ceases to be a distinct entity which chooses between
different possibilities; it is simply the final appetite preceding action. "Will" becomes a
name applied to the concluding element of a process.

Hobbes dismisses the notion of freedom of the will as meaningless nonsense on
the basis of his definition of the will. While any action resulting from deliberation or an
act of "will" is voluntary, neither the "will" itself nor the appetites and fears that
constitute it are voluntary (iv. 69). This conclusion is not surprising, given what has
preceded. As the "will" is simply a name attached to the final desire in a string of desires
preceding a given act, one can hardly attribute freedom to it. To picture this, one can
think of an equation such as 1-1+1-1+1-1+1=1. To argue that the final 1 preceding the
equal sign is "voluntary" or "free" is rather silly, as Hobbes well knew. To give another
example, perhaps I am trying to decide whether to have coffee or tea after supper. The
faintest whiff of coffee percolating could stimulate me "to choose" that over the abstract
concept of tea. Choice is merely the culmination of physical responses resulting from
internal (linguistic) or external (sensory) stimuli. As Hobbes states in his typically blunt
way, "a man can no more say he will will, than he will will will, and so make an infinite
repetition of the word; which is absurd, and insignificant" (iv. 69). Moreover, "the cause
of appetite and fear is the cause also of our will." (iv. 69). Thus, Hobbes removes
agency from the individual and places it in the cause of desire or aversion—conceptions.

Hobbes's careful construction of the mind has essentially closed the analogy that
grounds the belief in free will. Many considered the relationship between will and reason
to be akin to the relationship between reason and the senses. Under such a view, reason
actively collects and organizes the data from the senses and evaluates its accuracy. Adam
himself, in Paradise Lost, supports such thinking:
Chapter 1: 15

But know that in the soul
Are many lesser faculties, that serve
Reason as chief; among these Fancy next
Her office holds; of all external things
Which the five watchful senses represent,
She forms imaginations, aery shapes,
Which *Reason, joining or disjoining, frames*
*All what we affirm or what deny, and call*
*Our knowledge or opinion; then retires*
Into her private cell, when nature rests. (5, 100-109, emphasis mine)

Reason actively joins and disjoins conceptions, framing them until they form knowledge or opinion. The will, analogously, takes the information offered by the reason and makes choices based on the information provided. Again, Adam espouses this position in book 9:

Against his will he can receive no harm.
But God left free the will; for what obeys
Reason, is free; and Reason he made right,
But bid her well be ware, and still erect;
Lest, by some fair-appearing good surprised,
She dictate false; and mis-inform the will
To do what God expressly hath forbid.

.................................
Since Reason not impossibly may meet
Some specious object by the foe suborned,
And fall into deception unaware,
Not keeping strictest watch, as she was warned. (9, 350-63)

The danger that Adam foresees in this passage is that the will will make a choice based on faulty information. The important thing to note is that the will is not determined by the information, but uses the information to make its choice. Hobbes has taken great pains to describe the mind as passive, and, thus, one aspect of the analogy falters, for it is grounded in a false understanding of thought and thinking. That is, the reason does not simply use the information collected by the senses; the reason is constituted by sensory data. The other aspect of the analogy, that the will judges that which the understanding
places before it, Hobbes thwarts through his argument that the conceptions themselves
generate passions independently of the activities of the mind. The imagination can
contribute conceptions, but the conceptions play themselves out through their stimulation
of appetite and fear. By redefining the “will” to a name for the concluding appetite or
fear, Hobbes removes any controlling entity over the passions: the passions, or appetites,
determine human action.

Conclusion

To conclude, the idea of free will finds itself under increasing attack in the
seventeenth century. Our state of being is a determined state; freedom appears to be little
more than a delusion, an assumption, an arrogant conceit. In this chapter, I have
attempted to demonstrate how Hobbes makes the determining factor of human action
external to the individual. In the next chapter, I will contextualize my discussion on
freedom in Paradise Lost in terms of 17th century theology. Calvinist perspectives
emphasize how human depravity determines action. Both positions, Hobbesian and
Calvinist, deny freedom of the will, but the reasons behind their denials are quite
different. The challenge for Milton is to find a possibility that responds to both
arguments, that allows for belief in freedom of the will to remain a viable intellectual
option.
Chapter 2: Theological Understandings of the Will

Before we can explore Milton's approach to freedom of the will, we also need to consider the larger theological framework in which Milton was situated. In the first chapter, I delineated the philosophical position of Thomas Hobbes on freedom of the will. This chapter will outline some Calvinist positions, and one pre-Calvinist position. I will also briefly discuss their pertinence to Paradise Lost.

The Theological Climate of England

Before Milton could assert free will, he needed to ascertain free will's status and function. Unlike Hobbes, who negated the will as an entity, certain Calvinist thinkers in England elevated the role of the will and placed it at the centre of any discussion about morality and depravity. Calvinist thinkers such as William Ames, John Preston, and William Perkins bequeathed a tradition (traceable to the medieval philosopher and theologian William of Ockham) which places the root of human culpability in the will. This chapter focuses on how Ockham, Ames, Preston and Perkins portray the will and serves to contextualize the discussion of the next chapter (which explores Milton's theological position). Why am I addressing a Calvinist position at all (as opposed to an Arminian position)? I am doing so for the light these expressions on the will cast on Milton's own idiosyncratic position. The position to which we react is frequently more revealing than the position to which we readily concur. The implicit psychology that informed Calvinist writing elevated the role of the will in the tradition of Ockham, but, unlike Ockham, it elevated the will only in terms of our culpability, not in terms of positive action. These thinkers, however, influenced Milton's own position on the will.

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Footnote:

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**Historical Roots: William of Ockham**

William of Ockham (c.1290-1349) laid the groundwork for much Protestant thinking on the matter of the will, freedom and divine omnipotence. Ockham’s concerns would become Calvinist concerns: the relationship between will and intellect, the extent and nature of human freedom, the import of divine omnipotence, the nature of divine goodness. Ockham, for his part, asserts the primacy of the will over the intellect, believing that it is by means of the will that we exercise freedom. Wishing to preserve divine omnipotence, Ockham holds a Voluntarist ethical position, but also stresses the freedom of the individual human to choose. In an effort to protect divine foreknowledge from charges of tainting or ordaining human choice, Ockham postulates that God can only know future contingencies contingently. In short, human will is free, something Calvinism will later reject.

Ockham argues that free will is not restricted by the intellect or reason, by habits or inclinations, nor by divine foreknowledge. By freedom, Ockham means the ability of the will to choose or not to choose a given course of action. Potential threats to the will’s freedom include the will’s supposed subservience to the intellect, the power of habit to

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9 Voluntarism defines goodness as the exercise of God’s will. The direct consequence is that goodness is dependent upon that expression of divine will and is contingent in respect to it. For example, a Voluntarist could argue that it is wrong to steal because God says that it is wrong to do so. If God endorses stealing (for example, the plundering of a city or the spoiling of the Egyptians), then this exception is morally valid and good simply because God wills it. Citing the *Ordinatio* d. 17, q. 1, Q; q. 2, C; q. 2 D, Leff notes how Ockham understands merit: “An act is called meritorious because it is accepted by God’, and it is demeritorious because God rejects it” (476). As Adams notes in “Ockham on Will, Nature, and Morality,” *Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, 271-2, endnote 140, “Everything that does not include a contradiction or an evil of guilt can be done by God alone,’ but [Ockham] quickly goes on to rule out the latter disjunct: ‘Now God is bound or obligated to anyone like a debtor, and therefore he cannot do what he ought not to do, or not do what he ought to do’ (ibid., (343)), and so is not strictly speaking morally good or evil (bad) because ‘moral goodness or badness connotes that the agent is obliged to that act or its opposite’ (ibid., (353))."
dictate behaviour, and divine knowledge of future events. Ockham holds that our freedom is such that we are free to choose against the dictates of the intellect and against the sensitive appetite. The essence of morality is the correspondence of the human will with the divine will.

Ockham’s understanding of freedom of the will seeks to preserve the integrity of our ability to choose for or against some action in an undetermined manner. As Adams writes,

Ockham is notorious for his doctrine of the liberty of indifference: the notion that created willpower is power to will, to nill, or to do nothing with respect to any object . . . cuts will off from nature. The liberty of indifference turns created wills into neutral potencies unshaped by natural inclinations. Second, it “frees” will from reason’s rule: no matter what reason dictates, created willpower can disobey. (Adams 245)

The reason Ockham seeks to demonstrate this liberty of indifference is simple: he wishes to make us morally culpable for all our evil actions and tries to remove the implication that guilt may be attributed to a foreknowing God. As Ockham writes, “only an act of will is essentially laudable or blameworthy.”

10 Frederick Copleston, citing Quodlibet, 4, 11, translates one of Ockham’s definitions of freedom: “Freedom is the power ‘by which I can indifferently and contingently produce an effect in such a way that I can cause or not cause that effect, without any difference in that power having been made’” (101). Adams, citing Sentences 4, 16, translates Ockham’s understanding of the liberty specific to the will: “the will can by its liberty--apart from any other determination by act or habit--elicit or not elicit that act or its opposite” (Adams 255). Focusing on the first definition, three elements need further development and clarification: “indifferently,” “without any difference in that power having been made,” and “contingently.” I will develop all three in some length, but, for now, “indifferently” refers to an ability to override the intellect, the statement “without any difference in that power [to cause or not cause a given
action]” describes the will’s ability to override habit and the sensitive appetite, and “contingently” refers to the possible level of knowledge of future contingent action. For Ockham, these three conditions are essential to our understanding of freedom.

Ockham’s use of the term “indifferently” refers to the human capacity to override the intellect. The clearest example of our ability to choose against reason is the ability to choose evil as evil. In Ockham’s day, two viewpoints on the issue of the source of beatitude held sway: the Thomistic view and the Franciscan view. Thomistic thought holds that the source of beatitude resides in the intellect. As Aquinas states, “I say, then, that as to the very essence of happiness, it is impossible for it to consist in an act of the will.” That is, if one apprehends the true and ultimate Good (in this framework, God), his or her will cannot help but love and pursue that Good: “For at first we desire to attain an intelligible end; we attain it, through its being made present to us by an act of the intellect; and then the delighted will rests in the end when attained” (ST Ia, Ilae, 3, 4). As Copleston states, “In the beatific vision in heaven, however, when the soul sees the essence of God immediately, the intrinsic superiority of intellect to will reasserts itself, as it were” (vol. 2, 383). Dante, in the Paradiso, typifies this Thomistic position:

Quinzi si puó veder come si fonda
l’esser beato ne l’atto che vede,
non in quel ch’ama, che poscia seconda... .

Actions of the will are, for Aquinas, largely determined by the intellect, for the intellect provides the object. Conversely, evil actions are actions we perceive as “good,” even

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13 See ST, Ia, Ilae, 9, 1-6.
though this quality of goodness has been misconstrued.\textsuperscript{14} Evil, under Thomistic thought, is more delusional than malicious.\textsuperscript{15} In short, evil is a failure of the understanding: assist the understanding to perceive properly and the will follows irresistibly. By contrast, Franciscan thought consistently asserts the primacy of the will.\textsuperscript{16} We can apprehend or know God, even recognize that our true end and the object of our desire resides in God, and still choose evil: “we can will evil under the aspect of evil--to express a ready consequence of liberty of indifference: that we can will evil wittingly!” (Adams 260).

Under Thomistic thinking, the individual cannot choose evil as evil as it would amount to a rejection of reason. For Ockham, we can actively choose evil (Adams 260-1). Copleston elaborates on this power of the will to reject reason by referring to Ockham’s commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard: “the will does not necessarily conform to the judgement of the reason, it can conform with the judgement of the reason, whether that judgement be right or erroneous” (102). In other words, the will can conform, but it does not necessarily conform: “Indeed, he declares, on one and the same occasion, the will can act in accord with some dictates of right reason while \textit{wittingly acting contrary to others}”

\textsuperscript{14} “Hence, if a will be inclined, by its choice, to some evil, this must be occasioned by something else. Sometimes, in fact, this is occasioned through some defect in the reason . . . and sometimes this arises through the impulse of the sensitive appetite . . .” \textit{ST}, Ia, Ilae, 78, 3.

\textsuperscript{15} “But since we have said above that the cause of sin is \textit{some apparent good as motive}, yet lacking the due motive, viz. the rule of reason or the Divine law, this motive which is an \textit{apparent good}, appertains to the apprehension of the senses and to the appetite; while the lack of the due rule appertains to the reason, whose nature it is to consider this rule; and the completeness of the voluntary sinful act appertains to the will, so that the act of the will, given the conditions we have just mentioned, is already a sin” (emphasis mine) \textit{ST} Ia Ilae 75, 2.

\textsuperscript{16} This tendency in Franciscan thought reads like a motif in Copleston’s history. In speaking of Franciscan Roger Marston, Copleston writes, “He embraced all the characteristic ‘Augustinian’ theories . . . the \textit{pre-eminence of the will over intellect} . . .” (vol. 2, 453, emphasis mine). Of Raymond Lull, Copleston mentions how Lull held “familiar ‘Augustinian’ theories . . . \textit{the primacy of the will over intellect} . . .” (vol. 2, 458, emphasis mine). On Scotus, “In some aspects of his thought Scotus did indeed carry on the Augustinian-Franciscan tradition: in his doctrine of the \textit{superiority of will to intellect}, for example” (vol. 2, 482, emphasis mine). Finally, in speaking of Ockham, Copleston comments, “In emphasizing the \textit{freedom of the}
(Adams 260, emphasis mine). Ultimately, Ockham rejects the notion of “ethical intellectualism,” where the root of evil is ignorance. For him, human freedom consists in the capacity to follow or to reject the dictates of the intellect.

When Ockham writes that freedom is that power whereby I “can cause or not cause that effect, without any difference in that power having been made” (Copleston 101), he is describing the will’s ability to override sensitive appetite. Ockham has already discussed the ability of the will to choose against the dictates of the intellect, but what does he say about habitual action? Habits proved a unique problem to Ockham, because a habit seems to determine our behaviour even at a trivial level. We all know someone who cannot start the day without a cup of coffee. Is such a person bound by these habits or does he retain an ability to choose otherwise? Simple experience teaches us that habits are formed. How they are formed remains something of a mystery. Ockham writes that “there does not seem to be any other cause for the will’s natural inclination [to form habits] except that such is the nature of the matter; and this fact becomes known to us through experience” (Copleston 103). The will, however, retains an integrity that can override the habit most firmly entrenched in our sensitive appetite: “however intense may be the pleasure in the sensitive appetite, the will can, in virtue of its freedom, will the opposite” (Copleston 103). Habits, although they make the exercise of the will more problematic and difficult, can never negate or override the will’s ability to choose otherwise. The will remains essentially free:

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17 Adams cites Circa virtutes et vitia (285).
18 I use “determine” hesitatingly in this sentence, as the sense is stronger than I wish to imply, but “formative” is too weak.
Contrary to what recent critics suggest, Ockham recognizes that many inclinations pertain to the human will in and of itself. Inclinations to will (nill) things that produce sensory pleasure. Not to mention acquired habits. But he denies that any inclination is natural, either in the sense of defining the will's scope or in the sense of causally determining its actions. (Adams 255)

The term “contingently” is perhaps the most radical word in Ockham’s definition of human freedom. Ockham asserts that contingent human action is undetermined by God. To preserve the integrity of human action, Ockham seeks to unshackle human action from any perceived bonds of divine foreknowledge or predestination. Human actions remain contingent because they cannot be determined to be true or false in advance of their occurrence. As Adams writes, “where Aquinas says that God eternally knows the creation because He eternally sees created things in their own determinate existence, Ockham insists that the primary object of knowledge is determinately true propositions” (1137-8). By this statement, Adams means that only propositions about a thing can be decidedly true or false; a thing itself cannot be determined to be true or false. Truth and falsity resides at the level of language. Moreover, propositions about future contingents cannot be determined in advance of their actual occurrence; only propositions about things in the present or the past can be determined. Ockham holds that “[Aristotle’s] whole meaning . . . is that as regards future contingents, neither part is determinately true or false, as the thing itself is determined neither to be going to be nor to be not going to be.”¹⁹ For example, even if God knows from eternity that Peter will deny Christ, God knows this contingently (until it actually happens). Thus, even in the gaze of divine foreknowledge, a potency exists that any proposition (e.g. Adam will fall) “is true in such
a way that it can be false and can never have been true” (Adams, *William of Ockham*, vol. 2, 1142). Thus, for Ockham, future contingencies do not fall under the umbrella of determinate truth. Divine foreknowledge can know future contingencies only in their contingent state (although, according to Ockham, this does not make God’s knowledge of future contingents mutable!). The point of Ockham’s argument, however complicated it may be, is clear: human freedom is unaffected by divine foreknowledge because the acts initiated by the will retain their contingency.

I conclude my discussion of Ockham by describing Ockham’s ethical position, or how he conceived morality to function. Ockham’s definition of the will attempts to remove from God any implication of responsibility for human failure. In doing so, Ockham highlights the role of the will in human action and makes it the centre of any given action. Ethically, Ockham falls under the category of Voluntarism.

Ockham’s ethical position is that even though the human will is free to choose, it is morally obligated to will what God ordains it should will. What God wills is the definition of goodness and morality:

> Ockham holds that God is “supremely good” and “a cause of every good.” “Properly speaking, God does not have justice. Properly speaking, the highest nature is justice.” “From the fact that God does something it is done justly.” “God cannot will evil.”

God is under no obligation and can even order a normally forbidden act: “the same physical acts that would count as theft or adultery in the absence of a divine command to perform them would not count as theft or adultery when performed in obedience to divine

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command” (McGrade 281-2). The Divine will is, baldly stated, the norm of morality. On the converse side, evil is doing what God has forbidden or failing to do what God wills. Copleston cites Ockham’s 2 Sent., 5, H, “Evil is nothing else than to do something when one is under an obligation to do the opposite. Obligation does not fall on God, since He is not under any obligation to do anything” (103). Morality is correspondence or convergence of human and Divine wills. Because God’s freedom cannot be impaired, God has the right and authority to change or not to change his will at any time; morality, dependent as it is upon the potentially changing will of God, remains essentially contingent.

Voluntarism primarily seeks to preserve the omnipotence of God while also preserving the goodness of God. Danielson states that the Voluntarist “assents to the proposition that God is wholly good, but defines goodness in such a way that it is meaningless as applied to God” (8). Danielson argues that if goodness is dependent upon the decree of God, then goodness is as arbitrary as that will of God. Satan, in Paradise Lost, accuses God of an arbitrary moral standard:

Since he
Who now is Sovran can dispose and bid
What shall be right: fardest from him is best
Whom reason hath equall’d, force hath made supreme
Above his equals. (1, 245-49, emphasis mine)

In book 5, Satan asks how God “can introduce / Law and Edict upon us, who without law / Err not?” (5, 797-9). Satan forcefully presents the obvious danger of the Voluntarist position: God’s decrees appear arbitrary and imposed. Satan, on the other hand, appears to endorse something akin to a law independent of God, a natural law, when he talks of those “who without law / Err not?” The problems of a natural law are the very problems
which confront Ockham and Calvinism: natural law appears to restrict God’s freedom to act; God potentially becomes less than omnipotent as a result. In *Paradise Lost*, moreover, the command to serve Messiah and the interdiction against the fruit are not commands readily discernible by reason: “Knowledge forbidd’n? / Suspicious, reasonless” (4, 515-6, emphasis mine). The poem creates a problem for us as readers. If we assume a Voluntarist position, we have little with which to respond to Satan’s accusation that God is behaving in an arbitrary way. If we endorse a natural law position, we struggle with the apparent arbitrariness of the commands to the angels and to humanity. Ultimately, neither position takes into account the prerogative of God to make immutable decrees, a point that proves critical in *Paradise Lost*.

To summarize, Ockham argues that the will is free to choose against the dictates of the intellect and against the sensitive appetite. The human will is unaffected by divine foreknowledge, because the truth value of future contingent events is also contingent. Morality is determined by the correspondence of the human will with the Divine will: Ockham is a Voluntarist.

**Pertinence of Ockham’s Position to Paradise Lost**

Numerous features of Ockham’s vision are pertinent to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: the ability of the will to override both the reason and the sensitive appetite; the contingent truth value of future contingent events; and an ethical position that appears to be at least tainted by Voluntarism. I will briefly cite some key examples to demonstrate the relevance of these concepts to our understanding of the poem. Adam’s speech at the separation scene of book 9 suggests that the will can override reason. Eve’s dream in Books 4-5 introduces the problem of the sensitive appetite. The issue of Voluntarism
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pervades the poem, although, as this essay progresses, I will demonstrate how, through a deliberate speech act by God, the poem does, ultimately, reject this “heresy.”

*Paradise Lost* suggests that we are capable of rejecting or willing against the dictates of reason. Adam’s speech at Eve’s departure from Adam at the beginning of book 9 provides a good example. Eve’s departure, itself something of an irrational act, incites a rigorous discussion about temptation and the human capacity for resistance. Adam declares,

But God left free the will, for what obeys Reason, is free, and Reason he made right, But bid her well beware, and still erect, Lest by some fair appearing good surpris’d She dictate false, and misinform the will To do what God expressly hath forbid. (9, 351-6)

It is important to note that the will’s obedience is the ground of its freedom. The speech, however, suggests two possible lines of failure: the failure of reason itself and wilful disobedience. The first possibility, the failure of reason, is Adam’s major concern. Adam fears that Eve could be deluded into disobedience. The other possibility, willful disobedience, is implicit in Adam’s speech. From Adam’s speech, we can discern that he believes the will to be both distinct from reason and subservient to it—"for what obeys / Reason, is free" (9, 351-2). Yet, the word “obey” implies that the will could do other than obey the reason; the will could disobey. The exercise of the will’s freedom to contradict reason may result in a loss of freedom (the will can become enslaved to sin or disobedience and can be rendered incapable of conforming itself to the dictates of the reason), but this choice remains a possibility. Tragically, willful disobedience is a

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21 Two senses of freedom appear in this speech. One sense is that of freedom from error, sin, failure, and so on. The other sense is the more common one today, freedom to choose.
consideration that Adam does not pursue. Adam’s speech suggests the inherent ability of
the will to override reason, though Adam appears almost unaware of the import of his
own words. Adam’s great concern is with deception, with the will being deluded into
disobedience, with the conformation of the will to a deluded, confused, or misguided
reason. Adam does not entertain deeply the possibility built into his own words. Even if
disobedience is a departure from the true freedom experienced by the will when it obeys
reason, the possibility of disobedience coming in the form of the will overriding the
reason proves essential to the poem, particularly with Adam’s own fall from grace.

Satan’s own rebellion is another pertinent example of the will overriding the
reason. In book 4, Satan contemplates the irrationality of his own fall:

Ah wherefore! he deserv’d no such return
From me, whom he created what I was
In that bright eminence, and with his good
Upbraided none; nor was his service hard.

... yet all his good prov’d ill in me,
And wrought but malice. . . (4, 42-49)

Satan acknowledges that God deserved only praise and thanks. Furthermore, he admits
that his “bright eminence” came from God. Satan’s awareness of his state of being before
the fall indicates that he had the ability to choose against that awareness and knowledge,
since he did. In the poem, Satan cannot be choosing self-sufficiency or some erroneous
notion of the good, as Aquinas argues, for Satan’s speech indicates his awareness of his
dependency on God. The direct contrast between Milton’s Satan and Aquinas’s account
of the fallen angels brings to the fore the strangeness of Milton’s Satan. Firstly, Aquinas
argues that the blessed angels are incapable of sin:
The blessed angels are not able to sin. The reason for this is because their Happiness consists in seeing God through His essence. Now, God’s essence is the very essence of goodness. Consequently the angel seeing God is in the same way towards God as anyone else not seeing God is to the common notion of goodness. Now it is impossible for any man either to will or to do anything except aiming at what is good, or for him to wish to turn away from good as such. Therefore the blessed angel can neither will nor act, except as aiming towards God. Now whoever will or acts in this manner is not able to sin. Consequently the blessed angel cannot sin. (ST, Ia, 62, 8)

According to Aquinas, no matter what angels or human beings do, they aim at some good. Consequently, if a blessed angel apprehends the ultimate good, it cannot direct its will against this good. Of course, the obvious problem is that Aquinas also has to account for the fallen angel. Not surprisingly, given his emphasis on the intellect, Aquinas argues that the fallen angels have pursued a false good (but they still pursue a good). He states that each demon’s fall proceeds from a desire to be like God in the sense that “he sought to have final happiness of his own power, whereas this is proper to God alone” (ST, Ia, 63, 4). For Aquinas, the prelapsarian demon still pursues some good, however erroneous. In addition, the demon, once fallen, is incapable of remorse because his will is immoveable: “if his will be considered before his adhering, it can freely adhere either to this or to its opposite . . . but after he has once adhered, he clings immovably. . . . the angel’s free choice is flexible to either opposite before the choice, but not after” (ST, Ia 64, 2). In the same way the blessed angel is incapable of sinning, the fallen angel is incapable of remorse; the fallen angel is obstinate in sin. Consequently, from a Thomistic position, Satan’s speech in book 4 is nonsense. If Satan experienced beatitude, he could not deviate from it. If he had fallen, he could not feel remorse or acknowledge his own error. Satan’s powerful speech makes the most sense if the poem asserts that the will can override the intellect.

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22 Aquinas argues that “the devil sinned at once after the first instant of his creation. . . . For since the angels attain Happiness by one meritorious act, as was said above (Ia, 62, 5), if the devil, created in grace, merited in the first instant, he would at once have received Happiness after that first instant. . . .” ST, Ia, 63, 6.
The poem, particularly in book 4, also suggests that the will can override what Ockham would call the "sensitive appetite." This issue becomes extremely important for Eve's culpability within the poem. In book 4, Satan (who is disguised in the form of a Toad) subjects Eve to a dream. The narrator informs us that Satan hopes to seduce Eve through "The Organs of her Fancy" (4, 802) by forging "Phantasms and Dreams" (4, 803), presumably of a tempting and perverse nature. Another possibility presents itself, however: that "inspiring venom, he [Satan] might taint / Th' animal spirits that from pure blood arise" (4, 804-5). This passage suggests that Eve, through some sort of sympathetic relation with Satan, is now more inclined to succumb to temptation than she had been before the dream. Indeed, for a number of years scholars debated this precise point—whether Eve had "fallen" before the Fall. The passage itself, built upon an "or" structure, is deliberately evasive. The narrator wishes to suggest the concept of a sympathetic relation with evil, of contact leading to contamination. Adam may blithely inform Eve that "Evil into the mind of God or Man / May come and go . . . and leave / No spot or blame behind" (5, 117-18), but the idea that Eve's "animal spirits" might be tainted lingers and disturbs us as readers. Milton introduces this problem of "tainted blood" to reveal the integrity of the will. The narrator's suggestion combines with the reader's awareness of Eve's ultimate culpability to reveal another possibility—that the will is not ruled by the sensitive appetite at all. If the will possesses the power to refute the workings of the sensitive appetite (and even Satan admits that he had "free Will and Power to stand" (4, 66, emphasis mine)), then the power of the will can override even a sensitive appetite warped by the initiative of Satan. Eve's dream, if Milton's theodical project is to succeed, presupposes the ability of the will to override the sensitive appetite.

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23 This whole issue will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 5. For an introduction into the debate, see Fredson Bowers, "Adam, Eve, and the Fall in 'Paradise Lost,'" *PMLA* 84 (1969): 264-73, and the article which really started the whole debate, Millicent Bell, "The Fallacy of the Fall in Paradise Lost," *PMLA* 68 (1953): 863-88.
Some of the ethical precepts of Milton in *Paradise Lost* are similar to the formal ethical doctrine of Ockham. In both writers, the root of morality is ultimately a correspondence of will. Milton understands obedience as a convergence of human and divine will. While Adam’s statement regarding the will, that “what [namely, the will] obeys / Reason is free, and Reason he made right” (9, 351-2), certainly suggests a stable moral order penetrable by reason, or some sort of natural law principle, I argue that, for Milton, any law and, consequently, any obedience, is fundamentally rooted in the freely functioning and unbounded will of God. As Raphael exhorts before the fall, “Be strong, live happy, and love, but first of all / Him whom to love is to obey, and keep / His great command” (8, 633-5, emphasis mine). Adam, as well, after the fall asserts the importance of this conformity of wills: “Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best” (12, 561, emphasis mine). Conformity of the created will (be it human or angelic) to the divine will constitutes obedience, whether that divine will is immutable or mutable. Critical to this study will be the great decrees of God in the poem or the points where God exercises and expresses his will: the elevation of the Son and the interdiction against the fruit. The former metaphysically and morally creates the possibility of choice, and the latter defines the limits of human obedience.

**Post-Ockham Theology: Calvinism in England**

The rest of this chapter examines specific Calvinist theologians in England. Essentially, I am arguing that their ideas of the will and morality establish the parameters of Milton’s discussion and dilemma. As the first chapter sought to establish the philosophical threat to freedom of the will posed by Hobbes, this chapter seeks to establish the framework confronting Milton. I have attempted to describe Ockham’s belief that the will can override reason, that the will can override the sensitive appetite, and that morality depends upon the convergence of human and divine will. I have also attempted briefly to demonstrate the relevance of these issues in *Paradise Lost*. The rest of this chapter is devoted to Calvinist thinkers and their conceptions of the will, many of
which reflect aspects of Ockham’s position. William Ames develops Ockham’s conception of the will’s ability to override reason and the idea that a voluntary act resides in the will. John Preston develops Ockham’s conception of morality by stressing our utter inability to conform to the Divine will. William Perkins, for his part, argues that the will can override reason while arguing for freedom within the necessity of God’s decree.

**William Ames: The Power of the Will**

William Ames, in his work *Conscience with the Power and Cases Therof* (1639), argues that the will can override the understanding and that the will is the first and principal cause of a given human act. Ames seeks to demonstrate that goodness must be grounded not in education, but in salvation, arguing his position on the will in the context of a work whose primary concern is to attack an intellectualist approach to morality. The work portrays the understanding as something of an impartial interpreter of the constituent elements of an act, while the initiation of activity resides in the will. I will examine how Ames argues for the primacy of the will and how he defines the voluntary act. I will then quickly turn to see if there is a Miltonic counterpart to Ames’s conception.

Ames is fundamentally opposed to the opinion that the actions of the will are determined by the dictates of reason. The offending view follows the Aristotelian dictate that one always pursues some “good.” The will is subsequently bound to follow any actual or perceived “good” that the reason judges “good.” Ames presents the problem thus:

> The will, as it seemes to many, cannot will or nill any thing, unlesse Reason have first judged it to be willed or nilled, neither can it choose but follow the last practicall judgement, and doe that which Reason doth dictate to be done: and by consequence, the will cannot move against the determination of Conscience. (bk. 1, 22)

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24 By intellectualist, I mean the notion, dominant since the Socratic period and already discussed to some extent, that if I know what is right, I will do what is right. Ethical intellectualism argues that one never chooses an evil act purposefully, for evil can only be done out of ignorance.
The will cannot do other than it does for it follows the judgement of reason. Whatever the reason dictates, the will is obligated or compelled to follow. Consequently, all evil is, in fact, the result of ignorance or of a misconstrued notion of what is good. More dramatically, one can never act against his or her conscience, for the will is incapable of moving “against the determination of Conscience.”

As a Christian theologian, Ames objects to ethical intellectualism for two fundamental reasons: 1. It restricts human depravity to the level of the intellect. 2. It diminishes the need for grace. His concern about ethical intellectualism is especially revealed in a series of theological arguments supporting the primacy of the will. Three arguments in particular reveal Ames’s concern. One concerns the fall of angels and humanity: “If the judgement being right, then will could not but will aright; then before the first sinne of Angels and men, (which was in the will) there must necessarily bee an error in the understanding” (bk. 1, 24-25). Essentially, Ames is arguing that if one grants primacy to the understanding (believing that the will necessarily follows the dictates of the understanding), and if Angels and primordial humanity apprehended the true good (namely God), then they would necessarily will that good and there could be no fall. Experience and revelation teach us that we are fallen beings, and tradition speaks of the fall of the Angels. How does one account for this fall? Unless we reject the notion of the primacy of the understanding, Ames believes that we must conclude that the sin of Adam and of the angels was a sin of understanding. Ames believes that such a conclusion is absurd.

Ames brings another argument against the primacy of the understanding which is even more telling of his concern. He claims that sins of malice can be accounted for only
in a world which affords some sort of primacy to the will. Otherwise, all sins must be sins of ignorance or of passion. Ames writes that “it is manifest that this kind of sinne [of malice] is found in Devils, & likewise in some men” (bk. 1, 25). In other words, experience teaches us that there are, indeed, sins of malice for which we hold people culpable. To maintain that the understanding dictates to the will is to deny our own experience.

Ames follows this argument about sins of malice with the most cogent rendering of his reason for writing his book. Ames bluntly states, “If the will doe necessarily follow the Understanding, then in Regeneration the will it selfe neede not be internally renewed by grace: for the inlightening of the understanding would be sufficient” (bk. 1, 25). As Ames elegantly and succinctly expresses it, to grant primacy to the understanding is to diminish the need for grace and regeneration. For Ames, ethical intellectualism accordingly denies our dependence on God. A theological imperative motivates Ames throughout his book. He believes we are in need of salvation and grace, not a better education system.

Ames’s method is to begin by attempting to discredit the notion of the supremacy of the understanding, and then proceed to argue for the primacy of the will. Ames’s first attack on the notion of the primacy of the understanding is his attempt to prove the existence (or even the possibility) of a faulty conscience. Given even the possibility of a faulty conscience, Ames asserts that the will can circumvent and even reject the

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25 Ames’s concern with the subject casts a clearer light on the threat that Hobbes posed to Calvinism. Hobbes’s determinism empties the world of morality; society judges good and evil strictly in utilitarian terms. Calvinism, as understood by Ames, needs a will which functions independently of the understanding if Calvinism is to assert a moral dimension of existence. As if writing with Hobbes’s Human Nature: or the
prompting of the understanding. If the will can be shown capable of rejecting the prompting of the understanding, then primacy must be accorded to the will.

The critical point that Ames must establish is the possibility of a faulty conscience.\textsuperscript{26} Firstly, he argues that the will precedes and follows the activity of the understanding. As Ames puts it, “The will by some act or inclination can both command the Understanding to judge, and also follow that judgement” (bk. 1, 1). In itself, there is nothing particularly threatening in this statement about the will. It simply indicates that somehow the will sets off an act of understanding and then follows the judgement made by that understanding. Ames does not indicate at this point how or if the will is bound to follow the act of judgement, but simply states that the “will... can... follow that judgement.” At this point the act of will that follows the act of judgement may be bound by necessity or simply by chronology. Ames simply wants us to accept and acknowledge that the will both precedes and follows this act of judgement by the understanding. This point, that the will precedes and follows an act of judgement, is the first, apparently innocent, thrust at ethical intellectualism.

Secondly, given that the will precedes and follows the act of judgement made by the understanding, Ames then demonstrates through the example of habitual action how the will can override or prevent an act from coming to fruition.\textsuperscript{27} Ames examines the case of habitual evil. In such an instance, a person’s behaviour may be governed more by habit. 

\textit{Fundamental Elements of Policy} in mind, Ames declares “From hence we speak truely, and by consent of all Nations, say, \textit{I will Will}” (bk. 1, p. 25).

\textsuperscript{26} Ames writes that “I call Conscience Judgement, First, to shew that it belongs to the Understanding, not to the will... all those actions, which in the Scriptures are attributed to mans Conscience, doe properly belong to the reasonable power, or faculty” (bk. 1, 1).

\textsuperscript{27} It is interesting to note how Ames employs something that proved problematic to Ockham. Ockham saw in habitual action a threat to the autonomy of the will. Ames sees in habitual action an opportunity to demonstrate how the will can override the judgement of the understanding.
than by principle. The act of understanding may never actually come into play and “in so doing [acting habitually], they [the evil doers] doe in some sense, goe against Conscience” (bk 1, 23). For example, an alcoholic may know (on Saturday morning) that his Friday night binges are destructive and wrong, but his habitual practice may make him incapable of following his conscience and abstaining from drink. The hesitant manner that Ames uses in suggesting that habitual sinners “doe in some sense, goe against Conscience” belies the boldness of his statement. If we accept that the will precedes an act of judgement and that habit, not judgement, can determine behaviour, we accept that the will is determining the course of action independent of the judgement of the understanding, even if only at a habitual level. At the same time, Ames’s hesitancy indicates an awareness that habitual evil is not a particularly compelling case for the primacy of the will.

Thirdly, Ames takes his account of the will’s role in human action one step further by arguing that any act of understanding must be initiated by the will and that the understanding may not enter the picture at all. We encounter this claim when Ames writes that “a bare and simple apprehension . . . without any practical judgement . . . may be sufficient to draw forth the Act of the will” (bk. 1, 23). This lack of practical judgement suggests that one must engage the understanding before conscience can become involved. If one goes directly from stimulation to action, then, according to Ames, if the judgement is to be involved at all, the individual must actively engage the understanding. The initiation of the understanding, consequently, becomes an act of the will.

Fourthly, according to Ames, the will can ignore the determinations of the understanding. Ames becomes bolder in his statements regarding the will: “The will can
at pleasure suspend an act about that which is apprehended and judged to be good, without any foregoing act of judgement” (bk. 1, 23) and “The will can turn away the understanding from the consideration of any object, which at present it apprehendeth and judgeth to be good, to the consideration that it hath formerly apprehended and judgeth to be so” (bk. 1, 23-4). In short, the will has the power and ability to ignore the determination of the understanding. The will can fail to initiate the understanding (as in the case of habitual or impulsive behaviour), it can suspend the activities of the understanding, and it can even negate the determinations of the understanding. The will can choose to believe what it wants to believe in spite of the understanding. On the basis of these powers, Ames concludes that “the will is the first cause of unadvisedness, and blame-worthy error in the Understanding” (bk. 1, 24).

Building on preceding arguments, Ames finally concludes that the will can assent to that which the understanding judges sinful. Asserting that the “will can move it selfe” (bk. 1, 24), Ames first argues that while freedom is radically in the understanding, it is formally in the will. The freedom or liberty of an action is said to be radically in the reason because the will can only move itself “towards an object that is apprehended and judged good for profit or pleasure in some respect” (bk. 1, 24). Following such thinking, the will pursues the objects provided by the understanding. Moreover, some sort of evaluation takes place before an object can be pursued, however tenuous that judgement may be. Ames states quite explicitly that an object judged desirable may have no relationship to the universal good: “whatsoever good the understanding propoundeth to the will, in this life, it propoundeth it with a kind of indifferency of judgement, as not having any necessary connexion, with the universal good” (bk. 1, 24). This statement
implies that the understanding is reluctant or incapable of providing the will with an appropriate hierarchy of values, and, perhaps more importantly, evaluates goods independently of any overt moral code or divine law. It also suggests that even if there are principles of natural law, we may be incapable of properly penetrating them. Ames’s argument is useful in that it allows for the will to assent to sin without usurping the authority of the understanding as the seat of liberty. Ames, however, is determined to place the authentic seat of liberty in the will. As he states:

Though the will be determined by the understanding in regard of the specification or kinde of thing to be willed ... yet in regarde of exercise or act of willing, it [the will] moveth both it selfe, and the understanding with the rest of the faculties. And hence it is that liberty is in the will formally, which should not be true, if it were necessarily determined by the understanding. (bk. 1, 24)

The problem is that this statement is more of a declaration than an argument. It is grounded in the belief that the “will can move it selfe,” which, unfortunately, is the point to be demonstrated.

In this same book (Conscience with the Power and Cases Therof), Ames reflects on the nature of a voluntary act and what constitutes the morally good act. As has already been discussed, Ames believes that the will is the formal seat of human freedom. In book 3 Ames states that “the will is the principle and the first cause of all humane operation in regard of the exercise of the act” (bk. 3, 91). The thinking behind this position is primarily theological, as we have come to expect: “The first cause therefore of the goodnesse or sinfulnesse of any Act of man, is in the will” (bk. 3, 91). The source of goodness or of evil lies in the will, for the will is the root of all authentic human activity. Human understanding functions as something of an advisor to the crown, but its advice
may be bereft of any moral insight. The evaluation of the understanding may have nothing to do with the universal good or the good of the soul. Ames, having argued that the goodness or sinfulness of an act resides in the will, reveals what establishes an act as good: obedience. In Ames’s words, “our obedience stands in our conformity to the will of God. . . . Now our conformity with the will of God is first and principally in our will” (bk. 3, 91). The goodness of our actions depends on the level of our obedience, or how well we conform our will to the will of God. We do not lack insight; we lack conformity of will.

In determining the source of human activity, Ames attempts to establish the primacy of the will over the understanding. Through a carefully built argument, Ames hopes to convince the reader that the will has the power both to override the understanding and to assent to that which the understanding deems sinful. Ames argues that the first and principal cause of a voluntary human act resides in the will and that morality depends upon the conformity of our will with the will of God.

Relevance of Ames’s Perspective to *Paradise Lost*

We can pick up traces of Ames’s thought on the primacy of the will and on the nature of the good act in Books 3, 4 and 5 of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. In book 5, the effectiveness of Adam’s explication of Eve’s dream is grounded in an understanding of the will similar to the one outlined by Ames; however, the position of the text itself is more guarded and less defined. In book 3, the obedience of the Son highlights obedience as the root of goodness, while Satan’s grand rejection of goodness in book 4 also points to conformity of will as the root of goodness (and non-conformity as the root of evil).
The distinction Ames makes between the understanding and the will parallels a distinction which emerges in Adam’s speech to Eve. After Satan inspires Eve to dream that she has eaten the apple, Adam consoles her by making a distinction between that which enters the “mind” and the act of “consent.” This distinction resonates with the thought of Ames. As I have already demonstrated, Ames argues that the will can override the understanding and assent to that which the understanding rejects. The activity of the understanding, both its content and its judgement, is distinct from the activity of the will, consent. Adam points out that consent, not the evil that enters the mind (the content), constitutes blameworthiness:

Evil into the mind of God or Man  
May come and go, so unapprov’d, and leave  
No spot or blame behind: Which gives me hope  
That what in sleep thou didst abhor to dream,  
Waking thou never wilt consent to do. (5, 117-21)

The distinction made by Ames between the understanding and the will beautifully parallels Adam’s statement. As Ames writes,

Though the will be determined by the understanding in regard of the specification or kinde of thing to be willed . . . yet in regarde of exercise or act of willing, it [the will] moveth both it selfe, and the understanding with the rest of the faculties. (bk. 1, 24)

The understanding, according to Ames, simply grants us an object or concept to be willed or nilled. Consent or approval is needed for the act to be initiated. When we recall that Ames writes, “The first cause therefore of the goodnesse or sinfulnesse of any Act of man, is in the will” (bk. 3, 91), we recover a conception greatly in tune with the conception of Adam’s statement. Moreover, within this framework, the argument that Eve is tainted or predisposed to evil by the dream Satan inspires in book 5 (the positions
of Millicent Bell and E.M.W. Tillyard\textsuperscript{28} is incoherent. Eve’s dream cannot possibly taint her, for she has not enacted her will.

Adam’s description of the “Soul” at the beginning of book 5, however, vacillates between arguing for the primacy of reason and for the primacy of the will. Essentially, Adam’s conception of the working of reason does not correspond to Ames’s description of the Understanding.\textsuperscript{29} For Adam, choice is not exclusive to the will, and Adam gives no indication that an act of will must precede or initiate an act of reason. Explicitly, Adam holds that “in the Soul / Are many lesser Faculties that serve / Reason as chief” (5, 100-02). While Adam does place great importance on “consent,” he still defers to the faculty of reason. The poem itself seems unclear as to whether the reason or the will is more important. In book 3, God asks, “What pleasure I from such obedience paid, / When will and Reason (Reason also is choice) / Useless and vain . . . had serv’d necessity?” (3, 106-09). God distinguishes and names both will and reason, but grants both the ability to choose. Both Adam and God fail to elaborate on that ability to choose, but the suggestion that the will and reason can both choose remains. As well, the reason of Adam’s speech clearly is not the indifferent act of judgement delineated by Ames, but is more akin to the much vaguer concept of Aristotle.\textsuperscript{30} What is more significant for \textit{Paradise Lost}, however, is that an act of will does not initiate the dream. While Adam is certainly puzzled by the

\textsuperscript{28} These positions are found in Millicent Bell’s “The Fallacy of the Fall in \textit{Paradise Lost}” and in E.M.W. Tillyard’s \textit{Studies in Milton} (New York: n.p., 1951).

\textsuperscript{29} Ames uses the term “Reason” only in delineating the position with which he takes exception. He prefers the terms “Conscience,” “Judgement,” and “Understanding.” “Conscience” belongs “to the reasonable power, or faculty” (bk. 1, 1) and is the act of judgement that “belongs to the Understanding, not to the Will” (bk. 1, 1).

\textsuperscript{30} Copleston writes, “Aristotle, like Plato before him, had no really distinct concept of will, but his description or definition of choice as ‘desireful reason’ or ‘reasonable desire’ or as ‘the deliberate desire of things in our power,’ shows that he had some idea of will, for he does not identify preferential choice (προοθετεῖν) with either desire by itself or with reason by itself.” (1, 339)
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origin of the dream—"Yet evil whence? in thee can harbor none, / Created pure" (5, 99-100)—he does not pursue it beyond tracing back to certain "resemblances" of a previous conversation (5, 114-16). Adam does not feel compelled to determine the source for the dream, and certainly does not presuppose that Eve somehow initiated the dream through an act of will. While Adam places great importance on "consent," it is clear that the faculty of reason delineated by Adam differs from Ames's conception of the understanding in important particulars. What is also apparent is that the effectiveness of Adam's consolation of Eve depends upon a distinction between and explanation of the understanding and will not out of keeping with Ames's conception.

*Paradise Lost,* like Ames, also places great emphasis on the notions of obedience and the conformity of the individual's will to the divine will. In book 3 of *Paradise Lost,* the text equates the goodness of the Son with obedience. After the Son accepts his role as saviour of humanity, the Father praises him and declares that the Son has been found / By Merit more than Birthright Son of God, / Found worthiest to be so by being Good, / Far more than Great or High" (3, 308-11). The Son has been "Found worthiest" by being "Good." What constitutes the Son's goodness? The answer can be found in the narrator's lines which precede the Father's praise of the Son:

[the Son] breath'd immortal love  
To mortal men, above which only shone  
*Filial obedience:* as a sacrifice  
Glad to be offer'd, he *attends the will*  
Of his great Father. (3, 267-71, emphasis mine)

The text stresses that the Son's offer is an act of compliance, an attending of "the will / Of his great Father." The text links "Filial obedience" with "he attends the will / Of his great Father," stressing the obedience of the act. Through obedience, the Son assumes the
role of mediator: love from the Father is directed towards us through the Son; obedience from us towards the Father is directed through the Son. The goodness of the act proceeds from obedience; the concord of the Son’s will with the Father’s will defines goodness. As already demonstrated, concordance of will is precisely how Ames portrays human morality. As he states, “The first cause therefore of the goodnesse or sinfulnesse of any Act of man, is in the will” (3, 91) and “our obedience stands in our conformity to the will of God. . . . Now our conformity with the will of God is first and principally in our will” (3, 91). By linking obedience with a concordance of will, Milton echoes a position inherited from William Ames.

Ames’s ideas on the concordance of wills emerges with Satan’s speech in book 4 of *Paradise Lost*, where Satan rejects all hope for reconciliation with God and embraces evil. In this passage, evil amounts to defying the divine will. Satan recognizes that his deliberate rejection of the divine will caused his fall. Referring to himself in the second person, Satan states, “curs’d be thou; since against his [God’s] thy will / Chose freely what it now so justly rues” (4, 71-2). Satan admits that he is cursed because he freely chose against the will of God. Satan recognizes that the only hope for “Pardon” is “but by submission” (4, 80-1). Moreover, he assumes that reconciliation is even a possibility. 31 Satan, however, refuses to re-align his will with the will of God; he concludes that “all Good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my Good” (4, 109-10). Satan’s speech affirms a relationship between obedience/disobedience and the concordance of wills similar to that held by Ames.

31 On one level, God’s statement in book 3, “Man therefore shall find grace, / The other none” (3, 131-2) appears to suggest what Aquinas asserts: the demons are incapable of repentance. If such is the case, Satan is simply deluded to conceive of “Pardon” as an option. However, grace is a deliberate act of God; God initiates grace (even if the recipient “finds” it). God’s statement speaks about his own activity, not the activity of created beings. Whether Satan is capable of repentance, especially without the assistance of grace, is not made explicit. However, the converse, the potential fall of the angels remains an ever present possibility: “Myself and all th’Angelic Host that stand / In sight of God enthron’d, our happy state / Hold, as you yours, while our obedience holds; / On other surety none . . . in this we stand or fall . . . .” (5, 535-43).
William Ames contributed to a background from which Milton could draw upon in developing his own views. We can find in Paradise Lost Ames’s position on the primacy of the will and his belief that obedience determines the praise- or blameworthiness of a given act. While tracing the ancestry of Milton’s ideas is not the intent of this thesis, it is important to recognize that Milton integrated or rejected existing positions.

**John Preston: the depth of our depravity**

The Calvinist preacher John Preston also contributed to the context within which Milton found himself. For Preston, our depravity makes us utterly dependent upon grace. Preston seeks to minimize our participation in salvation. At the same time, Preston seeks to delineate the extent to which we are involved in our own salvation. In examining Preston, I will examine two works: The Saints Qualification (1637) and The Breast Plate of Faith and Love (1634). Ascertaining the role of the will in salvation was Preston’s concern. Preston was determined not to make it appear that we can achieve our own salvation in any way. Preston, wishing to preserve the absolute omnipotence of God, explicates the comprehensive nature of our depravity and our utter dependence upon God—portraying the understanding, will, and memory as inclined against God. At the same time, the role of the will is akin to the relationship between the bride to the bridegroom—if the bride does not say yes to the proposal of marriage, there can be no marriage. In the same way, the will must say yes to the bridegroom Christ in order to consummate the relationship with God. For Preston, the will (aided by grace) becomes the key element in our participation in our own salvation.

Primarily, Preston wishes to minimize our contribution to salvation by emphasizing our utter and complete dependence upon the mercy of God. Our dependence is grounded in our comprehensive and all-encompassing depravity. In The Saints Qualification, Preston conducts something of an anthropological study of human depravity. He begins with the understanding, follows with the will, and concludes with
the memory. According to Preston, each of these aspects of the human psyche demonstrates a similar fundamental perversity: contrariness to the will of God. To fallen humanity, God is somehow repellent, objectionable, even abominable. Human psychology is an aversion to the divine, a twisting and distorting of God’s presence and call.

Preston begins by delineating the flaws of human understanding; he finds human understanding to be essentially incapable of receiving truth. The first incapacity of the understanding is its own superficiality. Preston complains, “How ready it [the understanding] is to attend to trifles” (40). The understanding is more interested in the superficial and ephemeral than the spiritual and eternal. The understanding is attached to the sensual and has difficulty re-directing its attention to the concerns of the soul.

Added to this tendency of the understanding towards superficiality is the “blindnesse of the minde” (41) which is “unwilling to learne, and so long must needs be in an Errour” (41). This second failure of the understanding is noteworthy, for it portrays the understanding as acting wilfully. This is a distinctive feature of Preston’s examination of the understanding: the perversely wilful nature of the understanding. For Preston, the understanding can actively thwart attempts to correct or educate it. The “blindnesse” of which he speaks is more than a simple propensity to superficiality or even to that which is erroneous. The “blindnesse” is the understanding’s evasion of correction and education. It is striking that Preston refers to this characteristic of the understanding (its unwillingness to learn) as a “blindnesse”--an inability to see--and then describes this “blindnesse” as an unwillingness to learn. By describing it as a “blindnesse,” Preston seems to imply that this unwillingness is a natural state. But by using the term “unwillingness,” rather than a word like “inability,” he also suggests that the “blindnesse” is of our own making. We are not incapable of learning, but we are unwilling to learn.

The understanding, however, is plagued by more than a simple unwillingness to learn; it exhibits “a resistance to the Truth, and an unaptnesse to receive it” (42). Preston
again portrays a wilful sort of understanding which actually resists attempts to correct erroneous thinking. The word “unaptnesse” is interesting because the word “apt” derives from the Latin *aptus* or “fitted” and is the past participle of *aperere* or “fasten.” This choice of wording seems to imply that the understanding is somehow unable to fasten onto the Truth, and this inability or unfitness complements the resistance it so readily demonstrates. If we recall that Preston earlier coupled the terms “blindnesse” and “unwilling,” then we see a tendency on Preston’s part to describe the understanding as being both naturally and wilfully prone to error. This wilfulness, however, is not willed by the individual but is built into the understanding itself. The understanding becomes a self-functioning, wilful child clinging to the errors it has embraced. Preston further develops the understanding’s “resistance to the Truth” in his discussion of the incredulity of the understanding. He writes, “Adde to this the incredulitie of the understanding, how unapt it is to beleeeve” (42). It is strange to attribute belief or unbelief to the understanding, and this attribution of belief, unbelief or disbelief to the understanding provides some indication of Preston’s novel approach to the understanding. For Preston, the understanding is inclined to unbelief and scepticism. The understanding is “unapt” to believe.

To complete the picture of Preston’s “wilful understanding,” I shall briefly examine Preston’s summary statement, “adde to all this the enmitie of the understanding, which is more than all the rest” (43). The trifling nature, the unwillingness to learn, the active resistance to Truth, and the inclination to unbelief are minor flaws when compared to the active enmity that guides the understanding. For Preston, the understanding actually sets itself against the divine will. The other errors of the understanding can be described as errors of preference: As the divine will embodies Truth, so the understanding prefers error. In other words, the understanding prefers its own thoughts, however false, to divine revelation. The enmity of the understanding, however, extends the error of the understanding into another realm altogether. Until this point, the understanding has
simply preferred its own company and ideas. Preston here portrays the understanding as actually disliking or bearing malice towards the revelation of God. Many problems plague the understanding; cutting deeper than them all is this notion of enmity. We appear predisposed to reject the revelation of God.

Before Preston even discusses the will, he finds numerous flaws in the understanding. Information to be presented to the will is processed through an understanding which holds God and God’s will in contempt. All information, be it sense data or a passage of scripture, is tainted by the understanding’s aversion to God. The understanding is predisposed to misinterpret and misrepresent the salvific. Consequently, all thinking becomes suspect for it is faulty a priori. In short, we are wired for error.

Moving on to consider the will, Preston finds it corrupt in two ways: on the basis of the input of the understanding and on the basis of its own corruption. I will first examine the secondary corruption of the will (corruption follows from the corruption of the understanding) before proceeding to examine the corruption unique to the will. Preston holds that the will follows the understanding, but, as we have seen, his unique description of the understanding (as being inclined to error and wilfully perverse) makes the ethical intellectualist argument ludicrous. As Preston writes, “Let us come to the will, and you shall finde that to be no lesse corrupt than the understanding: for the will takes every thing as the understanding presents it” (45). One senses from this passage that the will is somehow corrupted because of the bad information being fed to it by the understanding. Preston does little to dispel such a suggestion when he writes that “if the understanding, the minde of a man be thus corrupted, the will must needs be corrupted” (45). The will is necessarily corrupt because “the minde,” or “the understanding,” is corrupt. Preston’s most complete statement on the relationship between the understanding and the will is thus: “the will of man sees every thing thorow the understanding, as we see thorow a glasse, but (Seeing) is not so proper a word to expresse it: the understanding tastes things, it is as the pallat is to the stomack, when it is out of order. . .” (45). Any
argument that the intellect can be reformed, however, goes against Preston’s description of the understanding. The understanding is thoroughly corrupt because of its enmity towards God. It is not simply a case of “garbage in, garbage out,” but a case of “pearls before swine.” To employ Preston’s own analogy, if the palate only permits distasteful food to be enjoyed, then what hope has the stomach for health?

The will, though necessarily corrupt because of the corruption of the understanding, is corrupt in its own right as well. Preston first makes us aware of this distinct corruption when he describes the function of the understanding “as the pallat is to the stomack, when it is out of order” (45). In this analogy, the palate leads to a disorder of the stomach, but the stomach also appears to be out of sorts—“when it is out of order.” Preston does not explicate a cause and effect relationship in his analogy. Both the will and the understanding are corrupt. The understanding simply enhances the corruption of the will, for the will cannot act independently of the understanding.

Preston develops distinct failures of the will. The first of these failures is the “Contrariety of the will” (46). As he writes, “it [the will] is contrary to God in all things; looke what God’s will is in any thing, you shall finde your will contradicting it, and going a contrary way” (46). This contrariety of the will itself complements the contrariety of the understanding. Preston, however, goes further than simply making contrariety a failure of the will; he suggests that it is actually the disposition of the will: “And yet what Hee [God] will have done, that we will not doe; and what Hee [God] will not have done, that we doe, that is the disposition of our will” (46). The contrariety of the will is important for theological reasons. If the corruption of the will is simply caused by an unenlightened understanding, then humanity appears less culpable for sin. To use an everyday example, we do not hold mentally ill people responsible for certain actions they may perform because their understanding may be performing inadequately. To avoid this suggestion that the corruption of the will rests on the corruption of the understanding, Preston argues that the failure of the understanding is matched by an equally potent failure of the will.
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Another failure of the will is the "Pride of the will, how ready it is to exalt it selfe above its measure" (46). The word "measure" implies that a balance exists in the world objectively and that the will does not respect this balance. The phrase "above its measure" seems to suggest that the self has been measured, that it exists within objective parameters. The will, according to Preston, views any givenness, any measure, as a restriction. As he writes, "we are not content to be disposed of, to have our affaires ordered as God pleases" (46-7). The will does not want to be contained within a context, within a measure. It prefers to order the world according to its own vision of appropriateness. In doing so, the will implicitly rejects creation, for the will sets itself up against creation. The will prefers its own measure to the objective measure of creation.

Two more failures afflict the will: "Inconstancie" and "Disobedience." In both cases, the will is fundamentally aligned against God. "Inconstancie" is the passive counterpart of "Disobedience." "Inconstancie" is the "weakenesse of [the will] in good things, and its peremtorinesse in evill" (47). "Inconstancie" amounts to saying that the will is disinclined to obey or serve. "Disobedience" is an active rejection of the will of God. It is the explicit decision to sin. "Disobedience" is also a fault proper to the will: "Disobedience of our will . . . is the great and proper fault of the will" (47). A simple example should clarify the difference between "Inconstancie" and "Disobedience."

Suppose I am walking with my children and I drop a wrapper on the ground. If I simply fail to pick up the wrapper or ignore that I have dropped it, such an act would be an example of inconstancy. If, however, my son or one of my daughters point out that I have dropped the wrapper and I still do not pick it up, this case is more in line with disobedience.

Preston's analysis of the relationship between the understanding and the will presents a picture of two distinct, equally corrupt psychic entities. Both maintain a somewhat passive disinclination to obedience as well as a more active inclination to disobedience. The will follows the understanding and is corrupted by the understanding,
but it also is fundamentally flawed in its own right. Consequently, human failure is assured and any human attempt to create goodness and eliminate evil is bound to fail for two reasons: 1. The understanding is incapable of grasping the truth and is actually opposed to it. 2. The will is disinclined to support truth and is, in fact, inclined towards supporting the antithesis of God’s will.

Preston, through his depiction of human depravity, minimizes our contribution to salvation by elevating our utter dependence upon the mercy of God. Our dependency is grounded in a corruption that embraces both the understanding and the will. Given this state of affairs, our dependence upon grace poses another problem: What then is our role in salvation, if any? Preston resorts to analogy to answer this question.

In *The Breast-Plate of Faith and Love*, Preston employs a simple and effective analogy of the relationship between a husband and wife to explicate the relationship between God and the individual. God, through the Son, acts as the bridegroom courting the bride of the human soul. In order to receive the Son as “Christ and Husband” (15), “the mind and will must concurre to make up this faith” (15, emphasis mine). Faith is a concurrence of both understanding and accepting, knowing and willing. For the regenerate, Christ is both revealed and offered. Preston asserts that “Now being both revealed, and offered, you must finde something in men answerable to both these” (15). The role of the understanding is to receive and comprehend the revelation of God. The understanding must assent to the truth of the revelation. Preston asserts that the “something” answerable to the revelation is the understanding. Regarding the offer, “there is also an act of the will, whereby it comes in, and takes or imbraceth this righteousness” (15). The analogy of Christ as the bridegroom clarifies Preston’s point. Preston holds that three conditions are necessary for this “marriage” to be valid: 1. The bride must recognize the bridegroom as a bridegroom (as Christ) (16); 2. The bride must understand the nature of the “proposal” (the call to grace) (18); 3. The person must “take and accept him [the bridegroom, or Christ] with a compleat, a deliberate, and true will.”
The first two conditions belong to the understanding while the last condition belongs to the will. Thus, salvation is a concurrence of the understanding and the will in response to the initiative or call of God. Our role in our salvation is to accept the proposal and will of God. Of course, given the depravity of the human spirit, this concurrence of understanding and will is impossible without the enabling initiative of God. For Preston, God is, ultimately, the determining factor in salvation or damnation. Our role is to accept the will of God, if our ability to accept has been enabled.

Milton and the Position of Preston

Milton is certainly sympathetic to Preston’s intent. Preston claims that our limited involvement in salvation resides in the will. In book 12 of *Paradise Lost*, the archangel Michael similarly informs Adam:

His [Christ’s] death for Man, as many as offer’d Life  
Neglect not, and the benefit embrace  
By Faith not void of works. (12, 425-7)

Milton’s stress on the *offer* itself is similar to that of Preston’s. Moreover, Milton’s unique phrasing, “as many as offer’d Life / Neglect not, and the benefit embrace” is in accord with Preston’s analysis of the relationship between God and the individual. Preston argues that the understanding must both recognize and acknowledge the revelation, and the will must accept the offer if we are to be saved. The phrase “Neglect not” effectively minimizes the role of the understanding in conversion. We do not need to understand the import or the consequences of the offer; we merely need to “Neglect not” the offer. Awareness is a prerequisite for the second phase of salvation, our “embrace / By Faith not void of works” (12, 426-7). Milton’s emphasis on both faith and works stresses the practical nature of salvation; it is not merely an intellectual exercise. Our role in this process is to be open to or aware of conversion, to embrace it, and to enact it. Preston
would likely complain that Milton places too much authority in the individual in determining his or her salvation. Milton certainly fights for the freedom of the individual to stand or fall—that is the essence of the poem itself—but he also suggests that it is our compliance with the will of God that enables us to perform good works. In other words, it is up to us whether we comply with the good act, but it is still God working through us that performs the good act. This state of affairs becomes clear when Michael speaks of the Holy Spirit:

Hee to his own a Comforter will send,  
The promise of the Father, who shall dwell  
His Spirit within them, and the Law of Faith  
Working through love, upon thir hearts shall write,  
To guide them in all truth, and also arm  
With spiritual Armor, able to resist  
Satan’s assaults, and quench his fiery darts,  
* * * * * * * *  
And oft supported so as shall amaze  
Thir proudest persecutors. (12, 486-97)

The Holy Spirit guides, arms, and supports the regenerate soul, enabling the good act.

For Preston, the human understanding and will are thoroughly depraved and incapable of achieving grace. The individual, therefore, is completely dependent upon grace. Our participation in the process is through the will, enabled by grace, that accepts the offer of God. The accepting will, however, must be enabled by grace, for the will is otherwise incapable of pursuing “truth.” Milton employs a similar process of acceptance in *Paradise Lost*.

**William Perkins: Compatibilism or Freedom Within Necessity**

William Perkins, an eloquent speaker for a freedom of the will which falls within a necessary order, outlines the dominant parameters within which Milton theologically found himself. William Perkins is an articulate spokesperson for the compatibilist
position which, as Danielson argues, Milton comes to reject. For this work, I focus on Perkins’s book *A Treatise of Gods Free Grace and Mans Free will* (1602). In this book, Perkins attempts to define the will and its powers, to distinguish between freedom from compulsion and freedom from necessity, and to articulate the powers of the will in Eden and in the postlapsarian world. Perkins’s task is a theodical one: he wishes to preserve the omnipotence and goodness of God while still accounting for evil. I will explore the theodical aspect only to the extent to which it pertains to the functioning of the will. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how Milton presents an alternative vision of the will in *De Doctrina Christiana*. Subsequent chapters will examine how, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton develops the mechanism through which this freedom is grounded.

Perkins’s primary concern in the book is to counter Catholic thinking which, Perkins believes, diminishes divine omnipotence in order to enhance, artificially, human agency. Consequently, his book opens with a diatribe against Catholic thinking on the subject of freedom of the will. In fact, in his own words, the Catholic Church “exalts the libertie of mans will, and extenuates the grace of God” (2). Particularly odious to Perkins is the idea that “the efficacie of Gods preventing grace depends upon the cooperation of mans will” (3). As he explains,

> they give unto God in all contingent actions a Depending will, whereby God wills and determines nothing but according as he foresees that the will of man will determine it selfe. . . . For by this meanes not God but will it selfe, is the first Mover and beginner of her own actions. (3-4)

Perkins finds such attempts to harmonize divine omnipotence with human free will objectionable, for they make God’s will subservient to human will. The free will defence is unacceptable to Perkins, for it impairs the will of God. To Perkins, the free will defence simply argues that God only wills what would have happened anyway, with

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32 See particularly chapter 5, “Theodicy, free will, and determinism,” 131-63.
33 See Danielson, chapter 4, “Milton and the Free Will Defence,” 92-130. In brief, the free will defence excuses God for evil because evil is the result of an inappropriate use of human free will. God allows evil because God does not wish to interfere in the exercise of free will. Through divine foreknowledge, God knows immutably what will happen, but is not responsible for what will happen.
or without God. Divine will becomes superfluous or, even worse, irrelevant. The corollary of divine omnipotence, for Perkins, is human impotence. Any attempt to mitigate human impotence immediately reflects on or diminishes divine omnipotence. For example, Perkins takes exception to the idea that “the renewed will of man, by the general direction and co-operation of God, can performe the duties of godliness, without any speciall helpe from God by new grace” (4). For Perkins, even the converted will is incapable of performing the good act without the special intervention of grace. Conversion alters our natural attraction to evil (this attraction towards evil being a consequence of the fall), but it does not enable us to pursue or perform good. Only special grace allows one to perform an authentically good act.

After condemning Catholic thinking on the matter, Perkins proceeds to define the will as a power and to link it closely to the act of reasoning. As Perkins defines it, “will is a power of willing, nilling, choosing, refusing, suspending, which depends on reason” (17). By “power,” Perkins means “an ability to” and it is a “created facultie” (17, emphasis added). Because this power is a “created facultie,” it can properly be exercised only by “men and angels,” for the power of willing is “in God onely by analogie” (17). In Perkins’s view, the authentic power of willing is unique to created rational beings. Perkins links reason with the will “Because it is incident onely to natures reasonable; as God, Angels, men. . .” (18). Perkins holds, however, that the will can “goe against good reason” (18), but that there remains some element of rationality in its activity. Perkins describes the relationship between reason and the will in the following terms: “in every act of will, there are two things, Reason to guide, and Election to assent or dissent” (18).

The contention that the power of willing is in God only by analogy derives from Perkins’s compatibilism. By compatibilism, I mean the co-existence of freedom and necessity. Perkins applies a compatibilist model to both human beings and God. I will discuss the nature of Perkins’s compatibilism as it applies to ourselves in the body of the text. In regards the application of compatibilism to God, the necessity that binds God derives from God’s nature. As Danielson writes, “the character of God is complete and changeless . . . goodness and justice” (151). In other words, God’s “choices,” or the exercising of God’s “will,” must be consistent with God’s nature. Consequently, only “men and Angels” can exercise the power of the will to the effect of choosing either good or evil.
While Perkins highlights the link to rationality, the emphasis of his approach is clearly on the act or power of choosing.

Perkins discerns the nature of human will from its practice. In his usual punctilious way, Perkins states that five conditions comprise an act of will, the last two being proper to the will itself. The five conditions are as follows: 1. consideration; 2. deliberation; 3. determination; 4. election; and 5. freedom from external compulsion. Perkins believes that a close relationship exists between the will and reason, although he holds that the will can override the determinations of reason, as noted earlier ("in every act of will... Election to assent or dissent" and his statement that the will can "goe against good reason"). The function of the will follows from Perkins's examination of the conditions of an act of will: the will enacts or rejects the determinations of reason.  

For Perkins, the first condition of an act of will is "Consideration of the thing to be done and the end thereof" (50). The inclusion of an "end" under the first category of "consideration" establishes a fundamental teleological orientation to willing. One cannot even consider without considering an end. In other words, a telos informs every act of will from its outset. The purpose of "consideration" is the determination of the end of an act; "consideration" is the discernment of the final cause of a given possibility.

Perkins also writes that "Deliberation of the diverse means, whereby the foresaide thing may be done" (50), follows "consideration." "Deliberation" can be said to be the work of reason proper, for no evaluation is made of either the means or the end. "Deliberation," most properly, is a formal exercise; it amounts to the reason examining various considered possibilities in terms of means and ends.

Perkins continues by saying that "Determination what shall be done" (50) succeeds "Deliberation." Like "Deliberation," "Determination" is properly confined to the reason. "Determination" is the evaluation of the means and the ends being considered.

Note the similarity of position between Ockham and Perkins on the relationship between the will and the understanding. The understanding serves as a guide while the will, ultimately, chooses.
and deliberated. Unlike "Deliberation," "Determination" is a practical, not a formal exercise. By practical, I mean it intends an outcome\textsuperscript{36} or evaluates the act being considered. It marks a shift away from thought towards action.

The two conditions of an act of will belonging to the will itself are "election" and "libertie" (although the latter is more of a precondition). Election is the choice itself while liberty is the ability of the will to choose freely. Perkins states: "The fourth action is proper to the will, and that is Election, whereby the will upon determination of the minde, chooseth or refuseth, that is willeth what shall be done, what not" (50). As we have seen, Perkins attempts to reconcile the independence of the will with a dependency on reason. Consequently, any given act of will is preceded and informed by an act of reason. The final element in the practice of will is something of a logical condition of there being an act of will: "the will in all her Elections keepes and maintains her libertie. Because when it wills or nills any thing, it mooves it selfe freely of it selfe to will or to nill, without any external compulsion. . ." (50). Freedom from external compulsion is the ground for any claims to freedom. For Perkins, an authentic act of will must involve reason in the form of consideration, deliberation, and determination. Election proper is preserved for the will and Perkins’s "fifth element" is the precondition of liberty. The will is under no compulsion to follow the reason, though the will cannot act without reason.

Perkins allows for a restricted freedom of the will in that he argues for freedom from compulsion, but not for freedom from necessity. This distinction serves to reconcile human culpability and preordained necessity. Perkins explicitly argues for this distinction: "will hath this propertie, and that is the Libertie of the will, which is a freedome from compulsion, or constraint, but not from all necessitie" (18). In fact, as Perkins understands the functioning of the will, liberty and necessity can coincide quite

\textsuperscript{36}I am not stating that, like Preston, Perkins has introduced a wilful component to the reason. By "intends," I simply mean that determination is directional; its function is to initiate a movement towards or away from a given course of action.
comfortably.\footnote{37} For example, God of necessity wills good, but wills good freely (18). Likewise, the angels “will their owne hapines and the doing of justice, and that of necessitie” (18). True freedom of the will consists in freedom from the bonds of sin, not in the exercise of choice: “Nay the necessitie of not sinning is the glorie and ornament of will: for he that doth good so as he cannot sinn, is more at libertie in doing good. . . . When the creature is in that estate that it willingly serves God & cannot but serve God, then is our perfect libertie”\footnote{38}(19). Liberty is a property inherent in the will and refers strictly to external compulsion, not to necessity. Perkins describes external compulsion as “necessitie by violence,” which “abolisheth freedome and consent of will” (20). A type of necessity which does not impinge on the liberty of the will is the “necessitie of infallibilitie, or the consequence” (20). Of this type of necessity, Perkins writes, “some thing followes necessarily upon a supposed antecedent, as namely upon the determination and decree of God. This necessitie and freedom of will may both stand together” (20). The “necessitie of infallibilitie” is essentially a cause and effect relationship, with God being the ultimate cause. If God knows that something is to be, then it necessarily follows that that thing must be.\footnote{39} Perkins describes the relationship between the will and this type of necessity thus:

\begin{quote}
For to the doing of a voluntarie action it is sufficient, that it proceeds of judgement & have a beginning from within the will, though otherwise in respect of Gods will it be of unchangeable necessitie. The certentie of Gods decree doth not abolish the content of mans will, but rather order it and mildly incline or draw it forth. (20-1)
\end{quote}

\footnote{37} As a pertinent aside, it should be noted how Perkins's position differs from Hobbes's. While, as Danielson points out (136-38), Hobbes employs “his decidedly more Christian compatibilist predecessors” (136), compatibilism is truly a side issue for Hobbes. Hobbes is concerned about language; he dismisses both the Will and freedom the Will as misuses of language. Perkins, on the other hand, wants to demonstrate the viability of compatibilism. Hobbes's use of compatibilism is opportunistic; Perkins's use is theodical.

\footnote{38} See Danielson (124) for a fuller explanation of posse peccare vs. non posse peccare.

\footnote{39} For a discussion of the relevance of this issue of “necessitie by infallibilitie,” see Danielson (157-63).
If I initiate an act of will, and if this act has been preceded by an act of judgement or has been informed by judgement, the act contains an intrinsic liberty based on the source of the initiation, the will. From the perspective of the divine, however, every act necessarily follows God’s knowing it. The perceived danger is that if God knows something that could potentially be otherwise, does God really know it? The answer that God only knows possible or probable outcomes proves insufficient for Perkins; anything less than necessary infallibility seems to diminish God’s prescience.

Perkins’s explanation of the “necessitie of infallibilitie” betrays a certain nominalism of approach. The same act is defined differently depending upon the perspective. The effect necessarily follows when approached from the perspective of divine knowledge, but contains an essential liberty when approached from the human perspective. Liberty and necessity depend upon the perspective of the language user. The words interpret, or, at the least, describe a relationship between an act and the performer of the act. The danger with this model is that the act itself becomes less relevant than the motivation; the physical act being determined, what remains is the internal motivation. Ethics becomes an issue of not what we have done, but how or why we have done it.

For Perkins, we are bound by necessity, but not by compulsion. Necessity bounds our existence, for our existence is not our own—we find ourselves within a given location and within given restrictions. The primary and ultimate restriction is the will of God, which for Perkins is absolute. By making God’s will part of the framework within which we find ourselves living, Perkins attempts to soften divine necessity to allow for a degree of liberty of the will. Because we initiate an act of will, even if the act itself follows
necessarily from God's knowledge of that act, it remains our own. In Aristotelian terminology, efficient causality is sufficient for culpability.

Perkins goes on to delineate the nature and power of the will before the Fall. Perkins writes, "In the estate of Innocence, the will of man is a power of willing either good or euill. . . . with the commaundement he [Adam] received the power to obey" (52). The last phrase in the formula, "with the commaundement," postulates that the enactment of a given command presupposes an enabling grace sufficient to the task. Perkins holds that humanity did exist in just such a state before the Fall. As he argues, two conditions must be met for a person to remain righteous: "a Power to perseueve in goodnesse" (55), and "the will to perseuevere, or perseuerance it selfe" (55).\(^{40}\) God met the first condition but not the second: "he [Adam] received of God the first helpe and not the second" (56). According to Perkins, "the acte of perseuerance was left to the choice and libertie of his [Adam's] owne will" (56). That God did not provide Adam with the latter condition proved to be the "cause of mutabilitee" (55) for "though it [Adam's will] was created in goodness, yet was it made changeably good" (55). Nevertheless, Perkins suggests that the first condition was sufficient for Adam--particularly in light of the twofold liberty granted the will before the Fall. For before the Fall, the will possessed two liberties: the liberty of nature (to will or to nill), and the liberty of grace ("the power to will or nill well" (53)). It is implied that the ability to will well, or the "Power to perseuere in goodnesse," was sufficiently enabling. The gift of willing well also creates the possibility within the will of willing ill: "the power to will that which is good, was put into Adams heart by God: and the power to will that which is euill, was in him before his fall not a gift but only a

\(^{40}\) Perkins does not make it clear if this model extends to angels.
Possiblitie to will euill, if he should cease to do his dutie" (53). The possibility of evil accompanies the power to will good, for it “was in him before his fall.” It is also interesting that the possibility of willing evil appears conditional: “if he should cease to do his dutie.” This again stresses the imperative of actually persevering, of Adam’s enacting the “Power to perseuere.” Evil is found in the domain of possibility and mutability.

Perkins proceeds to make an account of the will after the Fall. In short, we retain the power to will and nill, but we lose the power to will well. Essentially, Perkins argues that the Fall renders us incapable of willing good. He writes, “Though libertie of nature remaine, yet libertie of grace, that is, libertie of willing well is lost, extinguished, abolished by the fall of Adam” (68). We lose the capacity to choose good through our own volition. “There is not power or aptnes in the will corrupted, to will that which is truly good” (70). Perkins subsequently extends this incapacity into an active depravity: “There is not onely an Impotencie to good, but such a forcible pronesse and disposition to euill, as that we can do nothing but sinne” (74). Therefore, Perkins declares, “All the goodnes we haue and all we can do that is pleasing to God, is wholly in Scripture ascribed to God” (75). Only God can enable a good act; at best we can control our appetite for evil.

I will quickly summarize what has been said to this point about Perkins’s position on the will. Perkins defines the will as a power and presents five conditions of an authentic act of will: 1. Consideration; 2. Deliberation; 3. Determination; 4. Election; 5. Liberty. Reason, through the first three conditions (consideration, deliberation, determination) is closely linked to the will, but the will can override the determination of
reason. We are contained within a necessary order; what remains contingent is our internal motivation. Describing our condition before the Fall, Perkins believes that God granted us the twofold freedom of willing and willing well, but that God left the power of perseverance to our own choice. After the Fall, we retain only the power to will, not the power to will well.

**Milton and Perkins**

For Milton, Perkins provides a useful, albeit compatibilist, model with which to counter Hobbes. Certainly, Milton’s rejection of compatibilism frees him from the mental gymnastics that Perkins performs to allow for free will (of a sort) and necessity. The beauty of Perkins’s description of the act of will is that it avoids the “simplistic faculty psychology” (Danielson 137) employed by Bishop Bramhall in his debates against Hobbes. In its essence, Perkins’s description is accepted by Milton. Finally, Perkins’s model of the act of will fits in well with Milton’s depiction of reason and will in *Paradise Lost*.

As Danielson argues, a close reading of *Paradise Lost* demonstrates Milton’s utter rejection of the mutual working of free will and necessity. I wish briefly to look at two speeches which make a similar point in regard to freedom: one speech being divine and the other speech being diabolical.

God’s speech on predestination in book 3 carefully rejects charges of divine influence hampering human freedom. Because of its significance both here and later in the thesis, I will cite the pertinent passage in its entirety:

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,

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See particularly 138-49.
Which had no less prov’d certain unforeknown. 
So without least impulse or shadow of Fate, 
Or aught by me immutably foreseen, 
They trespass, Authors to themselves in all 
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so 
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. (3, 114-28)

The influence of predestination is emphatically rejected in these lines. God states quite clearly that “I form’d them free, and free they must remain.” Milton’s understanding of predestination focuses on the universal rather than on the individual. God, in the passage, speaks of “the high Decree / Unchangeable, Eternal.” This divine decree “ordain’d / Thir freedom.” Moreover, “Thir freedom” constitutes “Thir nature.” Predestination in this passage simply governs the conditions or preconditions of our humanity, not our actions. The opening of the passage—“As if Predestination over-rul’d / Thir will, dispos’d by absolute Decree / or high foreknowledge” (3, 114-6)—suggests the other possible understanding of “Predestination”—that God somehow determines all that comes to pass, either by his will (“absolute Decree”) or by his knowledge (“high foreknowledge”). Both are emphatically rejected: “they themselves decreed / Thir own revolt, not I” (3, 116-17). God explicitly states that “Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault” (118), and that “without least impulse or shadow of Fate, / Or aught by me immutably foreseen, / They trespass” (120-22). Thus, reading the passage as a whole, predestination establishes the framework or pattern of creation (and that framework is freedom); predestination does not establish the contingent events that fall within that framework of creation. God carefully denies any possible charges of divine influence on the Fall.

God’s position on the incompatibility of freedom and divine influence is likewise supported by an unlikely ally: Satan. In book 4, Satan accepts responsibility for his Fall and leaves God unimpaired by charges of predestination.

42 The sense of “ordain’d” being to destine, appoint or order.
Hadst thou the same free will and Power to stand?
Thou hadst: whom hast thou then or what to accuse,
But Heav'n's free Love dealt equally to all?

Nay curs'd be thou; since against his thy will
Chose freely what it now so justly rues. (4, 66-8; 71-2, emphasis mine)

Satan blames neither God nor Fate for his fall, but instead clearly absolves God of any part in his Fall. Satan's speech is remarkably in tune with God's account of freedom in book 3—an account that is consistently maintained throughout the poem.

Even though Milton explicitly rejects the compatibilism of Perkins (and of Calvinism in general), Milton does develop aspects of Perkins's portrayal of the will. For example, Milton's character Abdiel, the angel who successfully resists Satan's temptation, demonstrates the successful fulfillment of Perkins's "the will to perseuere" (55). As we have seen, Perkins posits two conditions on prelapsarian righteousness: "a Power to perseuere in goodnesse" (55), and "the will to perseuere, or perseuerance it selfe" (55). Perkins argues that God provided the former, but the latter condition was ours to fulfil. Abdiel succeeds in choosing well, thus demonstrating that God did, in fact, enable rational beings to will well. The character of Abdiel, and his significance, will be developed more fully in Chapter 7.

Perkins, through his conditions governing an act of will, escapes simple faculty psychology while preserving the useful features of faculty psychology. I have already cited the passage in book 3 where God refers to both "Will and Reason" (108) while stating that "Reason also is choice" (108). Perkins's model allows for a blurring of function while still maintaining a formal distinction. For Perkins, reason "chooses" when it completes its deliberation and determines a course of action to be followed. The will complements reason by following the determinations of reason, but it is free to diverge from this determination. This model of human psychology avoids the strict divisions employed against Hobbes by his opponents (such as Bishop Bramhall), divisions
effectively dismantled by Hobbes. By stressing the integration of will and reason and the act of willing, Perkins’s position cannot be as easily dismissed as one built on a strict faculty psychology. At the same time, the divisions between will and reason are maintained. Perkins asserts that they can be distinguished and that they do bear distinct powers and abilities. Most importantly, Perkins distinguishes between determination and assent, or, as God puts it in book 3, “Authors to themselves in all / Both what they judge and what they choose” (3, 122-23, emphasis mine).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced theological alternatives to the Hobbesian view of the will. My examination began with an examination of the medieval philosopher and theologian William of Ockham. I discussed Ockham’s position on the primacy of the will, on the will’s ability to override reason and the sensitive appetite, on God’s knowledge of future contingencies, and on Voluntarism in ethics. I then proceeded to examine the thought of three Calvinist thinkers: Ames, Preston and Perkins. My purpose has been to establish how they perceived the functioning of the will. Ames places the will in the centre of any ethical discussion, stressing conversion and regeneration over education and reform. Most importantly, Ames holds that the will can override reason and that “[t]he first cause therefore of the goodnesse or sinfulnesse of any Act of man, is in the will” (Ames bk. 3, 91). Preston, for his part, stresses the corruption of both the understanding and the will after the Fall. For Preston, depravity precludes any possibility of freedom, for both the will and the reason actively resist God. Perkins outlines five conditions of an act of will: consideration, deliberation, determination, election and liberty. Notably, Perkins accepts the will’s ability to will, but not the will’s ability to will well. In the prelapsarian order, humanity was endowed with the ability to will well, but perseverance in willing was left in our hands. I have also attempted to indicate the relevance of all these issues both for Milton and for *Paradise Lost*. 
I do not assert that the Calvinist thinkers Ames, Preston and Perkins are direct, or even important, influences on Milton. In fact, my purpose is quite otherwise: to outline the general theological framework within which Milton found himself. I have presented typical, popular seventeenth-century (in this case, compatibilist, Calvinist models) views on the functioning of the will. Calvinism, on the whole, denies freedom of the will on the basis of divine decree and omnipotence; in the previous chapter, we saw that Hobbes rejected the will itself as a misuse of language. If Milton is successfully to posit freedom of the will, he needs to present a vision of the will quite different from those presented in these first two chapters. In the next chapter, I will explore how, in Milton’s theological treatise *De Doctrina Christiana*, the will participates in the authentically good act.

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43 The freedom of the Will allowed by these Calvinist thinkers extends only so far as they deemed it was theodically necessary.
Chapter 3: Milton’s *De Doctrina Christiana*

Thus far, I have been creating a context for understanding Milton’s position on free will. This chapter explores Milton’s theological approach to the issue of the role of the will in human agency, particularly in the instance of the good act. *De Doctrina Christiana* specifically discusses the nature of the good act and the will’s involvement. Moreover, *De Doctrina Christiana* demonstrates how freedom of the will does not necessarily impinge on the freedom of God.

**Balancing the Integrity of Human Freedom with Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence**

The purpose of this chapter is straightforward: How did Milton conceive of the functioning of the will in his theological work *De Doctrina Christiana*? The problem confronting Milton was simple: two of the prevalent seventeenth-century models of the will, the Calvinist and Hobbesian, deny free will. The Calvinist, compatibilist model denies the will its freedom for two fundamental reasons: 1. the depravity of the postlapsarian will; 2. divine omniscience and omnipotence. Hobbes, for his part, rejects the notion of a will altogether. In both models, freedom of the will, except in a narrowly defined sense (as in Perkins), collapses. Both conceptions also tend to place the individual within a Voluntarist order--Hobbes promotes a secular Voluntarism and the

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Calvinists a Divine Voluntarism. "Virtue" amounts to conformity with the existing authority—be that authority human or divine.

*De Doctrina Christiana* develops a model of human psychology which attempts to preserve both the integrity of human freedom and the omniscience and omnipotence of God. Walking a line neither Pelagian nor Calvinist, Milton asserts that it is God who actualizes our potential for good through our consent (expressed in the form of obedience). Milton asserts that we constitute the material cause of the good act; our assent to God constitutes our contribution to the good act. We can also garner habits of understanding and will that facilitate our readiness to be actualized. My discussion focuses on the chapter "De Bonis Operibus," "Of Good Works," from the second book of *De Doctrina Christiana*, "De Dei Cultu," "Of the Worship of God."

**The Problem: Inadequate Accounts of the Will**

Milton expresses discomfort with various accounts of the functioning of the will. The perceived "Catholic model," akin to Pelagianism, implies that we can achieve justification. The materialist model of Hobbes denies the existence of a will altogether. The Calvinist position asserts the will, but denies its freedom. Moreover, the latter position fails to address problems created by Hobbes's position.

The "Catholic model" asserts that we contribute to our own salvation through our good acts. As Horton Davies writes,

> It is essential, however, to recognise that the Continental Reformers and the English Protestants after them made a fundamental distinction between Justification as God's forgiving acquittal of sinful man, for which they reserved the term, and Sanctification which is its consequence, by which they intended the inner regeneration of the Holy Spirit; for the latter the Catholics reserved the term Justification.\(^{46}\)

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For Protestants such as Milton, the Catholic position diminishes the role of Jesus as mediator and redeemer; it implies that we achieve grace. As we saw in the previous chapter, Perkins objected strenuously to the way the Catholic church “exalts the libertie of mans will, and extenuates the grace of God” (Perkins 2). In addition, ethical intellectualism is really a secularized version of this “Catholic” position. Ethical intellectualism is the position Ames objects to so vehemently: “If the will doe necessarily follow the Understanding, then in Regeneration the will it selfe neede not be internally renewed by grace: for the inlightening of the understanding would be sufficient” (bk. 1, 25). Both the “Catholic” position and the ethical intellectualist position are objectionable because they diminish the grace of God and elevate the role of the individual.

Hobbes takes a radically different approach to the will by rejecting it altogether. As we saw in the first chapter, “the last appetite, as also the last fear, is called will, viz. the last appetite, will to do, or will to omit” (Hobbes iv. 68). Rather than being a distinct entity that acts and chooses, the will is simply the concluding appetite or fear in a process of deliberation. The will is simply a name appended onto the last of a chain of causes that stimulate an act. Hobbes negates the will itself, and “freedom of the will” becomes a misunderstanding and misuse of language. I contend that Milton objects to this philosophical determinism of Hobbes most strongly. For now, I will simply note the comment we find in Aubrey’s life of Milton: “Their [Milton and Hobbes’s] interests and tenets were diametrically opposite--vide Mr. Hobbes Behemoth.”

Certain theologians, particularly Calvinist writers, have asserted the role of the will but denied its freedom, or have restricted it to such a degree that its freedom is little

47 John Aubrey’s “Collections for the Life of Milton,” in Hughes’s John Milton: Complete Poems and
more than nominal. The medieval philosopher William of Ockham, something of a forefather of the Calvinist understanding of the will, asserts free will, but his Voluntarism remains problematic. According to Ockham, we are free to act as we choose, be it positively or negatively. However, Ockham’s definition of goodness—whatever God wills—remains problematic. Typically, the Calvinist asserts, with Ockham, the primacy of the will, but he does not go so far as to assert that we can will well. Calvinists emphasize the will’s degeneracy and our need for grace. What freedom the will retains is essentially a freedom to fail. In chapter 2, I examined the positions of Ames, Preston and Perkins on the will. Ames, in his attempt to counter ethical intellectualism, emphasizes the role of the will while stressing the need for regeneration. For Preston, we are so thoroughly depraved that we are helpless but by grace. Preston also develops an analogy that places consent in a central role in our relationship with God. Perkins proves to be a champion of compatibilism, a position rejected by Milton. Perkins, however, also outlines five conditions that constitute an act of will: consideration, deliberation, determination, election and liberty. These three mainstream Calvinist writers all place the will’s consent above the workings of reason. However, they also tend to reject any notion of freedom which stretches beyond the nominal because of the basic Protestant principle that justification is received, not achieved. Pelagianism (or what many of these writers would consider even worse, Catholicism) appears to these writers to be an imminent danger, and they are inclined to assert the authority of God over the will of humanity, even if the conclusions appear objectionable to some.
These models of the relationship between the will and reason would prove inadequate and problematic for Milton. The perceived Catholic model, while allowing for freedom, seems to impair the omniscience and omnipotence of God. Hobbes's materialistic model threatens freedom on philosophical grounds; his nominalism precludes belief in the existence of the will. Ockham allows for human freedom and divine omniscience and omnipotence, but they come with the cost of Voluntarism. Calvinism gives the will a prominent role, but that role exclusively centres on our depravity. Concerns about foreknowledge and omniscience lead certain Calvinist writers, like Perkins, to adopt a compatibilist model that denies what many would consider true choice or freedom of the will. Milton's position must answer these problems: it must allow for freedom without impairing the power of God; it must support the existence and functioning of the will; it must provide an incompatibilist model that does not allow for the spectre of self-justification.

What are Good Works?

In the chapter "De Bonis Operibus," Milton seeks to answer a straightforward question: what is a good work? To answer this question, Milton relies on an Aristotelian view of fourfold causation (the material, formal, efficient and final). The role of the individual is that of the material cause. We allow ourselves, through obedience, to be formed by God for God. To allude to the biblical analogy, we are clay to be sculpted. By arguing that we constitute the material cause of a good work, Milton asserts the aspect of assent without falling into a strict faculty psychology. The result is an emphasis on obedience to God as the ethical norm.
At issue is the degree of human involvement in "the good work." If Milton can establish to what degree we are capable of "the good work," then he can more or less ascertain what constitutes an authentic human act and what freedom of the will truly means. The chapter "De Bonis Operibus," found in the second book ("De Dei Cultu") of De Doctrina Christiana, is most pertinent to this discussion. In this chapter, Milton establishes a working definition as to what constitutes the human act.

Milton opens this chapter by stating that "What chiefly constitutes the true worship of God is eagerness to do good works" (Carey 637). This evasive phrase raises a number of questions: What does he mean by "good works"? What role does the individual play in the exercise of "good works"? Is it the "good works" or our "eagerness" that constitutes "the true worship of God"? Milton states that six conditions must be fulfilled for a work to be identified as good: These six conditions constitute the four causes of the act. After determining the efficient, formal and final cause of the good work, Milton concludes that we are the material cause of the good work; our consent to actualization is our contribution to the goodness of the act. Goodness is not something inherent to the work itself.

Milton begins with a definition of what constitutes a "good work":

GOOD WORKS are those which WE DO WHEN THE SPIRIT OF GOD WORKS WITHIN US, THROUGH TRUE FAITH, TO GOD’S GLORY, THE CERTAIN HOPE OF OUR OWN SALVATION, AND THE INSTRUCTION OF OUR NEIGHBOR. (Carey 638)

Through this definition, Milton establishes a number of conditions that must be met in order for a given work to qualify as a "good work." Following Milton, I break down these conditions of the good work into the following six constituent parts (following

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48 It should be noted that I will not be examining the nature of God in this chapter, but the nature of humanity as Milton understood it in De Doctrina Christiana.
49 "Verus Dei cultus in studio bonorum operum praeceptae positus est" (Sumner 393).
50 "BONA OPERA sunt quae AGENTE IN NOBIS DEI SPIRITU PER VERAM FIDEM FACIMUS, AD DEI GLORIAM, SALUTIS NOSTRAE SPEM CERTAM, ET PROXIMI AEDIFICATIONEM" (Sumner 394).

These six conditions can be comfortably grouped according to their causative role in the good work. The four causes, again, are the efficient, formal, final, and material. The “SPIRIT OF GOD” is the means through which we achieve a good work and it constitutes the efficient cause. If we use a Biblical analogy, the “SPIRIT OF GOD” is the potter who shapes the potentiality of the clay to the given end design. Another way to understand this relationship between the “SPIRIT OF GOD” and the act of an individual is the way an instructor assists a student’s grasping of a difficult concept. The instructor certainly cannot learn for the student, but he or she can bring the moment of learning to fruition. In such an instance, the instructor can be considered the efficient cause. In a similar manner, the “SPIRIT OF GOD” “causes” the good act. Moreover, the student may already know something without knowing that he or she knows. In such a case, the instructor brings awareness to the student. Similarly, a work might appear good in itself, but it cannot be considered a good work without the involvement of the “SPIRIT OF GOD.”

Other causes to consider are the formal, final, and material cause of the work. In order to clarify how these causes work, I will use the two examples of the potter and the clay and the teacher and the student. In the case of the potter and the clay, the shape of the vessel is the formal cause. There is a generic and specific quality to this formal cause; Milton tends to be more concerned with the generic quality than the specific. At one level, in pottery the shape is specific to the work at hand. On another level, the vessel manifests the concept of vessel. In other words, the formal cause consists of two dimensions: that the vessel be this vessel but that it also simply be a vessel. In the example of the student struggling with a difficult concept, the concept to be learned
constitutes the formal cause of his or her learning. Again, however, there is also a generic aspect to this formal cause: learning itself. In the same way, the good work is the formal cause. While the specific formal cause is the act itself, the generic quality that accompanies the specific act is faith. The mechanism through which we achieve the good work, according to *De Doctrina Christiana*, is faith; faith is the formal cause of the good work. The final cause, to return again to the Biblical image, is the end or goal of being a vessel. For instance, I can use the vessel to draw water, to cook, and so on. In the instance of the student, the final cause might be to get a degree, to attain status, to become affluent, to get a position, and so on. *De Doctrina Christiana* outlines three conditions as the final cause of the good work. The final cause is the glory of God, the creation of hope, and the edification of others. The material cause is, in our case, of greatest import. The material cause is the potentiality offered for actualization. It is the ability of the clay to bear shape or our willingness and potential to learn. In the case of the good work, the material cause is the role reserved for the individual: We are the material cause. Milton employs these concepts in *De Doctrina Christiana*; how he develops each of these concepts and the significance of that development still needs to be described.

*De Doctrina Christiana* does not initially address how we are involved in the good work. For this reason, I too defer discussion of the first condition of the good work, the “WE DO” aspect. Milton does, however, begin his definition of a good work by stating that “WE DO.” To the modern reader, it may appear self-evident that we initiate any act we commit, but, as should be clear by this point, in the seventeenth-century this was not self-evident. Hobbes, for example, presents the human person as the culmination of conflicting stimulations and responses. If the blood around the heart sufficiently pleases, then the individual pursues a particular course of action. Nor is the Calvinist compatibilist model much better. To oversimplify, in the Calvinist model our freedom is limited to our contributions to failure. Ames, Preston and Perkins all argue against any claim that we constitute the subject of the *good* act. To cite Perkins, “There is not power
or aptnes in the will corrupted, to will that which is *truly* good" (70, emphasis mine). It is essential, then, that we examine the degree to which Milton claims that “WE DO” the good act at all.

Milton, as I have already mentioned, initially passes over a discussion of the subject of the good act. Enigmatically, Milton begins his elucidation with an examination of “WHEN THE SPIRIT OF GOD WORKS WITHIN US” (Carey 638-9). Milton either assumes that: 1. The subject of the good act is self-evident; or that 2. The answer to this question of subject lies within an examination of the other conditions of the good act. The former possibility appears unlikely. The latter contention, that Milton is trying to ascertain the extent of our involvement in the good work through an analysis of the conditions which constitute that act, is supported by his extended discussion of the salient conditions of the good act. Instead of discussing the role good works play in justification and sanctification, Milton lingers over what constitutes a good work itself. The motivation is clear: Milton wants to ascertain how we are involved in the good work in order to determine the nature and extent of our responsibility. Milton will conclude, as we shall see, that the nature of our involvement is the extent to which we allow God to actualize the good work through us.

This passing over of the “WE DO” is significant, because it is how we perform a good work that is the primary thing Milton is attempting to establish. The question of the “WE DO,” or the how it is that we are involved in the good work, is implicit in all of Milton’s subsequent analyses of the good work. In short, it is precisely our involvement in the good work that Milton is attempting to ascertain. Consequently, even though he appears to pass over the discussion explicitly, the question remains implicitly central to the discussion. I mean to glean from *De Doctrina Christiana* Milton’s working out of this “WE DO” aspect of the good work: Each condition contains a partial answer to the question of the “WE DO.”
The Efficient Cause

Milton first seeks to establish the role of "SPIRIT OF GOD": The Spirit of God constitutes the efficient cause of the good work. Milton’s biblical citations supporting this point come exclusively from the New Testament and are quoted without any explanation. Evidently, Milton simply seeks to establish that the Spirit of God is fundamental to the performance of the good work. Each citation implies, more or less explicitly, that a good work is performed through the agency of the Spirit. Take, for example, Milton’s example from 1 Cor. 15, 10: "by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain; on the contrary, I have worked more effectively than all of them [the other apostles]—not I, though, but the grace of God which is with me" (638). Somehw how, human agency, or at least the sufficiency of human agency, is bracketed or discounted, and the Spirit enables or enacts the good work in us. The biblical citations seek to establish that the Spirit is somehow responsible for the good work. In a sense, the good work is performed in us, not by us.

Formal Cause

Having established biblically the Spirit’s involvement in the performance of the good act, Milton seeks to ascertain the medium through which the Spirit achieves this performance. The medium is, Milton explicitly states, faith: “faith, as form, gives form to the works, so that they can be good, and is itself brought to perfection by these same works, as by an end or fruit” (Carey 639). Faith provides the mechanics for the good act and constitutes the formal cause. Note that, unlike Milton’s discussion of the Spirit (which consisted solely of scriptural passages), Milton finds it necessary to elaborate on his citations, or to gloss them, as he discusses the role of faith in the performance of the good work. Milton discovers that attempting to demonstrate how the Spirit achieves the

51 “[G]ratia Dei sum id quod sum; et gratia ejus, quae in me collata est, non fuit inanis, sed amplius quam illi omnes laboravii non ego tamen, sed gratia Dei quae mecum est” (Sumner 394).
52 “[I]d est, ut forma informat ipsa opera ut possint esse bona, it ab ipsis operibus ut fine et fructibus suis perficitur” (Sumner 394).
good work in us requires more than an explanation that the Spirit achieves the good work in us. Consequently, Milton writes, “Faith, then, is the form of good works, because the definition of form is that through which a thing is what it is” (Carey 639). Of the importance of faith for Milton, Arthur Sewell writes,

Faith, for Milton, was that knowledge of God which enables a man to live the good life ‘through the guidance of the spirit of truth.’ In chapter xxvii, he has added to the manuscript a passage from the Epistle to the Romans which seems to me to epitomise the conclusion to which his thought everywhere tends.

... present your bodies ... a reasonable service; and be not ye conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (xvi. 155)

Milton clearly indicates, in both cited passages, two things: that he is working within an Aristotelian framework of causation, and that faith constitutes the formal cause of a good work.

Moreover, Milton takes pains to dispute the idea that the form of the good work lies in its conformity with the ten commandments. A work, for Milton, is considered good in terms of its conformity “with faith, not with the ten commandments” (Carey 639). Milton provides an example in the observance of the Sabbath:

if I keep the Sabbath, in accordance with the ten commandments, when my faith prompts me to do otherwise, my precise compliance with the commandments will be counted as sin and as anomia or unlawful behavior. It is faith that justifies, not compliance with the commandments; and only that which justifies can make any work good. It follows that no work of ours can be good except through faith.

(Carey 639, emphasis mine)

53 “[F]ides ergo bonorum operum est forma; sic enim forma definitur, per quam res est id quod est” (Sumner 395).
55 “[C]um fide, non cum decalogo” (Sumner 394-5).
56 “Itaque si sabbathum ex praecepto deca logi observavero, fide mihi interim aliud dictante, congruentia illa cum decalogo exactissima mihi quidem peccatum et avoµα redetur. Etenim fides justificat, non congruentia cum decalogo: quod autem justificat, id solum perficere potest ut unumquodque opus sit bonum: bonum igitur nisi per fidem nullum opus nostrum esse potest” (Sumner 395, emphasis mine).
An act must conform with faith if it is to be truly good. Conformity with any written code, even a biblical code, is secondary and not of the essence. The act must conform with “lege non scripta” (Sumner 395), “the unwritten law” (Carey 640), or that which is “of the Spirit which the Father has given us to lead us into truth” (Carey 640). The Spirit grants the Christian the insight or prompting which provides the true touchstone of the good act. A good act will not deviate from the general principle encoded in the Bible, but it may deviate from its particulars: “These [good acts] never run contrary to the love of God and of our neighbor, which is the sum of the law. They may, however, sometimes deviate from the letter even of the gospel precepts” (Carey 640). Thus, the Christian ultimately relies on neither church nor scripture, but on conscience.

In speaking of the individual conscience, Milton appears to be treading on subjectivist or relativist ground. However, Milton avoids ethical subjectivism because the individual conscience does not justify the act, but the conformity of the act to the informed conscience. Milton is certainly not saying that an act is good merely because someone thinks it is right or believes strongly in the goodness of the act. An act is good only to the extent that it conforms with the informed conscience. As Milton states, “the Spirit of God” remains the efficient cause of the act: “The primary efficient cause of good works is God” (Carey 647).

Faith in things generated by the human mind or the human hand amounts to little more than idolatry. True faith responds to an instigation by the divine (“the Spirit which the Father has given us to lead us into truth”). The faith that is the form of the good work is true faith: “that through which a thing is what it is.”

**Final Cause**

If the formal cause of the good work is faith, and the efficient cause of the good work is the Spirit of God, then the individual must be either the material or final cause to

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57 “Cum lege Spiritus qui dux veritatis a Patre datus est” (Sumner 395).
58 “Quae tametsi amori Dei et proximi quae summa legis est, nunquam sunt contraria, a litera tamen specialium praesertim mandatorum, etiam evangelicorum, habita potissimum charitatis ratione, deflectere nonnunquam possunt” (Sumner 395).
59 “Bonorum operum causa prima efficiens est Deus” (Sumner 401).
be involved at all. Milton goes on to consider the final cause of the good act. The good act must be “TO GOD’S GLORY, THE CERTAIN HOPE OF OUR OWN SALVATION, AND THE INSTRUCTION OF OUR NEIGHBOR” (Carey 638).

Firstly, the good act effectively manifests God’s presence in the world through the believer. In performing an act “TO THE GLORY OF GOD” (640), one attempts to restrict his or her participation in the act. One no longer seeks to elevate the self or glorify the self, but he or she desires to be a conduit through which people recognize the power of God. In the truly good act, people do not see the individual, but the hand of God in the works of the individual. In a sense, the individual becomes something of an icon: to draw attention to the individual is to make the self an idol; to diminish the individual’s role in the act is to serve as an icon. To use another example: If I am teaching and my students remember me and my lesson and not the work upon which the lesson was grounded, I have failed as an instructor. To diminish the self so that the message stands above the performance is an act of faith. The good act serves to articulate the individual’s own state of belief. As the act itself is paramount and serves to glorify God, it draws attention to God’s presence through the actions of the believer. Secondly, the individual acts out of anticipation: “THE CERTAIN HOPE OF OUR OWN SALVATION” (Carey 638). The act is an expression of hope: I make or I do hope. Moreover, the good act becomes a statement of trust: the acting is hoping. Finally, the last condition, the edification of our neighbour is an act of charity. The act again removes the individual from the centre of Milton’s analysis. The act itself, not the individual, provokes emulation: “For a good example leads, in good men, to an imitation of that example” (641). Milton has already argued that the efficient cause of the good work is God through the Spirit. If a good act “leads, in good men, to an imitation of that example,” then it follows that the act itself must be an instantiation or manifestation of God to some degree. The individual Christian

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60 “AD DEI GLORIAM, SALUTIS NOSTRAE SPEM CERTAM, ET PROXIMI AEDIFICATIONEM” (Sumner 394).
61 “Ex bono enim exemplo nascitur in bonis aemulatio bona” (Sumner 396).
must therefore take care not to claim authority over the good work. Good works belong to God and God alone.

In the examination of the final causes, the virtue of the act appears to be the extent that it is disclaimed. If one allows God to work through him or her and serves as a manifestation of God’s glory, if the act is an expression of hope and not an attempt to win grace, and if the act stimulates emulation in the hearts of others, then the act is authentically good. If the act is authentically good, God becomes, or is, the final cause. As Milton states, “The worthlessness of our merits becomes quickly apparent when we consider that even our good deeds are not really ours but God’s, who works in us” (644-5).\(^62\)

Not surprisingly, the three aspects of final causality correspond nicely to the three virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Glorification of God proceeds from faith in God. Hope is “SALUTIS NOSTRAE SPEM CERTAM” (Sumner 345). Charity is the love of neighbour expressed in the instruction or edification the good work provides. The final causality of the good work is an authentic expression of these three virtues of faith, hope and charity.

To this point, it appears that human involvement amounts to little more than getting out of the way of God, a bracketing of oneself. In short, we constitute the material cause of the good work. Milton writes that “The primary efficient cause of good works is God” (647).\(^63\) God is the efficient cause of the good work by means of the Spirit of God. Faith in God (proceeding from God through grace) constitutes the formal cause of the good work. The final cause of the good work is the end of the work: the glorification of God, hope in salvation, edification of neighbour. As the good act proceeds from God through faith and the Spirit, it returns to God as an expression of glorification, hope and charity.

\(^62\)”Atque hinc meritorum etiam inanitas nostrorum facile cognoscitur; cum neque nostra sint quae recte facimus, sed agentis in nobis Dei” (Sumner 399). This point is, more or less, what Fish attempts to demonstrate in “Standing Only: Christian Heroism,” Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost (1967; London: Macmillan, 1997), 158-207.
\(^63\)”Bonorum operum causa prima efficiens est Deus, ut supra dictum est” (Sumner 401).
charity. In the domain of Aristotelian causation, the only cause left is the material cause. We provide the medium through which God acts. “WE DO” to the extent that God does through us. Our openness to actualization constitutes our involvement in the good work. Milton examines how we open ourselves in the chapter “DE BONORUM OPERUM CAUSIS PROXIMIS.”

Human Involvement as Material Cause

Milton allows for some human involvement in the good work in his discussion of the “IMMEDIATE CAUSES of good actions” (647). The garnering of virtues, which Milton understands to be good habits, constitutes our involvement in the causation of the good work. Not surprisingly, each of these good habits somehow detaches us from the act itself and allows God to work through us more completely. The virtues discussed include wisdom, prudence, sincerity, promptitude and constancy. In the discussion of these general virtues or habits, Milton discusses the distinction between the understanding and the will. Milton classifies wisdom and prudence as virtues of the understanding and sincerity, promptitude and constancy as virtues of the will.

Virtues of the Understanding

The virtues that fall within the domain of the understanding are “SAPIENTIA et PRUDENTIA,” (Sumner 401) or “WISDOM and PRUDENCE” (Carey 647). Milton defines wisdom:

THE VIRTUE BY WHICH WE EARNESTLY SEARCH OUT GOD’S WILL, CLING TO IT WITH ALL DILIGENCE ONCE WE HAVE UNDERSTOOD IT, AND GOVERN ALL OUR ACTIONS BY ITS RULE. (647)

To this definition Milton attaches a collection of biblical quotations under the headings “QUA VOLUNTATEM DEI” (Sumner 401) and “STUDIOSE INDAGAMUS” (Sumner 401).
Significantly, Milton adds this piece of commentary under “STUDIOSE INDAGAMUS”: “wisdom herself lies in the way of those who seek her, and offers herself to their knowledge of her own accord” (648). This commentary is quite telling of Milton’s attitude on the subject. Once again, wisdom acts independently of the desirous person: It “offers herself . . . of her own accord” (Carey 648). In other words, we can only receive wisdom. Yet, it is readily accessible: It “lies in the way of those who seek her” (Carey 648). For Milton, wisdom requires an openness and a desire. One must be open to the disclosure, provide a home for the disclosing. Wisdom can, indeed must, be sought, but it cannot be appropriated, for wisdom is inextricably linked to the divine will by Milton’s own definition of wisdom. The divine will, transcendent as it is, retains absolutely the right of disclosure, or omnipotence is compromised. Wisdom depends upon this disclosure, because the disclosure of the divine will constitutes its essence. Without this disclosure of God’s will, there can be nothing to “SEARCH OUT,” nothing to understand and “CLING TO,” and nothing to “GOVERN ALL OUR ACTIONS.” Consequently, the virtue of wisdom becomes a disposition of acceptance, an openness to the revealed, a subjugation of the Self and of the aspirations of the Self.

Milton contrasts wisdom with folly to elucidate further the nature of wisdom. Four modes of being comprise Milton’s analysis of folly: “ignorance of God’s will” (Carey 648-9); “false opinion of one’s own wisdom” (Carey 649); curiosity or “Seeking for knowledge of things which are hidden from mankind” (Carey 649); and “human wisdom” (Carey 650). Each of these conditions, the conditions of folly, amount to the individual attempting to elevate him or herself. Each condition involves a denial of some aspect of the limits of our human condition, and constitutes, at some level, a rejection of God’s will. Firstly, given that wisdom “lies in the way of those who seek her,” ignorance

66 “Quae etiam ipsa obvia quaerenti est, seque ul tuo congnoscendum offert” (Sumner 402).
67 “Huc opponitur stultitia, quae maxime quidem est voluntatis Dei ignoratio” (Sumner 402); “Et sapientiae falsa persuasio” (Sumner 403); “Et rerum occultarum indagatio, ut cum primi paretes boni et mali scientiam vetitam indagabant” (Sumner 403); “Et Sapientia humana” (Sumner 404).
of the will of God involves a hardening of the heart, a blocking of grace. Secondly, if one
suffers from a false conceit of wisdom, one trusts his or her own ability to think and to
d Judge beyond what is warranted. A false conceit of wisdom constitutes a preference for
the contingent over the absolute. Our minds, contingent and mutable, prefer their own
ramblings to the eternal and immutable ground of truth. Thirdly, curiosity is a rejection of
the limits established for human knowledge, a rejection of the boundaries of our
humanity. Finally, human and carnal wisdom is the preference for human reasoning over
divine revelation. Taken together, ignorance, a false conceit, curiosity and a preference
for human reasoning demonstrate that wisdom is more a disposition than a state of being.
Wisdom has little to do with knowledge or content, and has more to do with receptivity.
Wisdom is a disposition of openness.

The other virtue in the domain of the understanding is “PRUDENTIA” or
“PRUDENCE” (Carey 651). By prudence, Milton understands that “virtue which allows
us to see what we ought to do and when and where we ought to do it” (Carey 651).68
Whereas wisdom amounts to a disposition to revelation, prudence requires a sensitivity to
the contingencies of time and place. It is an awareness of circumstance; it is an avowal of
humanity and of human limitation and finitude.69

To summarize, the domain of the understanding is awareness. The virtues of
wisdom and prudence amount to the ability to be open and aware. Wisdom involves an
openness to the divine will while prudence involves an awareness of contingent reality. In
neither case does the reason constitute or even abstract these realities; they are given. An
analogy might be illustrative. Milton is delineating a difference akin to the difference
between listening for and listening to. I can train my ear to listen for aspects of music: the
melody in a piece of music, the rhythm, the overtones, the counterpoint, and so on. When
I listen for, I more or less control the experience of the music through the elimination of

68 “PRUDENTIA est virtus qua prospicimus quo quidque tempore et loco sit agendum” (Sumner 404).
69 Fish would likely argue that prudence is something the characters in Paradise Lost noticeably lack, and
that this lack is a test of their obedience. See Surprised by Sin, 158-208.
other possibilities. For example, I do not listen for the harmony when I listen for the melody. When, however, the music leads the experience, I am listening to the music. If I allow the music to lead the experience and attend to my experience and not the music itself, then what I am hearing at any given moment may vary. At times I might notice the melody, at other times the tone, at other times the skill of the players. The point is that at certain moments certain aspects of the music will capture my attention. My attentiveness is simply an awareness of what has captured my attention. In listening to, I relinquish control of the experience; I am led by the music and the performance. When I listen to the music, when the moment determines the contents of my awareness, each experience becomes distinct in time, unique and idiosyncratic. The contents of that experience may transcend the moment, but the experience as a whole is contained by the moment.

Milton’s linking of the transcendence of wisdom and the contingency of prudence drives this point home. The transcendence of wisdom is confined to the contents of wisdom, not to the experience of its disclosure. Rather than pry, like the demons, into “Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate” (PL 2, 559), we are to be humbly receptive, perfected in wisdom and prudence. Wisdom and prudence both require a cessation of activity on our part, a silencing of our exclusionary mindsets. I am talking not about activity as such, but about activities of mind. I certainly do not mean that the virtuous do nothing—Abdiel, Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel do all sorts of things in the poem—but they are all responsive; they do not initiate without a prompting or provocation.

**Virtues of the Will**

The virtues belonging to the will are sincerity, promptitude, and constancy. Each of these amounts to an active movement towards the good act; they are the desire that allows for the good act. As already mentioned, we are the material cause of the good act, with faith being the formal cause, God being the efficient cause, and God being the final cause. Being the material cause primarily consists of being available, being open to the movement generated by God. The role of the understanding is to remain open to
revelation and to be aware of the situation in the midst of which one finds oneself. The will is to be desirous and open to acting out the decree of the spirit.

Sincerity is acting rightly with the appropriate desire to pursue right. As Milton puts it, "SINCERITY, which is also called 'integrity' and 'a good conscience,' means pursuing a single good course of action with a sincere and heartfelt desire and sense of purpose" (Carey 652). Three conditions must, therefore, be satisfied to fulfil this definition of sincerity: the act must satisfy conditions of "goodness," the act must be pursued "with a sincere and heartfelt desire," and the act must have a "sense of purpose."

The first condition of sincerity refers to the act itself. The act must both accord with the will of God, as God's will determines the meaning of a "good course of action," and be appropriate to the circumstance, the singularity component. In Milton's writings, one path typically presents itself as uniquely appropriate for the Christian. This path satisfies the needs of both wisdom and prudence; it accords with the will of God and the situation at hand. An excellent example of this singularity of paths is the separation scene at the beginning of book 9 of Paradise Lost. The reader knows that it would be better for Adam and Eve to stay together and that this is the path they should take. There can be no compromise path; obedience is demanded. Eve's argument--"what is Faith, Love, Virtue unassay'd?" (9, 335)--is not entirely without merit, but it is flawed in the way it is applied to this situation--"Alone, without exterior help sustain'd" (9, 336). Eve's argument is simply without merit in this situation. In other words, Eve's argument distorts one of the conditions of wisdom by overlooking the condition of prudence.

The right action must also be pursued with a sincere desire, the second condition of sincerity. A sincere desire, it can be surmised from what has preceded, performs an act "TO GOD'S GLORY, THE CERTAIN HOPE OF OUR OWN SALVATION, AND THE INSTRUCTION OF OUR NEIGHBOR" (Carey 638). These ends contained in the

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70 "SINCERITAS, quae et integritas et bona conscientia nominatus, est cum sincere animi studio et proposito unumquodque bene agimus" (Sumner 405).
definition of the good act are the sanctioned ends for which the individual strives. If one desires more than these ends, one’s desires fall outside the very definition of the good act. Consequently, the *sincere* desire, or one that is pure and clean, should remain in accord with the final cause of the act. If the desire is for more or less than these three ends, then the desire fails to correspond completely to the final cause of the good act. In short, any other motive for an action lies outside of the definition of the good. If these motivations are outside the bounds of the good, then it follows that for Milton these motivations are, in some degree, insincere, impure, or unclean.

As well, the act must be pursued with a “sincere and heartfelt . . . sense of purpose” (Carey 652). Because we are speaking of a virtue belonging to the will, one can assume that this “sense of purpose” means that the will accords with the determination made by the understanding. This determination must, in turn, be in accord with the divine will. Thus, what constitutes sincerity is a harmony of divine will, human will and the understanding. The act itself must correspond with the efficient cause (namely, God), the desire of the will must correspond to the final cause, and the will must assent to the formal cause of faith revealed to the understanding. And this correspondence must be willed if the act is to be sincere.

Milton uses interchangeably the terms “sincerity,” “integrity,” and “good conscience,” but later alters the definition of a good conscience slightly. Of a good conscience, he comments,

Strictly speaking, however, a good conscience is not the same thing as sincerity. It consists rather of an intellectual judgment of one’s own deeds, and an approval of them which is directed by the light either of nature or of grace. By these means we are made absolutely certain of our own inner sincerity. (Carey 652)\(^7\)

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\(^7\) "Quamquam conscientia bona, si accurate agimus, non est ipsa sinceritas, sed mentis potius judicium de factis suis, et approbatio ex lumine vel naturae vel gratiae, qua sincerita tem nobis inesse certo scimus (Sumner 406).
The passage links a good conscience with sincerity, but does not equate the two. Conscience allows us to examine our sincerity: the content of our conscience is our own sincerity or insincerity. Thus, good conscience is the approval of the mind toward its own actions and is an act of understanding: "an approval of them [one’s own deeds] which is directed by the light either of nature or of grace" (Carey 652). If the divine will is in accord with the action or if the action is in accord with the divine will, then conscience can authentically approve of the action, and a state of good conscience arises.

The opposite of a good conscience is, naturally enough, a “conscientia mala” (Sumner 406). An “evil conscience” exists through “the judgment and disapproval of its own evil actions which each individual mind performs by the light either of nature or of grace. It should really be called a consciousness of evil” (Carey 653). Both a good and an evil conscience are caused by the same thing—“light enjoyed from nature or grace” (Carey 653). A good or bad conscience is more of an awareness of the goodness or evil inherent in the action than a state of being. This passage also makes it apparent that both a good or bad conscience follows the act. The mind evaluates a completed action against the authority of revelation and/or reason. Consequently, it is difficult to imagine someone acting in bad conscience, as conscience is really consciousness of the goodness or badness of the completed act. As conscience follows the performance and is simply an evaluation of that performance, it is absurd to accuse someone of acting in bad conscience.

Milton qualifies his definition of an evil conscience, however, and makes it correspond to the more traditional understanding of the term: “Strictly speaking, however, it is only correct to give the name ‘evil conscience’ to one which judges erroneously or by a perverted set of values, and not by the light of nature or of grace at all” (Carey 653).  

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72 “[E]t approbatio ex lumine vel naturae vel gratiae” (Sumner 406).  
73 “[L]ata quidem significatione accepta, ex lumine scilicet vel naturae ve gratiae judicium mentis cujusque de operibus suis malis, corumque improbatio; quae mali potius conscientia dicenda est” (Sumner 406).  
74 “Strictius autem et magis proprie conscientia mala dicitur quae ex errore aut pravo affectu judicium fert, non ex lumine vel naturae vel gratiae” (Sumner 407).
This more typical understanding is quite different from the earlier definition of an evil conscience. The respective citations clarify the sense that Milton is trying to capture with this distinction. A citation supporting the earlier definition is John 8, 9: “a conscientia convicti--” (Sumner 407), or “convicted by their conscience. . .” (Carey 653). A citation supporting the latter definition is Tit. 1, 15: “polluta est eorum et mens et conscientia” (Sumner 407), or “their mind and their conscience is defiled” (Carey 653). Thus, Milton discerns that a conscience can be evil in two ways: it can be an authentic awareness of one’s own evil, or it can be an erroneous or biased judgement of one’s own actions.

Milton distinguishes a good conscience from sincerity proper. Sincerity, as a virtue of the will, demands more than a good conscience; it requires a purity of motivation. This means that sincerity co-exists with the action, while conscience follows the action. Conscience evaluates the action, while sincerity lies in the doing with the appropriate desire and mental determination. Milton makes it quite clear that, in his opinion, conscience follows the action. Milton cites passages such as 2 Cor. 1, 12, to support his contention: “this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience, that we have lived in this world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not with worldly wisdom, but with the grace of God” (Carey 653). The conscience bears testimony of the manner “that we have lived in this world.” The conscience determines if we have lived “with simplicity and godly sincerity” as opposed to “worldly wisdom.” We can act sincerely, and such sincerity naturally gives rise to a good conscience. One cannot act sincerely by Milton’s definition without enjoying a good conscience. Thus, the two states concur, but they are distinguishable, and Milton takes some pains to make this clear.

Why did Milton feel the need to clarify the role of conscience, both good and bad? The answer may lie in the writings of William Ames already discussed. As has been

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75 “[G]loriatio nostra haec est, testimonium conscientiae nostrae, quod cum simplicitate et sinceritate Dei, non cum sapientia carnali, sed cum gratia Dei versati sumus in mundo” (Sumner 406).
Ames wants to assert the primacy of the will, and he sees conscience as a function of the understanding. Ames’s attempts to demonstrate that the will can override the dictates of the intellect takes him into a discussion of habitual action, the possibility of the will suspending the actions of the intellect, and so on. Ames’s success in his endeavour (demonstrating the primacy of the will), however, is dubious. His argument amounts to little more than the assertion that “will can move it selfe” (bk. 1, p. 24). Milton avoids the issue altogether by employing Hobbes’s favourite tactic—redefining the term. According to Milton, the conscience evaluates actions; it is more accurately a consciousness of good or evil. In other words, the conscience does not direct human behaviour, it simply evaluates it. Consequently, the issue of conscience, or whether one can act against the determination of conscience, becomes irrelevant. It becomes merely a side issue that arises out of a discussion of the virtue of sincerity.

That Milton links sincerity and conscience serves to elevate the role of sincerity in his construction of the will. This connection is not surprising, given that the human individual functions as the material cause of the good act. The role of the will, as outlined by Milton, is one of receptivity, of openness. The proper role of the will is to maximize the potentiality that God can work with; it is to align ourselves with the will of God and subordinate our own will. To quote Milton’s sonnet 7:
Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,
It shall be still in strictest measure ev’n
To that same lot, however mean or high,
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heav’n;
All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great task-Master’s eye. (ll. 9-14, emphasis mine)

“Time” and “the will of Heav’n” lead us. Our duty is not to impede the actions of the divine, but to allow God to form us for “that same lot, however mean or high.” Thus, sinceritas, one of the key virtues of the will, is a state of harmony with the divine will. Sincerity means assuming the role of the Biblical Mary, of listening, or, as Milton describes in sonnet 19, “They also serve who only stand and wait” (l.14).

“Cogitationes malae” (Sumner 407), or evil thoughts, and hypocrisy are the two things contrary to sincerity. Of evil thoughts, Milton cites two biblical passages that do not particularly illustrate how evil thoughts are contrary to sincerity, and he offers no further elucidation of the point. If we think of sinceritas as embodying its root meaning of clean and pure, then it follows that impure or evil thoughts constitute a contravention against sincerity. Evidently, Milton assumes that the connection is clear.

More significantly, Milton’s text cites hypocrisy as the other slight against sincerity. This meaning of sinceritas is consonant with the common understanding of sincerity today. Milton writes, “The actions of the hypocrite either have a quite false appearance of goodness or, if they are really good, are not done for a good purpose” (Carey 653). This formulation is important because it allows for the objective goodness to stand regardless of the actor. A deed can be good in itself, but it may still fail to be a good work. For example, it might be objectively good for a rock star to fly to Africa with food aid, but if his motivation is to further his career by increasing his profile, then the act fails as a good work.

76 “[Q]uae opera vel speciosa pro bonis facit, vel bona quae sunt, fini non bono agit” (Sumner 407).
The next virtue attributed to the will is **PROMPTITUDO**, or **PROMPTITUDE**, which “we display when we do good readily and of our own free will” (Carey 654). The description of how we display this virtue seems to suggest that we can initiate good works independently of God: “readily and of our own free will.” Promptitude, however, is a virtue of response. Milton is discussing the manner with which we are involved in the good work, not our ability to enact a good work. Milton cites Psalm 40, where the emphasis is on the concordance of wills, not the initiative of the individual. In other words, “PROMPTITUDO” refers more to the manner in which an act is carried out than to the act itself. Milton wishes to demonstrate how we submit to the will of God, not our ability to do good in itself.

This emphasis on our manner of submission becomes clear when Milton contrasts promptitude with “praecipitantia” (Sumner 408) or “precipitancy” (Carey 654) and, as Carey translates, “the compulsory discharging of duty, which is quite unspontaneous” (654). These two opposites show that promptitude is the mean between these extremes of “praecipitantia” and “minime spontaneum” (Sumner 408). “Precipitantia” precludes the openness required by the understanding to receive and comprehend the divine will. An act begun with precipitancy lacks or overrides the necessary virtues of wisdom and, more significantly, prudence. It is less a prompt following of God’s will and more a reckless following of what one anticipates as God’s will. Reluctancy, on the other hand, results when the individual either rejects or doubts the divine will. The person fails to put the desire of God before his or her own desire. In either case, the individual, rather than the prompting of the spirit, constitutes the efficient cause of the act. In both cases it is the “I” that initiates or fails to initiate the act. Rather than let God achieve the good work through us accordingly, we either plunge ahead or defer altogether.

The last virtue of the will—“CONSTANTIA” (Sumner 408) or “CONSTANCY” (Carey 654)—stresses the individual’s orientation to the divine will. Milton writes that

77 “[C]um spontet libentus bene agimus” (Sumner 407).
“CONSTANCY is the virtue by which we persevere in our determination to do well, and are not shaken in that determination by anything at all” (Carey 654). In other words, constancy is the continuous attempt on our part to actualize and instantiate the divine will. This perseverance may or may not involve an actual doing. Carey’s translation makes this clear when it states that it is the determination that cannot be shaken, not the act itself. This emphasis on the determination, as opposed to the act itself, is consistent with Milton’s understanding of the individual as the material cause of the good work. Once the divine will has been ascertained (for an act is good only to the degree that it conforms with the divine will, be that will discerned through reason or revealed), the human will should remain in accord with this determination until the divine will has been actualized. Constancy is the ability to remain oriented to the divine will.

Against constancy, Milton examines “inconstantia” (Sumner 408) or “inconstancy” (Carey 655) and “pertinacia in errore” (Sumner 408) or “obstinacy in error” (Carey 655). Constancy means, literally, “to stand with”; in Milton’s case, it means “to stand with” the will of God. Milton’s Biblical citations of inconstancy emphasize the abandonment of the divine will. For example, Milton refers to Matt. 13, 20-22, “he hears the word . . . but he does not take root, he is shortlived: and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word he is at once shocked” (Carey 655). Because the virtue of constancy means, for Milton, “to stand with” the divine will, inconstancy involves a turning away from, or standing apart from, that same divine will. An individual is inconstant in the sense that he or she refuses “to stand with” the divine will.

Obstinacy involves more than the detachment from the divine will implied by inconstancy; rather, obstinacy involves an alternative attachment to another will, usually our own. In Milton’s words, “Also opposed to constancy is obstinacy in error or

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78 “CONSTANTIA est virtus qua in proposito bene agendi perseveramus, neque ab eo ulla ratione dimo vemur” (Sumner 408).
79 “[S]ermonem audit--: non habet autem radicem in sese, sed temporarius est; or taque compressione vel persecutione propter sermonem statim offenditur: sermonem audit; sed sollicitudo saeculi hujus et fallacia divittiarum--” (Sumner 409).
perseverance in an evil purpose” (Carey 655). From Milton’s supporting citations, we can infer that obstinacy involves attaching oneself to a perception that blinds him or her to the prompting of the spirit. Milton cites Jer. 2, 35, “look, I will dispute with you, because you say, I have not sinned” (Carey 655) and Acts 7, 51, “stiff necked, and thorough Gentiles still in heart and ear, you always strive against the Holy Spirit” (Carey 655). If we do not stand apart from, or silence, our own will, we have not a hope of standing with the will of God. Consequently, obstinacy is at two removes from constancy. Not only is the obstinate person not standing in accord with the divine will, he or she is standing in accord with a non-divine will, an alternative interpretation, an opposing will. Thus, Milton emphasizes two distinct senses of constancy: the common sense of “persevering in spite of,” and the semantic sense of “standing with.”

In short, the virtues of the will, according to Milton, are sincerity, promptitude, and constancy. Each of these involves an aligning of our powers to the determinations of the divine will. The virtues of the understanding are wisdom and prudence, which amount to standing under the divine will, to being open to the prompting of the Divine Spirit. When taken with Milton’s understanding of the role of the individual in the performance of “the good work,” it becomes apparent that our role, our duty, is to subjugate our own sense of Self, to see ourselves as moments in a divine pattern. It is the assertion of the “I,” the defining of ourselves as autonomous entities (as opposed to defining ourselves in terms of our relationship with the divine) that constitutes much of human tragedy.

Relevance of Seeing Ourselves as the Material Cause of the Good Work

Milton’s understanding of our role in the good work is of enormous importance to our understanding of Paradise Lost. Seeing ourselves as the material cause of the good act, especially in the text of Paradise Lost, addresses the problems faced by Milton with the Catholic/Pelagian and Calvinist positions on the will. Specifically, the limited degree

80 “Huic opponitur inconstantia . . . Et pertinacia in errore seu proposito malo” (Sumner 409).
81 “Et cce ego disceptaturus sum tecum, eo quod dicas, non peccavi” (Sumner 409).
82 “[D]uri cervice, et incircumcisi corde et auribus, vos sempen spiritui sancto obtinimini” (Sumner 409).
of human involvement in the good work negates the proprietary claim over the work essential to Pelagianism. Moreover, in answer to Calvinist compatibilism, Milton’s position demonstrates that if one can argue that an individual constitutes no more and no less than the material cause of the good work, then one can avoid the disadvantages of both compatibilism and Pelagianism.

The text of *Paradise Lost* forcefully conveys Milton’s belief that we constitute the material cause of the good work. This conception of our contribution to the good work pervades Milton’s prelapsarian and postlapsarian vision of humanity. While the degree of our contribution to the good act appears greater in the prelapsarian vision, it is in truth of the same kind. Goodness is actualized in us; we do not actualize the good. Our role, as material cause, is permissive; we accept the initiatives of God. Obedience bears with it its root meaning, *audire*, to hear. Just as the Greek ἀκούω (I obey) bears within it the word ἀκούω (I hear), so the Miltonic sense of obedience is inextricably linked to the transformative experience of listening and hearing.

In book 5 of *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Raphael both conclude that spiritual growth in prelapsarian humanity is linked to obedience. Raphael first speculates that Adam’s and Eve’s corporeal bodies may be someday transformed to spirit:

Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,  
Improv’d by tract of time, and wing’d ascend  
Ethereal, as wee, or may at choice  
Here or in Heav’nly Paradises dwell;  
*If ye be found obedient, and retain*  
Unalterably firm his love entire  
Whose progeny you are. (5, 497-503, emphasis mine)

According to Raphael, transformation of the physical into the spiritual depends upon two conditions: steadfast obedience and the retention of God’s love. The passage suggests that

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we, by maintaining and nurturing obedience, allow for the corporeal to be transformed from materiality to spirituality. The continued positive response of the human will towards the promptings of the divine will enables greater freedom. Yet, we need more than “to be found obedient” (5, 501), we need to “retain / Unalterably firm his love entire” (5, 501-2). Growth depends more upon the preservation of graces received than upon the active pursuit of the soul for God. From our perspective, we must “retain / Unalterably firm”; we do not grow, change, or transform ourselves. Transformation is not ours to actualize; it comes from outside of us. Unchangeableness (from our perspective) results, ultimately, in our being transformed. Adam, for his part, assents to all that Raphael has spoken—“Well hast thou taught the way...” (5, 508), but he also asserts that the containment of the self within the realm of comprehension leads to the expansion of that comprehension. In responding to Raphael’s statement, “enjoy / Your fill what happiness this happy state / Can comprehend, incapable of more” (5, 503-5), Adam states that “In contemplation of created things / By steps we may ascend to God” (5, 511-12). Through the contemplation of the mundane we enkindle a divine ascent. Our role is not to ascend, but to preserve and retain what has been revealed to us. Our ascent depends upon our receptivity, not our ambition.

The relationship between static and dynamic is found in the language itself. Our task, the human task, is rooted in words of Latin derivation associated with holding and grasping: “retain,” “comprehend,” and “incapable.” The message is simple: our task is to hold to obedience. Moreover, the language of place and stillness is tied to this task. We, by choice, may ultimately “dwell” in earthly or heavenly domains; we are to “be found obedient” (emphasis mine), be “Unalterably firm” and live “In contemplation.” On the other hand, this stillness is our movement: “Well hast thou taught the way...” (5, 508, emphasis mine). As well, this “way” may allow for our bodies to “at last turn all to spirit, / Improv’d... ascend” (5, 497-8, emphasis mine). Milton confronts us with a paradox:
We do by standing; our movement is stillness. As Milton writes in sonnet 19, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

Of greater consequence than both Raphael's and Adam's speculation on the human ascent is God's confirmation of that speculation in book 7. In book 7, God purposes to create,

Another world, out of one man a Race
Of men innumerable, there to dwell,
Not here, till by degrees of merit rais'd
They open to themselves at length the way
Up hither, under long obedience tri'd,
And Earth be chang'd to Heav'n, and Heav'n to Earth. . .

(7, 155-60, emphasis mine)

Clearly, obedience plays a central role in any progression upwards. Through obedience, "They open to themselves at length the way / Up hither. . ." (7, 158-9). Yet, while they [obedient humanity] "open to themselves," the text explicitly states that they do not raise themselves, but are "rais'd." Obedience discovers a path which results in the transformation and elevation of the individual "by degrees of merit" (7, 157). The discovery of that path is, evidently, the effect of obedience, but the greater effect of being "rais'd" or transformed depends upon the revelation of merit or God's discovery of "obedience tri'd." Moreover, the transformation is not isolated to the individual, but extends to the category of space as such--"And Earth be chang'd to Heav'n, and Heav'n to Earth" (7, 160). Unlike Raphael's speculation that humanity could be transformed and transpose itself between heaven and earth, God postulates the possible dissolution of the notion of place or a collapse of "here" and "there." Obedience is not the human actualization of innate potentiality, but it is an actualization of God's will and extends throughout the created universe. Obedience is our saying yes to the transformation, and it is our acceptance of the role as material cause in the good work that allows this transformation to occur. Thus, in the prelapsarian order, transformation follows "obedience tri'd," but that transformation is effected by God, not the individual.
Moreover, that transformation is not confined to the individual, but radiates outwards into the universe itself.

God's rendering of the postlapsarian situation places great emphasis on the element of actualization. Whereas in the prelapsarian order humanity can "open to themselves at length the way / Up thither," in the postlapsarian order any ascent on the part of humanity is received as a grace. In the postlapsarian order, our role is to allow God full reign in our lives. As God declares to the Son in book 3, 290-94:

thy merit
Imputed shall absolve them [saved humanity] who renounce
Thir own both righteous and unrighteous deeds,
And live in thee transplanted, and from thee
Receive new life. (emphasis mine)

The renunciation of "both righteous and unrighteous deeds" is of immense importance in the poem. In the postlapsarian order, we cannot will the good; we can only will that God's will be done through us. To employ the classic clothing metaphor, the will can disrobe the self, but the selection of wardrobe is the prerogative of God if the act is to be declared a good act. The renunciation demanded by God allows for a transplanting or transformation. By explicitly employing the term "transplanted," Milton enhances the passive, receptive nature of our role. Dependent upon location, water, sun, and soil, a plant receives life as much as it sustains life. Moreover, the transplanting of a plant must be perpetrated by an outside force; a plant does not transplant itself. This disarmingly evocative word, "transplanted," which also bears with it rich biblical associations, bears with it a force of meaning consistent with what I have been developing in this chapter: the individual human constitutes the material cause of the good act. God remains the efficient, formal and final cause of the act if that act is to be considered authentically good. What is required of the will is renunciation and openness. In the postlapsarian
order, we still must will something, even if that something is the renunciation of our own activity. In the wake of this renunciation comes the transforming force of God.

After the poem’s account of the fall, God reiterates the role of humanity in the good act. The role of humanity is to allow for the promptings of the spirit to come to full fruition. This role is well delineated in the opening scene of book 11 which begins with the narrator’s comments on the repentance of Adam and Eve which closed book 10:

Praying, for from the Mercy-seat above
Prevenient Grace descending had remov’d
The stony from thir hearts, and made new flesh
Regenerate grow instead.

(11, 2-5, emphasis mine)

Prayer is seen not as the initiative of the participants, but as something received from divine initiative. Proper prayer proceeds from God, incarnates itself (“made new flesh / Regenerate grow”), then returns to God. The Son adds that the “first fruits on Earth are sprung / From thy implanted Grace in Man, these Sighs / And Prayers” (11, 22-4). This statement appears to confirm that prayer is received, that it is “implanted.” The end of prayer, or the final cause of prayer, is clear. Prayer ascends to God; the end of prayer is to pass “Dimensionless through Heav’nly doors . . . Before the Father’s Throne” (11, 17-20). The opening of book 11 makes it clear that God initiates prayer—“the Spirit of prayer / Inspir’d” (11, 6-7) and “Prevenient Grace descending” (11, 3). God’s words to the Son, regarding the future of humanity, remind the reader of the formal cause of the good act:

after Life
Tri’d in sharp tribulation, and refin’d
By Faith and faithful works, to second Life,
Wak’t in the renovation of the just,
Resigns him up with Heav’n and Earth renew’d.

(11, 62-66, emphasis mine)
The role of the human is to be the material cause, to incarnate the divine, to be open to the regenerative power of God. We will obedience to the extent that we allow the hand of God to form us; we will our tractability.

Why is it significant that we constitute the material cause of the good act? Before answering this question, it might be helpful to reiterate the context within which Milton found himself. Milton did not want to assert that grace depends upon the will or that we, to some extent, save ourselves. Neither did he want to reject the notion of freedom of the will, as did many Calvinists. Milton’s position rejects Catholic and compatibilist thinking.

Against Catholic/Pelagian thinking, Milton affirms the role of grace in the salvation of the individual. As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, we receive the good work; we are actualized by an outside force, namely God. In no manner do we earn salvation; at best, we allow for salvation. It would be very strange to argue that a material cause achieves anything; it is achieved. In the performance of a good work, God constitutes three of the four causes: formal, efficient and final. We are involved in the good act, but it is God who performs the good act.

While Milton’s position is clearly Protestant in that it rejects Catholic thinking and asserts the role of God over the individual, it also rejects the compatibilism rampant in Calvinism. That is, Milton aligns himself with the Protestant cause when he asserts that God is the primary, efficient cause of the good act. At the same time, however, the good act depends upon the exercise of the individual’s free will. Our affirmation constitutes a necessary cause, but it is by no means the sufficient cause. For Milton, God remains the initiator and grace reigns supreme. At the same time, Milton rejects compatibilism with great ferocity. We experience the good or evil act and allow the act to be, but we neither initiate it nor do we “cause” it in the normal sense of the word.
Conclusion

Milton achieves a remarkable balance between human freedom and divine omnipotence and omniscience. By postulating that the human role is that of material cause, Milton finds a space for the will's freedom that does not impinge on the omnipotence of God. God, the formal, efficient and final cause of the good work, entices us to remain open. Our role is not a role of fulfillment but of acceptance. The good act is received.
Chapter 4: Eve’s Dream, Interpretation, and Shifting Paradigms

In this chapter, I will discuss the significance of Eve’s dream (Books 4 and 5 of *Paradise Lost*) in terms of the discussion of freedom of the will. To this point, I have outlined Hobbes’s rejection of the will as an entity and his argument that freedom of the will is a misuse of language. I proceeded to examine the theological concern regarding freedom of the will: that freedom of the will impinges on the omnipotence of God. In the last chapter, I discussed Milton’s theological response to the issue and how that response attempts to reconcile freedom and omnipotence. To summarize, the text of *De Doctrina Christiana* asserts that we constitute the material cause of the good act; by means of the affirmation of our will, God actualizes the good act in us. This chapter focuses on a moment in the poem where the philosophical issues and theological concerns converge: Eve’s dream.

Eve’s dream draws attention to interpretive parameters and paradigms and raises issues about interpretation itself. Why, in prelapsarian Eden, do we encounter so many distinct possibilities and perspectives? By approaching the dream from different perspectives--Satan’s, the narrator’s, Adam’s, and Eve’s--book 4 and the opening of book 5 prepare us for the moment that makes interpretation possible: the elevation of the Son. Practically, the dream itself clarifies for the reader essential distinctions among experience, innocence, and failure. More significantly, Satan’s strategy exposes his own interpretive perspective and attitudes toward human motivation. The narrator, for his part, appears to introduce Hobbesian notions of human motivation, which seem to threaten the possibility of continued innocence. Adam’s perspective, which resonates strongly with the position contained in *De Doctrina Christiana*, negates concerns about innocence (from a theological perspective) but raises concerns about the origin and nature of evil (underscoring concerns about omnipotence and the issue of Voluntarism). Eve’s experience returns our attention to the issue Satan introduced: the interpretive act itself.
Her experience of the dream connects identity (and Adam's concern about the origin and nature of evil) with interpretive choice. Ultimately, the dream remains problematic until Raphael, later in book 5, reveals the origin of choice to Adam, to Eve, and to the reader.

**The Function of the Dream: An Awareness of Interpretive Choice**

Eve's dream has puzzled and continues to puzzle scholars and readers of the poem: Is Eve tainted by the dream? Has Eve fallen before the fall?\(^{84}\) My position is unequivocal: no, Eve has not fallen. While Eve, as I will demonstrate, is not unaffected by the dream, she is neither predisposed to evil nor tainted by some sympathetic reaction. If we conclude that Eve is untainted by the dream, the question remains, why does Milton include this strange little incident in his poem? I will argue that Milton is exploring various options and positions on the relationship between the reason and the will.

Through the continued examination of possibilities, the tensions inherent in a theological explanation become apparent. Eve appears vindicated, but there is a cost for her vindication. Most significantly, the cost for her vindication is our doubt. The various interpretations of the dream and its significance cause us to wonder about the effects of the dream. As well, why does not God clear up the issue? God's silence and the human struggle to understand the idea of freedom cuts to the heart of the poem. The comfort Eve receives after the dream is unsatisfying: The dream blurs our understanding of the parameters of our freedom. Moreover, the dream awakens in us a desire to understand the nature and extent of human freedom.

This chapter argues that the dream mitigates Eve's ignorance and forces her to contemplate horizons beyond those presented by Adam. Up to this point, Eve's

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dependence upon Adam has been a source of strength; after the dream, a continuing interpretive dependence on Eve’s part will prove a source of weakness. Eve’s integrity depends upon her own decisions, not upon her subservience to Adam, feigned or authentic. Engaging with Eve’s dependence upon Adam for direction and meaning, the dream opens up the possibility of the false autonomy offered by Satan, an autonomy predicated on action and disobedience. Henceforth, Eve must actively engage her will to abide within a relationship previously assumed, an abiding previously predicated upon reception and obedience. This engagement is the cost Eve must pay for receiving the dream: She can no longer assume; she must choose. In a very real sense, Satan becomes the great moral imperative in the poem. The dream Satan implants forces Eve to entertain the possibility of disobedience. Every act thereafter becomes charged with moral worth. Eve must choose to remain steadfast within the parameters of the divine will or assert her autonomy in the pattern of Satan. For Milton, innocence does not equal ignorance.

The impact of Eve’s failure within the confines of a dream: the scholars

A quick survey of Miltonic scholarship demonstrates how vexing this dream has proven. Opinions are as varied as the temperaments of the readers. Positions range from Millicent Bell’s contention that Eve has effectively fallen before the fall to Diane McColley’s glorification of Eve.

In “Eve’s Dream and the Temptation in Paradise Lost,” Murray W. Bundy draws attention to the distinction between thought and action. According to Bundy, who relies heavily on the De Doctrina Christiana, Milton did not believe in complete innocence. Bundy holds that the dream occurs a third of the way into the poem and indicates the state of concupiscence. The actual fall occurs two thirds of the way into the poem, representing actual sin (Bundy 290-1).

The positions of E.M.W. Tillyard and Millicent Bell, positions which state that Eve has effectively fallen before the Fall, mark the early 1950s. Tillyard's view appears in his *Studies in Milton* (1951). He argues that the Fall begins long before the actual transgression and that "the actual eating of the apple becomes no more than an emphatic stage in the process already begun" (159). According to Tillyard, "if the dream has disturbed Eve so much, she has really passed from a state of innocence to one of sin" (158). In her essay "The Fallacy of the Fall in *Paradise Lost*," Bell bluntly contends that Eve is tainted by the dream: "from the very first we are after the Fall; we are dealing with results and preliminaries" (867). Regarding the possibility that Eve retains her innocence, Bell assumes that "we cannot believe it, knowing already the outcome" (867). Aside from Bell's view of the seventeenth-century reader, her argument is essentially one of incredulity. She does not believe that experience and innocence can coincide. Any claims by prelapsarian Adam to the contrary are dismissed as being "wide of this particular mark" (867). Bell, and Tillyard before her, conclude that Eve is irreparably tainted by the dream; they reject the notion that innocence and experience can coincide in a meaningful way.

H.V.S. Ogden points out some of the obvious problems in the position of Bell and Tillyard in his essay "The Crisis of *Paradise Lost* Reconsidered." Ogden points out that Tillyard's argument is built upon the assumption that innocence and experience are incompatible. Ogden shows how innocence and experience are far from being mutually exclusive: "experience could have strengthened innocence and confirmed rectitude as readily as in the event it destroyed them [Adam and Eve]" (310). As for Bell, Ogden says that she mistakenly assumes that Adam and Eve are perfect and, being perfect, would be incapable of falling without the corrupting influence of Satan. Years later, Danielson, in *Milton's Good God*, finds himself still forced to attack the prevalent notion of a perfect Adam and Eve in a static, perfect Paradise. Danielson argues that Adam and Eve's existence in Paradise is far from dull and that the potential for change and growth is
integral to that existence. The case of Adam and Eve is far from being a case where the options are stagnation or failure.

Most people who deal with Eve’s Dream have tended to support Ogden’s position, or some variation of it. Prime examples of this tendency to support Ogden include Barbara Lewalski’s “Innocence and Experience in Milton’s Eden” and Thomas Blackburn’s “Uncloister’d Virtue’: Adam and Eve in Milton’s Paradise.” Lewalski’s essay confronts the tendency to misunderstand “Paradise” and ignore the novelties of Milton’s version. In her view, Milton suggests that one could acquire experience and knowledge within the confines of innocence. Particularly regarding Eve’s Dream, Lewalski writes,

In the moral climate of Milton’s Eden, Eve’s virtual experience of evil no doubt creates new tensions within her, but by making her so much more aware of evil’s true nature, it could greatly enhance her ability and her determination to shun the actual experience. (103)

In the same vein, Blackburn emphatically argues that innocence is actual before the Fall and that knowledge is strictly conceptual. As he writes, “the knowledge of evil they [Adam and Eve] do possess in their innocence is essential to their status as free and responsible moral beings before the Fall” (130). Concerning Eve’s Dream, Blackburn writes, “Eve’s dream provides an even more striking example of a knowledge of vice acquired without corruption by it” (132-3). In other words, virtue depends upon a conceptual awareness of evil. This awareness need not be experiential to be effectual; knowledge does not equate with fallenness.

In her 1985 article “The Voice at Eve’s Ear in Paradise Lost,” Jane M. Petty posits that Satan does not cause the dream at all, but that Adam’s voice and speech instigate the dream. In brief, Petty argues that parallels between Adam’s awakening

86 See especially 177-201.
address and the enticing voice in the dream indicate that Adam’s voice initiates the dream sequence. The severity of Edward Le Comte’s response is indicative that Petty touched a sensitive chord among the Miltonic community. Even though many will follow Le Comte’s curt dismissal of Petty’s argument for being forced and contrived, her essential insight concerning the importance of Adam’s voice is worth some consideration. Our obsession with the toad, the angels’ confrontation with Satan, and the “fall” that occurs within the dream can make us overlook why it is that Eve is so easily duped within the dream itself. The voice of Adam is much more than reassuring and persuasive, it is authoritative. Unlike Petty, I do not propose that Adam’s voice propagates the dream—that seems to ignore the whole orchestration of the scene—but I do acknowledge that Adam’s voice is singularly important in the construction of the dream. Eve states quite explicitly when she recounts the dream to Adam, “I rose as at thy call, but found thee not; / To find thee I directed then my walk” (5, 48-9). The apparent allusion to the Song of Songs (5: 6) tells the reader that he or she is dealing with a text whose core is desire. Desire drives the dream, but the desire is neither for the forbidden nor for the unknown: As in the Song of Songs, the desire is for the known, the man Eve assumes to be the source of the voice, Adam. While Adam may not initiate the dream, he certainly is integral to its functioning.

The basic contention has been to determine whether innocence and experience can coincide in a prelapsarian state. The case that the two states can coincide has often been argued, and this Eden, as Danielson says, is rich in experience and full of growth and movement. Moreover, Raphael directly posits the possibility and desirability for growth: “Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit, / Improv’d by tract of time” (5, 497-8, emphasis mine). There is room to “become” in this Paradise, for it is not static. Another, related concern has been the nature of dreams and Satan’s level of involvement in causing

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the dream. But instead of pursuing either of these two themes, I wish to consider perceptions of the dream within the poem itself.

**The impact of Eve's failure in the dream: four voices within the poem**

The significant and contradictory views of the various critics already appear within the poem, which entertains each view. The incident of the dream creates an interpretive problem within the poem. Two points must be considered when examining Eve's dream: 1. The experience of the dream is utterly unique; 2. Interpretations are framed by the perspective of the party involved. Four dominant views of the incident emerge: Satan's, the Narrator's, Adam's, and Eve's.

**Satan: Inflaming Desire**

Satan's understanding of the stratagem of the dream is rooted in his understanding of desire and the nature of temptation. Satan assumes that ignorance of possibility grounds the apparent contentedness of Adam and Eve in Paradise. If alternatives emerge, then desire will emerge. Desire will, Satan believes, inevitably disrupt order.

Satan's view essentially equates temptation with desire and possibility with probability. Satan's analysis, not surprisingly, builds upon his own distorted self-understanding, corrupted and inaccurate as that may be. We become aware of Satan's view with his analysis of an overheard conversation between Adam and Eve. Satan intends to inflame desire within the breast of Eve by presenting possibilities previously unexposed or not entertained. If Eve sees herself in the dream violating the interdiction and benefiting from that violation, she cannot but want to attempt the violation herself. Building upon his own experience, Satan believes that the presentation of alternatives is sufficient cause to desire those alternatives.

For Satan, desire is the root of suffering. Upon seeing Adam and Eve's delight in one another, Satan reflects on desire:

... while I to Hell am thrust,
Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,
Among our other torments not the least,  
Still unfulfill'd with pain of longing pines... (4, 508-11)

Evidently, desire is one of the great torments afflicting Satan in Hell; perhaps, desire is the great torment. Removal from the object of desire is a cause of suffering and severs one from both joy and love. Because joy usually proceeds from enjoyment (and is, in fact, built into the word "enjoyment"), it is clear why joy is distinct from desire. The distinction made between love and desire, however, is peculiar. Socrates (in Plato's *Symposium*) held that desire spurred us on to the realm of the Forms. Dissatisfaction with the tangible and ephemeral dislocates one's complacency from the present and serves as a first step towards the attainment of the eternal. Desire's function is to dislodge us from the sensory and to impel us towards the spiritual truths that underlie the perceptual. Such a view, however, is *not* held by Satan.

Because of Satan's understanding of separation as the fundamental source of suffering, he misinterprets Adam and Eve's conversation regarding their state of being. While Satan correctly understands that the root of his own suffering lies in alienation and separation, he overinterprets Adam's and Eve's happiness. Satan is correct about himself: his sufferings are rooted in desire—desire which arises from alienation: "Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell" (4, 75) and "while I to Hell am thrust, / Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire... Still unfulfill'd with pain of longing pines" (4, 508-11). Although seeing Adam and Eve "Imparadis't in one another's arms" (4, 506), Satan does not comprehend that integration is the source of Adam's and Eve's happiness: He sees it coming from ignorance: "do they only stand / By ignorance, is that thir happy state, / The proof of thir obedience and thir faith?" (4, 518-20). Consequently, he incorrectly concludes that their happiness is *desireless*: "Hence I will excite thir minds / With more desire to know..." (4, 522-3, emphasis mine). Their happiness provokes Satan's awareness of his own state of discontent. Satan's resentment causes him to see only fulfillment. Satan's resentment begins to build as he first skirts creation: "The Stairs were
then let down, whether to dare / The Fiend by easy ascent, or aggravate / His sad exclusion from the doors of Bliss” (3, 523-5). Resentment transforms the wonder Satan experiences to envy: “Such wonder seiz’d, though after Heaven seen, / The Spirit malign, but much more envy seiz’d / At sight of all this World beheld so fair” (552-4). The sight of Adam and Eve plunges Satan into a correct awareness of the discrepancy between their state of being and his own: “O Hell! what do mine eyes with grief behold” (4, 358). How Satan proceeds to interpret that insight, however, displays his own biases.

Resentment causes Satan to misunderstand the nature of Adam and Eve’s existence. He sees the walls of Paradise as designed to exclude the chaos of change and possibility. In such a configuration, Satan becomes the initiating, creative force that disrupts by bearing possibility, the Pandora of Chaos. Moreover, Satan believes that ignorance, as opposed to living within the parameters or the givenness of creation, grounds their bliss. Thus, the interdiction against the tree of knowledge proves both evocative and provocative to Satan: “Knowledge forbidd’n? / Suspicious, reasonless. Why should thir Lord / Envy them that?” (4, 515-17). The two words “Suspicious, reasonless” stand out from the text because they do not constitute an actual sentence but are presented as such. With a writer like Milton, who orchestrates the construction of each line and sentence down to the prepositional phrase, a fragment of a sentence is worthy of attention. Aside from indicating the broken, fragmented, degenerative speech patterns of Satan, this non-sentence draws our attention to the words themselves. The root of the word “suspicious” means to look under. This root implies that Satan assumes that, in this case, there is an “under” to be looked at. “Suspicious,” moreover, conflates with “reasonless” to indicate that “reasonless” means more than “without purpose” and really means “without rational purpose.” In other words, there is a search for motivation, for the “hidden,” irrational purpose behind the interdiction, a search for the final cause. The command, to Satan, appears to subvert reason. How can the faculty of reason and knowledge, possessed by both the blessed and the damned, angels and humans, be
connected to suffering and desire? Satan generates and multiplies causes. Instead of following the pieces of the puzzle before him—happiness, unity, harmony, containment within an interdiction—Satan looks under; he seeks the reasonless reason, the irrational purport for this interdiction.

For Satan, the answer to the puzzling issue of the interdiction is power. The Lord is envious: he “envy[s] them that [knowledge]” (4, 517). God, according to Satan, craves obedience and faith. If God must diminish humanity in order to attain that obedience and faith, so be it. There is an arrogance to Satan’s interpretation. The interpretation assumes that his own rejection of God proved to be such a bitter blow to heaven that God is taking new and unprecedented precautions to prevent such a rejection from happening again. Upon approaching humanity, Satan immediately concludes that humanity is “Into our room of bliss thus high advanc’t” (4, 359). The conclusion that humanity and creation replaces the fallen angels directly contradicts Satan’s own initial recollection of the rumours of the new creation:

Space may produce new Worlds; wherof so rife
There went a fame in Heav’n that he ere long
Intended to create, and therein plant
A generation, whom his choice regard
Should favor equal to the Sons of Heaven. (1, 650-4)

The transformation and mutation of experience through his interpretation serves to warn the reader against Satan’s interpretive model—the Hobbesian model of power. While appearing to be on the side of “knowledge” and against the tyranny of ignorance, Satan, in fact, projects causes that go far beyond legitimate observation and experience within the poem. Satan’s intoxicating doctrine distorts his perception of Paradise; Satan believes that he is confronting an order authentically different from the one in which he previously existed; God has changed the rules. If God were to change the rules with every unanticipated violation, then God would be reduced to the status of the despot who
changes the law whenever it works against him. And this is how Satan perceives God: as a very powerful but profoundly arbitrary being.

Satan, essentially, is constructing a God in his own image, projecting onto God his own motivation and beliefs. Satan is the ultimate, and ultimately insecure, corporate executive officer. There is no doubt that a hierarchy exists in the mind of Satan; what is at stake is not the existence of that hierarchy, but the mechanism to assert dominance within the “market” of creation. Whereas God creates multiplicity and choice, Satan diminishes possibility, dichotomizes creation, and seeks to establish a monopoly of his own.

Under such a model of power, the way of temptation appears obvious: present the possibility of “liberation” in the form of disobedience. Satan believes that if he gives Adam and Eve a reason to doubt and rebel, they will. The heart of the dream is Eve’s disobedience. In order to make that disobedience appear probable, Satan separates Eve from Adam in the dream. This separation is the truly profound aspect of the dream, even though from Satan’s perception it is somewhat functional and pragmatic. This proposed separation ultimately proves more effectual in causing the fall than Satan ever realizes. Satan’s focus is simply on reconfiguring possibility, on entertaining doubt; he actually achieves a dislocation or fracturing by touching something far deeper within Eve.

Because Satan’s designs are so deeply rooted in his interpretive skills, it is worth dwelling upon and examining the exact words that Satan uses. Satan’s reality is largely linguistic; it depends upon words that connote and transform. A prime example of this distortion of language is the purported ignorance of prelapsarian Adam and Eve. The pre-Satanic state is one of balance and harmony; it is not predicated upon a lack of awareness or knowledge. Nature and humanity live in mutual dependence. Humanity’s role is, as Adam states to Eve,

to reform
Yon flow’ry Arbors, yonder Alleys green,

89 See Lewalski’s “Innocence and Experience in Milton’s Eden” and Blackburn.
Our walk at noon, with branches overgrown, 
That mock our scant manuring, and require 
More hands than ours to lop thir wanton growth: 
Those Blossoms also, and those dropping Gums, 
That lie bestrown unsightly and unsmooth, 
Ask riddance. . . . (4, 625-32)

The garden is something akin to chaos, requiring the ordering mind of humanity to bind it, contain it, rein it in. Yet, the mind of humanity is to turn at Nature’s bidding: “as Nature will, Night bids us rest” (4, 633). Humanity is under the guidance of the natural order just as the natural order is bound by the restrictions of human habitability. Nature and humanity mutually contain each other, restrict each other, establish limits and boundaries. Prelapsarian knowledge discerns these boundaries; it is not ignorant of them.

Satan decides to “excite thir minds / with more desire to know, and to reject / Envious commands” (4, 522-4). The word “excite” derives from the Latin ciere, meaning to set in motion. The minds of Adam and Eve must be set in motion from their present state of being. The motion is to be both away from and towards something, as is all motion. Desire is an awareness of absence, of lack. Satan intends to increase or create Adam and Eve’s awareness of absence. Through the medium of absence, Satan hopes to set the mind in motion away from its current state of innocence towards knowledge. The order of motion is significant—first, towards an object, knowledge; and, secondly, away from their current state, “to reject.” Satan is careful, however, to imply that the movement away be as decisive as the movement towards; hence the word “reject.” To reject is to throw back: The word implies a returning, a regurgitation of sorts, a purging. What is rejected becomes abject. Instead of evil being abject and serving to define reality in Paradise, God’s interdiction becomes abject. That which is abject, even as it defines, organizes, and limits, also threatens the definition, entices, attracts. Knowledge must be contained within the borders of innocence, but one must approach those borders to understand those limits.
Satan believes that in order to create disobedience, the appearance or presentation of possibility is sufficient. The heart of the dream, for Satan, is the “One shap’d and wing’d like one of those from Heav’n / By us oft seen” (5, 55-6). The manner in which this figure defiantly disobeys is meant to raise questions in the vulnerable Eve: “is Knowledge so despis’d? / Or envy, or what reserve forbids to taste?” (5, 60-1). The dream goes one step further and actually rewards Eve’s disobedience: “Forthwith up to the Clouds / With him I flew” (5, 86-7). Satan directly challenges the interdiction in the dream. The dream does more than suggest; it explicitly states that the interdiction only stunts the growth of Adam and Eve. The questioning of the interdiction, coupled with the transgression and reward, attempts to reconfigure the realm of Eve’s possibility. The dream hopes to take Eve to a portion of Chaos where possibility is endless in the belief that, given the choice between restriction and non-restriction, Eve will choose the unlimited potentiality of disobedience under the guise of freedom.

Satan’s construction of the dream is built upon his own interpretive skills. Upon seeing Adam and Eve, Satan becomes aware of his own alienation and desire as a source of suffering. Overhearing Adam and Eve’s conversation, he mistakenly concludes that their harmony and unity rest upon the ignorance of possibility and lack of desire. The dream is meant to instigate an awareness of disobedience as a possibility, creating a desire that will lead simultaneously towards disobedience and away from God.

The Narrator’s Rendering: Confusion Abounds

In an interesting turn in the poem, the reader never actually witnesses Satan implanting the seeds of temptation. Rather, the mechanism of this implantation is only hinted at; the narrator does not explicitly state it. The narrator joins us as an outsider trying to read the event; the narrator makes the first attempt at interpreting the dream and its function.

The actual implanting of the dream by Satan and the experience of the dream by Eve are hidden from us as readers. We are left outside the experience, and it must be
recounted to us by Eve. After Satan establishes his plot, we shift to the angels’ search for him. Both the angels and we, the readers, find Satan to be “Squat like a Toad, close at the ear of Eve” (4, 800). The reader, the angels and Adam are excluded from the experiences of Satan and Eve; we stand outside the event, attempting to interpret its significance and impact. More significantly, the narrator also suffers from the same lack of insight. The narrative voice suggests possibilities but fails to establish certainty.

The narrator betrays his lack of insight into the nature of the dream by the inclusion of the conjunction “Or.” The narrator is first to interpret the dream:

Assaying by his Devilish art to reach  
The Organs of her Fancy, and with them forge  
Illusions as he list, Phantasms and Dreams,  
Or if, inspiring venom, he might taint  
Th’ animal spirits that from pure blood arise  
Like gentle breaths from Rivers pure, thence raise  
At least distemper’d, discontented thoughts,  
Vain hopes, vain aims, inordinate desires  
Blown up with high conceits ingend’ring pride. (4, 801-09)

The significant key to this passage is the ambiguous “Or.” Two distinct interpretations lie on either side of this critical “Or,” and the force of both is diminished by the inconclusiveness of the “Or.” Once again, the poem makes the reader aware that he or she and the narrator stand outside of the situation. The precise experience of Eve is uniquely hers. We can speculate and interpret the exact nature of Eve’s experience, but the narrator makes us aware that we are interpreting. The uncertainty of the “Or” disrupts the certainty of any interpretation built on this passage.

The first interpretation by the narrator emphasizes the role of the Fancy and the relationship between the Fancy and the Mind. The narrator, though, does not go into any

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90 Louise Flavin, in “Similar Dramatic Function of Prophetic Dreams: Eve’s Dream Compared to Chauntecleer’s,” *Milton Quarterly* 17 (1983): 132-38, appears to accept the validity of the narrator’s interpretation without question: “The passage reveals that Satan intends to work on Eve through a dream that will be generated in one of two ways.” She underestimates the role of Milton’s narrative voice; we must always keep in mind that the narrator is approaching his subject matter as an already fallen individual. We must also distinguish between “intent” and causation within the poem.
explanation of the nature of the relationship between either the Fancy and the Will or the Fancy and the Mind, nor does he elaborate on Satan’s use of the Fancy to forge “Illusions.” The pictorial simile—“like a Toad”—that the scene uses, however, acts as something of a guide to this event. The image is of a toad whispering into Eve’s ear. At the root of the word obedience is the word *audire*, to hear. In Milton’s construction of the good work in *De Doctrina Christiana*, God must ultimately be the formal, final, and efficient cause for a work to be truly good. In the case of the dream, however, Satan is the efficient cause. The final cause is temptation, and the formal cause is a dream. The obvious problem for Satan is that if the object itself, the tree of knowledge, has thus far proven insufficient to arouse desire, then a simple remanifestation of the object in the dream will be pointless. Satan must somehow connect the discrete entities of the tree and Eve and bind them. Obviously, without coercion, Satan cannot make the connection to her directly, so he must create a possibility, or make the possibility real in some sense. The Fancy is the place where the mind can create possibilities and permutations. The dream becomes a piece of sense data prompting the mind to act, either affirmatively or negatively. Either way, the possibility of failure has been actualized to some degree in the mind of Eve. The possibility of sin has been internalized and ceases to be strictly theoretical; the possibility is something experienced.

The other interpretation presented by the narrator stresses the physical motion of desire. Satan appears to have been well versed in the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes.

Satan intends to generate a physical motion, to generate a physical desire in Eve, a motion

91Patricia Howison, in her article “Memory and Will: Selective Amnesia in *Paradise Lost,*” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 56 (1987): 523-39, argues that Satan does not so much mentally bind Eve and the tree as aid a forgetfulness within Eve as to the memorial status of the tree. Satan replaces the notion of the tree as memorial with the notion of the tree containing its own inherent power. Howison’s argument places an inordinate role on the memory instead of the will. It implies that the will would have been stronger if the memory had been longer. The memory, as Milton would have it, is not a Hobbesian memory; it does not initiate action. Memory aids the will; memory’s faulty function inclines one towards failure, but Milton, I believe, would object to memory being seen as a cause. The failure must reside in the will if culpability is to be complete and authentic. Flavin refers to Bundy’s 1942 article, which argues that Satan “was not attempting to plant a dream but to use the fancy to forge or ‘fuse out of materials already there’ illusions, phantasms, and dreams” (132).
around her heart to induce her to act. The parallels with Hobbes’s explanation of human action are apparent. Discontented thoughts distemper the blood, creating “vain hopes, vain aims, inordinate desires” (4, 808). Like a fly buzzing around a toad, the object creates a desire within and a physical response. It is a scientific, Hobbesian view of the scene. In such a rendering, Eve becomes something of a victim, an innocent in a dramatic struggle between God and Satan. In other words, such an interpretation displaces Adam and Eve from the story; the real struggle is not their struggle. Adam and Eve become objects rather than subjects. By his actions, Satan does appear to view Adam and Eve as objects, as tools to assault the fortress of creation and heaven, but are we to follow his logic unquestioningly?

In either case, be it through a stimulation of the organs of her fancy or a motion around her heart, the result of the narrator’s presentation is the same: Eve has been dislodged from her former state of innocence. Following the passage, we easily conclude a possibility has somehow been actualized within her, leaving her more vulnerable to falling, to failing. This interpretation is precisely the path that so many scholars have followed and the one which Stanley Fish finds so objectionable. A dichotomy has been created: Has Eve fallen before the Fall or has she not? Neither conclusion is really legitimate given the uncertainty of the passage.

Both conclusions are misguided because they assume something of the narrator that the narrator never assumes: certainty. Quite the opposite occurs as the narrator retreats from the event of the dream; his knowledge is deliberately limited. First, the narrator does not speak about what Satan is doing or what he achieves, but what Satan intends to accomplish. The narrator states, “Assaying by his Devilish art to reach / The Organs of her Fancy…” (4, 801-2). The word “assaying” means, according to the OED, “The action of trying or proving.” The word speaks of the intentions of Satan; it says nothing at all about the parameters of that trial. Moreover, the narrator states that “if… he might taint” (4, 804, emphasis mine). The text refuses to speculate upon the extent to
which Satan can truly achieve this end. The narrator carefully suggests two distinct possibilities for Satan without indicating whether the actualization of either of these two possibilities is feasible or does take place.

Moreover, the narrator stumbles upon the entire incident in the first place. The scene’s focus is not the dream but the confrontation between Satan and God through the angels. The angels discover Satan doing something, “like a Toad,” beside Eve’s ear. A mere nine lines focus on the activity of Satan. The rest of the fourth book is taken up with the verbal sparring between these mighty foes. Adam and Eve almost disappear in the cosmic background. The angels, like Satan, fail to see Adam and Eve as participants, as subjects, as free entities. Instead, Adam and Eve become objects to be protected from Satan, innocents whose innocence must be maintained and defended. The notion of freedom, implicit in any interdiction, is noticeably lacking in the scene.

Considering the vagueness of the “explanation,” the narrator’s comments about Eve’s dream reveal very little to the reader about its impact on Eve. The narrator claims much less than is often granted to the passage. The overinterpretation of the significance of the words reveals our own desire to understand. The narrator stands outside the event—hinting at the meaning and the effect of the dream without examining the dream itself or listening to Eve’s account.

The narrator attempts to understand the nature of temptation and suggests possible theories for its effectiveness. The text suggests two possibilities: that Satan assaults the organs of Fancy or that Satan “might taint / Th’ animal spirits.” Both approaches lead us to the conclusion that Eve is somehow more inclined to fall after the dream than before it. The narrator, however, does acknowledge his uncertainty. Such uncertainty should cause us to examine the validity or invalidity of the theories presented.

**The Response of Adam: Analysis of Mechanism, Ignorance of Content**

Adam, in comforting Eve, makes one of the most powerful statements regarding the nature of innocence and free will found within *Paradise Lost*: “Evil into the mind of
God or Man / May come and go, so unapprov'd, and leave / No spot or blame behind" (5, 117-19). Why, then, is Adam’s total response so unsatisfying? Why are readers so frequently unconvinced? Adam’s response attempts to shift the ethical burden from the thought itself to the act of consent. This shift, however, fractures the integrity of Eve’s experience. Moreover, Adam’s effectiveness at clarifying the relationship between willing, acting and thinking is dubious. His words seem to confuse when they intend to clarify.

Adam’s primary purpose is to absolve Eve from culpability and to find a potential source for the dream. Adam states that the dream is “of evil sprung I fear; / Yet evil whence?” (5, 98-9). Adam’s experience, to date, cannot accommodate an external source of evil. But neither can it account for an internal source of evil: “in thee can harbor none [evil], / Created pure” (5, 99-100). Adam’s search for causes is limited to God as the creator of all. That God creates evil within Eve is, not surprisingly, unacceptable and loathsome to Adam. Both possibilities for the evil dream, of an external or an internal source, are equally unacceptable given Adam’s limited range of experience.

In order to understand the source of the dream, Adam pursues another path which involves charting the human soul. Adam ultimately arrives at a definition of the soul and the interrelationship of its faculties that allows for random, independent functioning of various individual faculties. The burden of ethical conduct is removed from these random functionings and transferred to the chosen, the regulated, the dictated. Consequently, content becomes of secondary importance and consent, permission, openness become the hallmarks of steadfastness or of failure.

The crux of Adam’s psychological charting of human activity is the distinction between Reason and the faculties that serve Reason, the chief being Fancy. Adam states, “But know that in the Soul / Are many lesser Faculties that serve / Reason as chief” (5, 100-2). Fancy serves as something of a receptacle for sense data and as a conjoiner of possibilities. External things approach us through the “five watchful Senses” (5, 104).
These senses, in turn, “represent” “all external things” to the Fancy (5, 103-4). The Fancy “forms Imaginations, Aery shapes” (5, 105) from these representations. Representations are closely linked to the experience itself, while Fancy is a distinct, autonomous act. Reason, however, also partakes in the activity of “joining or disjoining” (5, 106). The Reason’s powers go beyond simple combinations; the reason “frames / All what we affirm or what deny, and call / Our knowledge or opinion” (5, 106-8). The Fancy has this strange position that appears to duplicate or mirror Reason’s functions.

The Fancy may also function to provide the semantics for Reason’s syntax. Clearly, “Imaginations” are distinct from that “which the five watchful Senses represent” because the Fancy forms “Imaginations, Aery shapes” from them (5, 104-5). The question remains how and why they are distinguished. Most likely, representations are bound to the experience directly. If we recall Hobbes, Imaginings and Imagination are the diminishing sense impressions created by the movement of external objects. Adam’s postulation of the entity of Fancy parallels Hobbes’s notion of imagination. According to Hobbes, the mind deals exclusively with conceptions, be they vibrant and present or diminished and imagined. Language allows for the recollection of certain conceptions in the absence of the actual object. For Hobbes, all knowledge is experience—either external and original or internal, deriving from the conjunction and disjunction of words. For Hobbes, it is perfectly legitimate and possible that one could have trouble distinguishing between reality and a dream.

Adam, on the other hand, clearly postulates that this entity of Fancy stands between representation and Reason. First, Adam states that there “are many lesser Faculties that serve / Reason as chief; among these Fancy next / Her office holds” (5, 101-3). Adam then speaks of “external things, / Which the five watchful Senses represent” (5, 103-04). Fancy “forms Imaginations” (5, 105). Reason does seem to work propositionally, as in Hobbes—“Reason joining or disjoining, frame / All what we affirm or what deny” (5, 106-07, emphasis mine), but it is active, not passive, in its work. The
Reason joins, disjoins and frames both “Our knowledge and opinion” (5, 108). For Hobbes, Fancy merges with Reason as Reason; the truth or falsity of a given proposition arises from the proposition itself, from the language and the way the words fall into place. To quote Hobbes again on this matter:

the former being the experience of the effects of things that work upon us from without; and the latter experience men have from the proper use of names in language: and all experience being, as I have said, but remembrance, all knowledge is remembrance. . . . (iv. 27)

Reason follows Fancy in a determined way for Hobbes:

Seeing the succession of conceptions in the mind are caused . . . it must needs follow, that one conception followeth not another, according to our election, and the need we have of them, but as it chanceth us to hear or see such things as shall bring them to our mind. (iv. 19, emphasis mine).

For Adam, however, Reason seems actively to arrange imaginations supplied by the Fancy into propositions that are then accepted or refuted. The Reason looks to Fancy to supply material, to provide a vocabulary for its functioning.

But Fancy mimics the functions of Reason as well: “mimic Fancy wakes / To imitate her [Reason]” (5, 110-11). Fancy also appears capable of combining distinct conceptions into propositions. These propositions tend to be monstrous in proportion: “but misjoining shapes, / Wild work produces oft, and most in dreams, / Ill matching words and deeds long past or late” (5, 111-13). Reason thus shifts to a role of framing, containing, restricting the unlimited possibilities of the imagination. The Fancy appears as something of a manifestation of the chaotic, of the mixture, of a return to the indistinguishable and uninformed matter that preceded creation. The Fancy is the home of possibility, of multiplication, duplication, conjugation, endless permutations. It reflects an order distinct from creation and reflects the order/disorder of pre-creation, or chaos.

Reason's role is to displace or contain the internal chaos that is Fancy. Adam needs to ascertain whether sheer possibility constitutes a reality of some sort. The question is: Does the threat of the dream actually unseat the reality that confronts Eve when awake? This question lies behind Adam's distinction between thinking and willing, and this distinction is the crux of the passage and of his response to Eve's dream.

Adam rejects the ontological reality of the strictly possible. Potentiality remains simply potentiality. It is in the shift from potentiality to actuality that one can incur guilt. The shift from conceptual to actual occurs with an act of will (which, at this point, seems to be equated with Reason):

Evil into the mind of God or Man
May come and go, so unapprov'd, and leave
No spot or blame behind: Which gives me hope
That what in sleep thou didst abhor to dream,
Waking thou never wilt consent to do. (5, 117-21)

One can have a ball thrown to one without playing catch. The danger is in catching the ball directed towards us. In this case, Eve's abhorrence is sufficient evidence of her rejection of the substance of the dream. The Latin root of "abhor" means "to shudder." To shudder is a physical reaction to the repugnant, the horrific, the unthinkable. Adam applies this term to Eve's response, indicating the strength of her reaction to the thoughts contained in the dream. Eve's manifest discomfort is a testament to her innocence; the dream remains apart from her, distinct. Eve has, however, entered the domain of internal chaos, of possibilities beyond those restricted by the harmony of Eden, her relationship with Adam, or by Reason, but she has done so unwillingly. She has been altered by the dream; one cannot enter the domain of possibility and not be aware of other distinct potentialities contained within creation. Yet, Eve remains innocent so long as she restricts the chaos to her Fancy. If her Reason does not actively formulate, join, disjoin, or frame that which must be rejected, Eve remains unstained.
While no mention of the will is made in Adam’s response to Eve’s dream, implicit differences exist between “consent to do,” the “Evil into the mind” that remains “unapprov’d,” and Reason which “frames / All what we affirm or what deny, and call / Our knowledge or opinion. . . .” In this passage it appears that Reason consents or dissents, approves or denies, accepts or rejects, but a closer reading of Adam’s words makes this understanding less clear.

The relationship between content and choice and the function of the Reason is less than clear. According to Adam, Reason constructs the text of knowledge from the vocabulary provided by the Fancy. Fancy “forms Imaginations, Aery shapes. . . .” Reason then takes these “Imaginations” and joins or disjoins them, forming propositions. In this activity of joining and disjoining, Reason “frames / All what we affirm or what deny, and call / Our knowledge or opinion. . . .” (emphasis mine). Reason creates or produces what we affirm or deny, what we call knowledge or opinion; the passage gives no clear indication that Reason affirms, denies, or distinguishes between knowledge and opinion. Moreover, “Evil into the mind of God or Man / May come and go, so unapprov’d. . . .” The content of the mind, the ideas that “we affirm or what deny” can be evil and still no guilt will accrue. It is only in the affirmation of what is evil that the soul is burdened and stained. Consent becomes the key word in Adam’s monologue on dreams and the mind. The degree of consent establishes whether something is considered knowledge or opinion. Knowledge I demonstrate; opinion I argue. Both, however, are distinct from the framing of the content.

Adam’s psychological analysis of the state of consciousness and rest, wakefulness and dreaming draws attention to the consensual aspect without directly addressing it. Adam declares Reason to be the chief among the faculties of the soul, but then gives it the

93Here, I diverge from Flavin who stresses the importance of the word “consent” in the passage “Waking thou never wilt consent to do.” The role of consent is important, but it is strikingly overlooked in Adam’s interpretation. The issue of the dream is whether Eve has somehow succumbed to sin, not what she will do in the future.
task of framing what we affirm or deny from the Imaginations supplied by the Fancy. The text implies that approval is necessary for sin to occur, and Adam is assured that Eve “never [will] consent to do.” The element lacking in Adam’s speech is how one approves or disapproves, how one affirms or denies.

The evasiveness of Adam’s statements about a distinct faculty of the will relates directly to the opposition Milton would have had to Hobbes. If the word “memory” replaces Adam’s word “Fancy,” Hobbes would not be overly disturbed by Adam’s explication of the soul. The role of consent is precisely what is being debated, whether consent follows from desire and from the proposition itself or whether there is a freedom within the individual which allows for consent and dissent.

Adam’s speech clearly implies a relationship among the Senses, Fancy and Reason; however, all three can also act independently. The Fancy is blamed for the dream, although twice Adam acknowledges the inadequacy of his account: “This uncouth dream, of evil sprung I fear; / Yet evil whence? in thee can harbor none, / Created pure” (5, 98-100) and, speaking of the role of Fancy in the creation of the dream, “methinks I find / Of our last Ev’nings talk, in this thy dream, / But with addition strange...” (5, 114-16). There are actually two elements unexplained in Adam’s account: the source of this “addition strange” and the mechanism of approving or consenting. Adam accounts for the Fancy’s fabrications, but not for the source of the fabrications. More importantly, by emphasizing the distinction between Reason and Fancy, Adam suggests that if the Reason remains pure, Eve will remain pure. Adam’s failure to consider the nature and mechanism of consent places an inordinate emphasis on the Reason to the neglect of the will.

**Eve’s Account of the Dream: Finding a Perspective**

With the rush of interpretation around the dream, a forgetfulness attends the dream experience itself. Satan and the narrator are concerned about the effect of the dream; Adam is concerned about causes. Eve relates the dream, but Adam does not seem to listen to the dream itself. The dream reveals an organization of experience built upon a
sexual hierarchy that renders Eve particularly vulnerable to Satan's promptings. At the same time, Satan's dream is effective almost incidentally; the dream stumbles upon Eve's great weakness and the weakness in Adam's and Eve's relationship. The problem is that Adam serves as Eve's frame of reference; Eve organizes her experience in terms of her relationship with Adam. Remove that frame and Eve flounders and becomes dependent upon whatever is familiar for orientation. In the dream, the tree of knowledge displaces Adam as Eve's frame of reference. Instead of listening to the dream and responding to it, Adam attempts to explain it, dismiss it. Ultimately, this proves disastrous because both Adam and Eve cling to a world view that is now obsolete with the presence of evil in the form of Satan. Their failure is rooted not in the dream but in their failure to change in light of the dream.

As Eve understands dreams, they are restricted to three realms of being: Adam, the supreme object of her devotion and the ground of her experience; the work of the past; and the anticipated work of tomorrow. Eve comments that

\[
\text{for I this Night,} \\
\text{Such night till this I never pass'd, have dream'd,} \\
\text{If dream'd, not as I oft am wont, of thee,} \\
\text{Works of day past, or morrow's next design} \\
\text{But of offense and trouble, which my mind} \\
\text{Knew never till this irksome night. . . . (5, 30-35)}
\]

Adam is the binding force between the past and future, the fulcrum of time for Eve. Dreams only deal with the past or with the anticipated future; the only present in the dream is the existence of Adam. Upon waking, Eve declares of Adam, "O Sole in whom my thoughts find all repose" (5, 28). Insofar as the presence of Adam is foremost in Eve's

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94 I disagree with Richard Turner's comment that "Up to that point Adam had experienced only oracular and prophetic dreams and had learned of naturally caused dreams" ("The Interpretation of Dreams and Audience in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained," Papers on Language and Literature 19 (1983): 368). Such a notion disregards all that Eve has spoken and makes her response irrelevant. If we are to assume that the prelapsarian Adam is worth listening to, then we should accord the same respect to prelapsarian Eve.
thoughts, insofar as her relationship with Adam frames all of her experience, Eve feels that she stands within the safe confines of nature and revelation.

Evidently, the dream is confusing to Eve; it causes her to question whether it was a dream at all: “Such night till this I never pass’d, have dream’d / If dream’d” (5, 31-2, emphasis mine). The elliptical clause “If dreamed” is strategically placed at the beginning of the line to draw attention to the question it poses. Grammatically, the clause serves as an aside; poetically, the line break draws attention to the clause and gives it an emphasis that would otherwise be lost or diminished.

Eve’s confusion results in part from the enigmatic voice that beckons her. She recounts that in the dream “one call’d me forth . . . With gentle voice, I thought it thine” (5, 36-7, emphasis mine). The confusion of the voice allows for the continuation of the dream experience. Eve’s experience is intertwined with her history with Adam, so it is understandable that she would trace the voice’s origin either to Adam or to a voice leading her to Adam. In book 4, Eve recounts the experience of a voice that is not Adam’s:

there I had fixt
Mine eyes till now, and pin’d with vain desire,
Had not a voice thus warned me, What thou seest,
What there thou seest fair Creature is thyself,

... what could I do,
But follow straight, invisibly thus led?
Till I espi’d thee, fair indeed and tall,
Under a Platan, yet methought less fair. . . (4, 465-78)

As a general rule, if Eve hears a voice that is not Adam’s, it should lead her to Adam. Moreover, the voice is associated with a revelation of identity. The divine voice informs Eve that “What thou seest, / What there thou seest fair Creature is thyself” (4, 467-8). The illusion of otherness is shattered by the voice who promises to lead her “where no shadow stays / Thy coming, and thy soft imbraces, hee / Whose image thou art” (4, 470-2). The
voice leads her from a reflection of herself towards someone of whom she is a reflection. The text, however, does not reduce Eve to a mere reflection or image. What the passage does establish is the intimate nature of her relationship with Adam: She appears more intimately connected to Adam—"Whose image thou art"—than to her own reflection—"What there thou seest fair Creature is thyself." Eve is to see herself in relation to Adam. Consequently, in her dream, Adam's absence is provocative and disturbing. Adam's absence also facilitates a willingness to follow an outside voice which leads—a reenactment of the revelatory moment where she discovered her own identity.

Equally confusing to Eve is the way the voice plays with her conception of time. As Eve has already related, dreams are restricted to Adam, the past, and the anticipated future; the only present or the only continuous thread that runs through the normal dream experience is the presence of Adam. Yet, here the voice proclaims that "now is the pleasant time ... now reigns / Full orb'd the Moon" (5, 38-42, emphasis mine). The dream confuses the normal operation of time within the dream and distorts Eve's expectation of time and presence within a dream. The emphasis and repetition of the word "now" suggest that the dream is happening, that there is a merging of objective time and internal, dream time. Eve naturally assumes the presence or proximity of Adam, and the shift to the present causes her to confuse dreaming with waking. Dreaming and waking, normally distinct, blend and blur within the dream experience.

Eve's immediate response is to reconnect the dream experience to her own experience: "I rose as at thy call, but found thee not; / To find thee I directed then my walk" (5, 48-9). Eve seeks to complete her experience, to bind it to reality as she understands it. To Eve, experience is inextricably linked to experience with or of Adam, and Adam's absence and the incorporeality of the voice create within Eve desire: desire to be reunited, to be whole, to be contained within the normal dimensions of experience.

The use of "find" in its past tense and infinitive forms emphasizes Eve's need to ground

95Note the parallels with Song of Songs 3: 1-2.
her experience. Moreover, the phrase “found thee not; / To find thee” (5, 48-9) suggests a mirroring. The line of symmetry between the two variants of finding is the word “not.” “Not” is one of those wonderfully potent words of negation which happens to pun with “naught.” There is a rich sense of absence, loss, and negation in these lines. The lines do more than state that Eve goes to look for Adam in the dream, they imitate her feeling of loss and urgency.

The dream displaces Adam’s normative presence, or fills the gap of his conspicuous absence, with another object: “alone I pass’d through ways / That brought me on a sudden to the Tree / Of interdicted Knowledge” (5, 50-2). The binding entity of time, or that which allows this dream to occupy the present of Eve’s experience, is the recognizable presence of the Tree. The phrase “on a sudden” shifts the emphasis of the line from searching—“alone I pass’d”—to arrival and recognition—“brought me on a sudden.” The phrase “on a sudden” emphasizes this moment of recognition. She has obviously passed other objects, but “on a sudden” stresses arrival, something which startles. The pleasure of arrival and recognition enhances the beauty of the tree: “fair it seem’d / Much fairer to my Fancy than by day” (5, 52-3). Eve is no longer lost and wandering; even without Adam, she at least knows where she is. Moreover, only after she identifies the tree does she notice “One shap’d and wing’d like one of those from Heav’n” (5, 55). Eve herself states that “I wond’ring lookt” (5, 54) at something that should have been quite familiar and ordinary: the tree of interdicted knowledge. What we expect to startle her—the “One shap’d and wing’d”—is secondary and is treated as the familiar, “By us oft seen” (5, 56). The dream leads Eve through the emptiness of an Adamless landscape. Recognition of the tree allows Eve to be Eve; contact with the familiar makes it possible for Eve to assert her own identity by reassuring her that her identity, unlike her world, remains intact. The dream creates a vacuity that threatens Eve with panic and/or experiential collapse. This void must be filled. Eve searches for Adam but finds a tree. In that moment “That brought me on a sudden to the Tree” (5, 51), Eve discovers a
dichotomous experience: a present separate from Adam and a pleasantness (the pleasantness that comes from recognition) distinct from Adam. By removing Adam from her experience, Satan accidentally activates an authentic possibility of desire within Eve, and the tree fulfills the desire for the familiar within Eve. But, in providing the familiar, the tree becomes the grounding of the experience and, subsequently, a possible object of desire.

Eve displays an hierarchical understanding of experience that is severely threatened when faced by competing visions of experience. Because Eve sees and understands the world solely through her relationship with Adam, she is ill equipped to confront a world without him. The object of her devotion and desire corresponds with or is her interpretive framework for understanding the world. Through the combination of desire and experiential grounding, Eve has difficulty distinguishing between the two. In seeking the familiar, Eve seeks for the desired. The familiar normally coincides with desire. Satan, unintentionally and quite accidentally (for his source of experiential grounding is himself), stumbles upon the perfect way to shatter Eve's primary defenses against temptation.

The shattering of Eve's primary defenses does in no way indicate that she has fallen before the fall. Eve's preconceived notions about experience have been disrupted, but her actual experience remains intact. As Adam argues, Eve has neither initiated nor accepted anything. What the dream does do is make Eve more vulnerable to attack, particularly if Adam and Eve do not address the new reality in which they find themselves. Eve is especially vulnerable if she fails to contemplate the implications of negation and absence.

Eve's dependence upon Adam as the grounding of her experience places her in a distinctly dangerous position when confronted with an experience outside the narrow, exclusive patterns within which she functions. To speak simply, if she puts all her eggs in one basket and then loses that basket, she will become disoriented and lost. At the
moment of the dream, Eve is disassociated from paradise and therefore displaced from the reality that she understands. In short, she experiences absence and the accompanying anxiety. Eve staggers in this anxiety, overwhelmed by its burden until she discovers the familiar. The familiar, in this case, is that which is abject, that which defines the outside and the inside. The experience of potential loss of definition is replaced by the object that constitutes the ultimate loss. The search for definition finds its home in something other than Adam; it finds itself in the question of obedience itself, in the possibility that one can be other than or can be outside of oneself, can be interdicted. That the interdicted, the fruit of the tree, exists when all else is displaced from the dream suggests that the interdicted has become the ground of experience. Adam has proven unreliable as a ground of experience while the interdicted, the forbidden, remains. Eve's identity has become inextricably linked to the tree and its fruit.

When Eve awakes to life, she looks upon her own reflection. Her genesis experience is self-interpreted until an external voice calls her from that reflection into a relationship with Adam, whose reflection she is. Eve learns to defer the interpretive act; Adam becomes the means through which she understands the world. In the dream of book 5, a new identity presents itself for Eve: one linked to the tree and, more specifically, the choice that it represents. The dream forces Eve to see herself no longer merely in terms of her relationship with Adam, but now also in terms of her obedience/disobedience of the divine interdiction. The dream shakes Eve from an order contained and nurtured by her relationship with Adam and plunges her into a direct relationship with the imperative that contains her very existence: obedience.

**Conclusion: Absence and the Potentialities it Presents**

Many voices crowd the discussion of Eve's dream, both within and without the poem. Most critical commentary has focused on the effect of the dream: Is Eve tainted by the dream? Within the poem, four dominant impressions of the dream are presented. With Satan, we are given his intention, which is built upon his own ability to interpret the
world. Satan perceives the world in terms of power, and he builds his dream as a power struggle between ignorance and wisdom. The narrator, for his part, attempts to determine the actual mechanism of the dream and presents two theories: One foregrounds Fancy while the other sounds distinctly like Hobbes's understanding of human motivation. Both suggest the possibility of a tainting of Eve. Adam, seeking to absolve Eve from blame, discerns causes for the dream. He asserts innocence by recognizing the importance of affirmation, but his concern for cause draws him to speculate more on the role of Fancy than on Eve's response. Eve's account of the dream reveals much about Eve's current relationship with Adam. On one level, the very nature of that relationship makes it difficult for Eve to attend to the dream. Eve depends upon Adam for interpretation; Adam's concern about causes to the negation of content exposes Eve to greater dangers and to greater instability. Soon, however, Raphael will address the imperative to which Adam and Eve are individually and collectively bound. This imperative clarifies the disturbing value of Eve's dream. Eve's dream attempts to seduce by presenting the possibility of autonomy, independence, and the interpretive act. The dream actually reveals, however, that Adam and Eve are not simply bound to each other. The true and larger relationship that binds Adam and Eve is obedience. It is to this imperative--how it establishes independence and the necessity of the interpretive act--that we must now turn.
Chapter 5: The Exaltation: Freedom and the Speech Act of Promise

To this point, I have been exploring various aspects of the problem of freedom; this chapter delves into the radical solution proposed by Paradise Lost: a constitutive speech act by God establishes the parameters of obedience and disobedience. As already discussed, Hobbes rejects the will as an entity and freedom as a misunderstanding and misuse of language. Instead, he sees human activity as the result of forces stimulating the blood around the heart. Theologically, the seventeenth century demonstrates a concern about the compatibility of human freedom with the omnipotence of God. In De Doctrina Christiana, Milton proposes a theological understanding of human action which ensures the omnipotence of God and allows for human freedom. De Doctrina Christiana suggests that we constitute the material cause of a good act while God constitutes the formal, efficient and final causes. The crux of our materiality resides in the will, the affirmation or rejection of the other causes. Thus, we will our actualization. Regarding other, more hostile, causes, “Evil into the mind of God or Man / May come and go, so unapprov’d, and leave / No spot or blame behind” (5, 117-19).

Eve’s Dream, however, complicates the picture and introduces a myriad of problems. As Satan, the narrator, Adam, and Eve struggle with the meaning of the dream, the reader experiences a shift in orientation within Eve: away from the relationship with Adam and towards a direct relationship with the interdiction itself and the tree which represents it. Somehow, Adam’s and Eve’s identities are tied to the interdiction and the tree.

In this chapter, I argue that Raphael’s account of the rebellion in heaven, particularly what instigates it, reveals the significance of the interdiction of the tree and how Adam’s and Eve’s identities are tied to the tree. Essentially, Milton abandons psychology and approaches the problem of free will in terms of language: A speech act by the Father establishes freedom. The heavenly event analogous to the interdiction of the fruit of the tree—the elevation of the Son—establishes a new relationship between God and
the angels: one based on a promise. With promise comes choice, individuation, and the integrity of the individual.

A defining moment of *Parade Lost* occurs in book 5 with the exaltation of the Son. The exaltation of the Son not only defines the nature of the Son and his relationship with the angelic host; it also defines what constitutes nothingness. Theologians have traditionally resorted to privation or nothingness as the ground of evil: absence of absolute presence (God being the source and ground of Being), ungodliness, or the non-God constitute what is evil. In this sense, *Parade Lost* is neither original nor exceptional. However, having God create from himself, *ex Deo*, creates a problem for Milton that most theologians do not encounter: Why would God “create” nothingness? Milton’s solution is simple and daring: The potential for nothingness grounds freedom. Moreover, God does not “create” nothingness (this would lead to a realism which would prove untenable); the exaltation, however, defines the meaning of obedience and of its counterpart, disobedience. In other words, God implies nothingness, or the possibility for nothingness, by creating obedience. As well, God’s defining speech act is a constitutive act: it reconfigures the universe, changes the environment radically. By a simple act of language, God predicates the universe on a free choice and allows it to stand apart from himself.

Before examining the nature of the exaltation itself, I will briefly discuss two issues: the problem of individuation, especially for Milton’s conception of creation, and the distinction between a regulative and constitutive act. Much criticism fails to see the difference between a regulative and a constitutive act of speech, and a number of “problems” disappear in the light of this distinction. I will also examine the exaltation itself and consider how the exaltation stands as an argument against religious and secular determinism.
Individuation: How To Be Distinct From an Omnific Being

Before beginning any discussion on the possibility of freedom, we need to consider what constitutes an individual. Without individuality, the actions of a person can too easily be attributed to society, God, fate, predestination, and, today, bad genes. To argue for personal freedom of choice, Milton needs to establish the principle of individuality: not only that it exists, but how. In the seventeenth century, a number of possible solutions for individuation existed: Thomistic, Scotistic, Nominalist (Ockham and Hobbes), Cartesian, and Spinozan. For Milton, each of these solutions would have had serious shortcomings and would conflict with his understanding of creation and/or freedom.

Milton, in Areopagitica, explicitly suggests an awareness of both Thomism and Scotism. When speaking of Spenser, Milton writes, “whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas.”96 The mere mention of both names in Areopagitica indicates that both positions need to be addressed. Milton is not the type of thinker to dismiss something out of hand; he knows well what he rejects. In order to understand either Scotus and Aquinas, we need to understand the framework both adopted: moderate realism.97 By realism, I mean that universal words, such as “human,” “dog,” “table,” refer to some actual entity inhering in individual humans, dogs, and tables. The issue of universals proved historically important in theology, but the solutions of Aquinas and Scotus ultimately proved unsatisfactory to Milton. Realism, by stressing the commonality of kind (for instance, “dogness”), raises the question of individuation: What makes Joe distinct from Sam? For Milton specifically, if God creates from himself (ex Deo), what makes the created universe distinct from God?

For Aquinas, matter is the source of individuation. To understand what he means by this, the case of angels is illustrative. An angel is a being uninvolved with matter: An angel has a formal but not a material cause. According to Aquinas, there can, consequently, be no species of angels. Each individual angel constitutes a species in itself, a species of one. The reason each individual constitutes a species unto itself is that each angel needs a distinct form in order to exist without a material cause. Having a distinct form means being a distinct species.\(^{98}\)

*Paradise Lost* quite explicitly rejects matter as the cause of individuation. In book 5, Raphael tells Adam,

> O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom  
All things proceed, and up to him return,  
If not deprav’d from good, created all  
Such to perfection, *one first matter all,*  
Indu’d with various forms, various degrees  
Of substance, and in things that live, of life. . . . (5, 469-474, emphasis mine)

If all share the same first matter, matter can hardly be the cause of individuation.

Moreover, Chaos, in book 2, complains that heaven, hell and the earth all come from his realm: “first Hell / Your dungeon stretching far and wide beneath; / Now lately Heaven and Earth, another world / Hung o’er my Realm” (2, 1002-5). As heaven, hell and the earth all share in this first matter, matter shows itself to be an inadequate source of individuation.

Scotus, like Milton, rejects matter as the source of individuation.\(^{99}\) Instead, Scotus postulates a “thisness” or “haecceitas” as the principle of individuation. Thus, there is a

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formal ground for individuation. To use the example of the angels, Scotus’s “thisness” means that there can be a number of angels within the same species of angels. Of course, the meaning of “thisness” is rather vague, and one can do little more than assert its existence.

For Milton, “thisness” presents a possible solution, but the source of this “thisness” is ultimately unclear. In book 7, God states, “Let us make now Man in our image, Man / In our similitude . . . in his own Image hee / Created thee, in the Image of God / Express, and thou becam’st a living Soul” (7, 519-28). Clearly, God establishes the human form, but does God establish the “thisness” of the individual? What, exactly, does “thisness” consist of? As Scotus holds that individuation is a formal difference, “thisness” cannot consist of or be isolated to any activities or experiences of the individual which require a body, movement of that physical body, or time through which that body moves. As “thisness” remains at the formal level, it can only be attributed to God as creator of form, for a created being cannot determine its own form. Consequently, a formal level of differentiation implies divine involvement in the generation of each and every individual. Yet, Milton has God commanding reproduction: “Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the Earth” (7, 531). Aside from establishing a horribly inefficient duplication of activity, “thisness” requires a divine level of intervention which we simply do not see in Paradise Lost. In this poem, God delegates. More problematically, Satan engages in unsanctioned reproduction—Sin and Death—in book 2. If Milton follows Scotus, which seems unlikely, God is somehow involved in the “thisness” of Sin and of Death. Milton has been too careful to allow such a possibility to slip in unnoticed.

Nominalism (Ockham and Hobbes) opposes realism by asserting that only individuals exist; universals are simply mental abstractions from singulars. As a result, the source of individuation becomes largely irrelevant. Milton, however, posits a material commonality to all things: “one first matter all, / Indu’d with various forms, various degrees / Of substance, and in things that live, of life...” (5, 472-4). If Paradise Lost asserts that only singulars exist, the question remains as to how they exist.

The Cartesian explanation, which assumes a plethora of individual souls and asserts a spiritual dimension in creation, but also creates a dichotomy between body and soul, would hardly attract Milton. For Descartes, certainty rests in our awareness of our own thinking. However, being a thinking thing extends beyond a simple awareness; it excludes awareness of anything else beyond our own ability to think. As Thiel translates Descartes, “that each of us understands himself to be a thinking thing and is capable, in thought, of excluding from himself every other substance, whether thinking or extended, it is certain that each of us, regarded in this way, is really distinct from every other thinking substance and from every corporeal substance” (Thiel, “Individuation” 223).

Somehow, individuation rests in the soul, the thinking thing, but the means for our distinctiveness is an issue Descartes never deals with. As the world itself is always somehow tenuously connected to thought and does not impinge upon the autonomy of the soul, matter hardly constitutes individuality. In short, Descartes implies that individuation rests in the soul, but how individuation rests in the soul is never answered.

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Milton would likely find Cartesianism inadequate. For Milton, the mind is intricately linked to the body; the mind is coextensive with the body. The link between the body and mind is all encompassing in Paradise Lost; even the angels are not exempt from bodily activities such as eating: “food alike those pure / Intelligentia substances require / As doth your Rational” (5, 407-09). Bodies are not the mere vessels, convenient containers, for the soul. Moreover, each being contains both the grosser and purer elements: “both contain / Within them every lower faculty / Of sense, whereby they hear, see, smell, touch, taste, / Tasting concoct, digest, assimilate” (5, 409-12).

There is not a split between the body and spirit in Paradise Lost, but a continuum. We cannot begin to conceive of a soul without a corresponding body to experience. Even when Raphael distinguishes between spiritual and corporeal reality, he acknowledges that the limits of our understanding demand bodies: “what surmounts the reach / Of human sense, I shall delineate so, / By lik’ning spiritual to corporal forms” (5, 571-73). While a spiritual body, however this may be defined, seems to allow for three dimensional movement—“wing’d ascend / Ethereal, as wee, or may at choice / Here or in Heav’nly Paradises dwell” (5, 498-500)—the movement is still contained by a body moving over space in time. The rebel angels fall “Nine times the Space that measures Day and Night” (1, 50); they travel over space in time because they have bodies and dimension. Uriel, “gliding through the Even / On a Sun-beam” (4, 555-56), must transfer his spiritual body over space and over time, however quickly he may do so. Even though the rebel angels, in particular, appear capable of transforming their bodies in term of size and appearance, they remain constrained by dimension to some degree. In other words, the rebel angels retain some sort of physical presence, however altered. Although the relationship between matter and spirit is unclear in spiritual bodies, we can with certainty assert that they are recognizable bodies, meaning they occupy space and move through space in time.

The thinking of Milton’s close contemporary Baruch Spinoza (1632-77) probably sheds the most light on Milton’s understanding of individuation and the crisis for
freedom. Spinoza postulates that everything exists within God: Individuals are simply “modes” or limitations of divine attributes (Thiel, “Individuation” 229). The consequences of this understanding are profound. As Alan Donagan states, “As subject, every human mind is God: not God so far as he conceives himself as he is, but God so far as he constitutes the essence of that individual human mind.” What constitutes the individual, what individuates, is the proportion of motion and rest of a body:

There is no other mode in extension than motion and rest, and... each particular corporeal thing is nothing but a certain proportion of motion and rest, so much so that if there were nothing in extension except motion alone, or nothing except rest alone, there could not be, or be indicated, in the whole of extension, any particular thing. (Thiel, “Individuation” 230)

The interaction of one body with another determines the proportion of motion and rest of each body (Thiel 230). Individuation does not inhere in the individual but results from the interaction of modes of extension.

Spinoza’s conception of the world is, in regard to derivation, quite compatible with that portrayed in Paradise Lost; however, Spinoza’s understanding of freedom places him in opposition to Milton. Spinoza’s idea that individuals are simply modes of the divine is compatible with Milton’s creation ex Deo:

O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom
All things proceed, and up to him return,
                                                     
. . . one first matter all,
Indu’d with various forms, various degrees
Of substance. . . (5, 469-74)

to exist by itself or by something else. Every mode is determined by something outside itself. Spinoza defines freedom in the following manner:

That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone. But a thing is called necessary, or rather compelled, which is determined by another to exist and to produce an effect in a certain and determinate manner.¹⁰⁴

This definition of freedom negates human freedom because “Such a volition or action would be a mode and, as such, it would be determined from without” (Sleigh, Chappell and Della Rocca 1227). God alone is free in the strictest sense for Spinoza. Whether Spinoza is necessitarian in his views (i.e., God is responsible for every action) or simply adheres to a determinism which negates human freedom, the result is the same for Milton: the concept of one substance threatens freedom of the individual. The question is essentially the one that faces Milton: if creation comes from God, how can it be distinct from God? And if creation is merely an extension or mode of the divine, can anything in creation be distinct and free?

Milton’s unique portrayal of the world in Paradise Lost required him to develop a new ground of individuation, a ground intricately linked to freedom. Although Paradise Lost presents a materialist world, Aquinas’s solution of matter as the source of individuation is unsatisfactory because of the unicity of first matter. The “Thisness” of Scotus, aside from being overly complicated and vague, would implicate God in the formation of the allegorical figures of Sin and Death. Nominalism, while allowing for individuals, is difficult to reconcile with Milton’s portrayal of creation. The Cartesian account of individuation, for its part, denies an important, integral aspect of experience for Milton: the bodily. Finally, Spinoza’s account of creation, compatible with Milton’s, highlights the issue for Paradise Lost: How can one have both creation from God and

freedom of the individual? In the exaltation, Milton creates a new possibility through language that allows for both creation from God and individuation and freedom.

**God and Searle’s Speech Acts**

Before I discuss the speech act that establishes individuation and freedom, the idea of the speech act itself needs to be clarified. I am using the concept as discussed by John R. Searle in his book *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. After outlining the different types of speech act, I will demonstrate how commentary typically dwells on either the illocutionary or the perlocutionary. Ultimately, I will discuss the distinction (more significant for this paper) between regulative and constitutive rules within language.

For Searle, there are at least three fundamental types of speech act: utterance acts, propositional acts, and illocutionary acts. Moreover, the performance of one type of speech act does not exclude the others from the same utterance. The uttering itself of words or morphemes constitutes an utterance act. For example, the physical act of typing these shapes on the computer screen constitutes such an utterance. Propositional acts involve the reference and predication of an utterance. Searle use the examples of four utterances to clarify his point:

1. Sam smokes habitually.
2. Does Sam smoke habitually?
3. Sam, smoke habitually!
4. Would that Sam smoked habitually.

In each of these examples, reference and predication remain constant: “in uttering any of these the speaker refers to or mentions or designates a certain object Sam, and he predicates the expression ‘smokes habitually’ (or one of its inflections) of the object referred to.” Illocutionary acts involve the speech act as a whole: stating.

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questioning, commanding, speculating, and so on. An illocutionary act is what the person or, in Milton’s case, what God, the angels, or people do with language. Is the exaltation in book 5 a command? A warning? A threat? An assertion? A statement? How we understand the function of God’s speech act affects our interpretation of the import and meaning of it.

To complicate things even further, Searle discusses the notion of perlocutionary acts. A perlocutionary act is the effect of the utterance on the recipient of the utterance. For instance, reading this chapter may change the way one understands the exaltation. If one is persuaded, then persuasion is the perlocutionary act. The exaltation initiates the rebellion of Satan, but the exaltation also creates an opportunity for obedience in the steadfast angels. In the case of Satan, the perlocutionary act is disobedience and rebellion; in the case of Abdiel and the steadfast angels, obedience is the perlocutionary act. If one emphasizes the perlocutionary quality of the exaltation, one must somehow address the possibility that God can appear as the agent of rebellion.

Certain tendencies in scholarship become clear when examined from the perspective of these various speech acts. Generally speaking, not many scholars are particularly interested in the utterance act of the exaltation. Nor are they interested, on the whole, with the propositional content (although the meaning of “beget” is often discussed). The illocutionary and perlocutionary acts seem to be paramount in importance. My analysis of the exaltation stresses the illocutionary aspect of the utterance but also stresses its unique nature. However, before discussing the uniqueness of the exaltation, I need to discuss Searle’s distinction between regulative and constitutive rules.

According to Searle, regulative rules govern specific activities which exist with or without the rules. As Searle states, “regulative rules regulate antecedently or independently existing forms of behavior” (33). The activity must be “logically independent of the rules” (34). For example, we can eat with our hands or we can eat with a fork and knife. However, we make a point of telling our children, “Eat with your fork,
please!" and, by doing so, we create a regulative rule for an activity that would occur with or without the rule. If we see the exaltation as an instance of regulative rule making, we have to determine the state of affairs that exists independently of the rule. Existence itself appears to be the state of affairs that exists independently of the promise/threat of the exaltation. The exaltation concerns itself with the how of existence, obedience or disobedience, and the consequences of such. The moment, with such a reading, aligns the universe on moral lines of allegiance, a yea or nay to God. This type of reading also presupposes freedom: One does not impose a rule unless one presumes the individual’s ability to obey or disobey. What is more problematic is that, as a regulative rule, it is imposed from without; and a feeling of arbitrariness can pervade the scene. In other words, existence and freedom become givens; what is new is the sudden demand for obedience of a certain kind. As a regulative rule, it restricts freedom and autonomy ("[Who] can introduce / Law and Edict on us, who without law / Err not?" (5, 797-99)); the world is more constrained than it was before the rule.

Constitutive rules, on the other hand, “create and define new forms of behavior” (33). For example, without an ice surface, equipment, and some rules, could one be said to play ice hockey? Searle uses the examples of checkmate in chess or a touchdown in football: “The rules for checkmate or touchdown must ‘define’ checkmate in chess or touchdown in American football in the same way that the rules of football define ‘football’ or the rules of chess define ‘chess’” (34). In other words, rules create a whole new situation or reality. If one does not play by the rules, can one be said to play chess, football, and so on? The rules constitute the activity itself. In the exaltation scene in Paradise Lost, I argue, God creates a constitutive rule that alters the whole of reality.

Searle discusses how we can distinguish between a constitutive and regulative rule. He writes,

Regulative rules characteristically have the form or can be comfortably paraphrased in the form “Do X” or “If Y do X”. Within systems of
constitutive rules, some will have this form, but some will have the form
"X counts as Y", or "X counts as Y in context C". (34-5)

Biblical laws, for example, often take the form of a regulative rule: You shall circumcise
all male children, for example. Indeed, some biblical laws are regulative rules: You shall
not murder, for instance. Many biblical laws, however, are constitutive: They have more
to do with the identity of Israel than with moral astuteness. That is, the reason for the law
is to distinguish the Jewish people, not to identify some activity as being morally wrong
or right. The biblical notion of covenant is a prime example of a constitutive law. To
return to Paradise Lost, the exaltation scene on one level appears to say "Bow your
knee!" but it actually goes further and defines what constitutes obedience and
disobedience. This distinction between constitutive and regulative rules is very important
for what follows.

A Regulative Act?

Typically, scholars ignore the possibility that the exaltation scene is a constitutive
act unique to the poem. They focus instead on the propositional content of the scene
(What does "begetting" mean?), the perlocutionary aspect of the scene (How does Satan
respond to God’s utterance? What is the relationship between the utterance and the
response, the utterer and the respondent), or the illocutionary qualities (Is the utterance a
command? A promise? What, exactly, is this utterance?). Some, naturally, examine the
utterance as if it were an example of a regulative rule. Each of these approaches, however,
creates a problem, either in terms of individuation or in terms of freedom.

The propositional content of the scene has been of concern for writers such as
Edmund Creeth, Maurice Kelley, and Stella Revard. Creeth’s “The ‘Begetting’ and the
Exaltation of the Son”\textsuperscript{106} examines the two pronouncements on the Son in Books 3 and 5,
respectively. Creeth addresses the apparent problem that the Son is exalted in book 5
before he assumes the role of mediator (theoretically in book 3 and really after the

incarnation). Citing a number of scholars confused by this apparent double exaltation, Creeth focuses on H. J. C. Grierson’s argument that “begot” has a double sense: literal, the actual emanation or production of the Son; and metaphorical, the exaltation to kingship (697). The problem, as Creeth finds it, is a statement in De Doctrina Christiana: “The humiliation of Christ was succeeded by his exaltation” (698). Creeth argues that the pronouncement of book 3 is consistent with this statement in that book 3 avoids the term “begot” (698). Creeth shifts to Psalm 2 and argues that “beget” simply means that the Son has been made into a king: “This constituting as king is distinct from the exaltation but nonetheless a necessary element of Christ’s mediatorial function” (698-99). In other words, there is no mediatorial content to the utterance of book 5. Tracing the argument of Creeth and the people to whom he responds, we see a concern with propositional content guiding their criticism. Creeth traces words back to classical or biblical roots and searches for a consistency within Milton’s canon of writing. Whether Milton understood language in the way Creeth does is, naturally, quite open to debate.

Maurice Kelley’s This Great Argument, while more aware of context (poetry vs. systematic theology) than Creeth, still insists on a singularity of diction which foregrounds propositional content. Kelley attempts to reconcile the exaltation of book 5 with the historically posterior proclamation of book 3, and his argument really hinges on the possible meanings of the word “beget.” He refers to the scholars David Masson, H.F. Fletcher, and Grierson, who all held that “the word ‘begot’ meant in this instance something other than a literal suggestion” (95). Thus, Masson suggests that the Son exists as the Logos prior to the exaltation of book 5, but exists as Son only after the exaltation (95). Fletcher agrees fundamentally with Masson, but refers to the rabbinical writings of Rashi that assert that creation and appearance are distinct: The begetting of book 5 refers to the revelation, not the generation, of the Son (95). Grierson stresses the possibility of a double meaning of the word “beget”: one referring to the actual generation of the Son and

107 Maurice Kelley, This Great Argument (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1941).
the other referring to the exaltation (96). Denis Saurat puts forward a literalist understanding of “beget,” stressing the poetic need for the apparent inconsistency (96-97). According to Kelley, the exaltation of book 5 does not properly fit into De Doctrina because the exaltation exists only for poetic necessity, the need for motivation for rebellion. Yet, Kelley endorses a figurative interpretation of “beget”: “in proclaiming that Son ruler and vicegerent over the angels, he [God] is metaphorically generating a new thing—a king” (105). Kelley’s argument, like those of his predecessors, focuses on the propositional content of the word “beget.” “Beget” means more than existence itself; “beget” refers to different modes of existence—as Son, as King, as mediator, and so on. “Beget” refers to identity within existence more than to existence itself.

The very fruitful approach of examining the perlocutionary has been taken by Stella Revard in her book The War in Heaven. In the chapters “Pride as Intellective Sin” and “Envy and Pale Ire,” she concerns herself with the response of Satan to the decrees of God. While she does take time to justify the decrees themselves and considers what God is trying to accomplish with the decrees, the decrees for her become secondary to the perlocutionary response. For example, she writes, “It is one of Milton’s most remarkable paradoxes that the very decree that ‘causes’ Satan to revolt might have been, had Satan listened to it carefully and without the blinding fury of his pride, the means to stay his revolt” (57). Shortly thereafter, she writes, “The beginning of sin must be the reason’s mischoice and not the emotions’ misdirection, however strongly the emotions may be said to sway the reason. The cause of sin is intellective” (59). For Revard, the decree does not cause the fall; Satan’s intellective and wilful response causes the fall. God’s decree and the exaltation itself are of interest primarily because of the response they generate, not because of their propositional content or import. In her chapter “Envy and Pale Ire,” Revard again focuses not on the content of the decree but on Satan’s response to the decree. Satan envies the radiance of the Son and connects that radiance with the office, not the person, of the Son (79-80). Again, according to Revard, the intrinsic radiance of
the Son, grounded in love (80), simply is; Satan's response to that radiance generates the activity within the poem. Thus, Revard focuses almost exclusively on Satan's response to the decrees or on the perlocutionary effect of the divine speech act of the exaltation.

The problem with focusing on the perlocutionary act or the response to God's decree is that it overlooks God's speech act. For the reader to waver in his or her attention to God's pronouncement proves unwise considering that the poem sets itself to "justify the ways of God to men" (1, 26). Revard, indeed, gives us some wonderful insights into the character and nature of Satan, but she reveals very little about God or God's project. Revard's approach is simply to reject Satan. The assumption seems to be that if we reject Satan, Milton's project has, to some degree, succeeded. While Milton obviously does wish to cast doubt on Satan's "nobility," God's speech acts function at their own level. In other words, the speech acts of God, particularly the exaltation, are efficacious and significant, regardless of any perlocutionary impact they might have. Revard addresses these concerns, but only secondarily within the larger context of her anti-Satan argument. The illocutionary is secondary to the perlocutionary.

Much critical attention has, however, been granted to the illocutionary aspect of the exaltation or the question of what God is doing with his words at the exaltation of the Son. Some see the act as deliberately provocative, as initiating rebellion. Others see the speech act as part of Milton's theodicy.

For figures such as William Empson and John Carey, the exaltation amounts to little more than a direct provocation to rebel; it is little more than a taunt, a dare. The response of Satan, subsequently, speaks well of his character and, ironically perhaps, makes him profoundly compliant to the desires of God. In other words, God knows well that the exaltation will initiate rebellion, and this rebellion is what he desires. Empson argues that the exaltation effectively justifies the rebellion:

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it [the decree] makes the case for Satan's revolt look much stronger. If the Son had inherently held this position from before the creation of the angels, why has it been officially withheld from him till this day, and still more, why have the angels not previously been told that he was the agent of their creation? . . . to give no reason at all for the Exaltation makes it appear a challenge, intended to outrage a growing intellectual dissatisfaction among the angels with the claims of God. . . . he [Milton] was telling us a deep truth about the nature of God, whose apparently arbitrary harshness is intended to test us with baffling moral problems. (102-103)

Carey, for his part, is even more direct and explicit: "God's exaltation of the Son (V, 600-15), which starts all the trouble, is deliberately doctored by Milton so that it sounds provocative compared with its source (Hebrews 1, 6)" (81). The nature of the provocation, once again, centres on the meaning of the word "begot": "God, we cannot help feeling, needlessly gives some colour to the charge [of arbitrariness] by using the word 'begot' in the text of his announcement when he means 'promoted'" (81). Carey goes so far as to state that "God prods the devils into rebellion" and that "Vindictiveness, anger, and a passion for self-aggrandisement are three characteristics that bind Milton's God to his Satan" (82). The interesting aspect of these arguments is that they reveal very little about God's purpose. If we accept the notion that God initiates the rebellion and that God is arbitrary, there is still the problem why God would initiate a rebellion. And why would God feel a need to justify himself and be justified by such easily manipulated underlings? The argument for a malicious, erratic God seems out of temper with the poem and difficult to support. The other possibility, that God is deliberately naive, flawed, or ethically authoritarian, needs to be seriously addressed.

Other scholars, such as William B. Hunter, Jr., John T. Shawcross, and Dennis Danielson, see the illocutionary act of the exaltation as connected with Milton's theodical purpose. Although full of insight, these approaches tend to see the interdiction
accompanying the exaltation as a regulative act, not a constitutive act. I argue that seeing
the interdiction as regulative is, at the very least, presumptuous.

Hunter, in "Milton on the Exaltation of the Son: The War in Heaven in Paradise
Lost," argues that the exaltation, and the promises that effect that exaltation, bring
about a collapse of time. The Son is revealed as Son from the beginning, through the
historical resurrection, and at the end of time. The exaltation is less an elevation than it is
an instantiation. The moment of the exaltation draws our attention to the issue of time and
makes the Son the focus of time; time collapses into eternity. Hunter’s position skirts
many of the problems the text presents, such as why God chooses that particular moment
to reveal the identity of the Son. Satan’s response becomes something of a side issue; the
point is not the command as such but the identity of the Son. The command comes so we
can recognize the Son, and the command naturally proceeds from the identity revealed.
The whole point of the revelation thus appears more readerly than dramatic: The
exaltation is to show the reader how the Son unifies time. For Hunter, the language act
becomes pedagogical or didactic; we are the intended audience. The illocutionary act is
akin to identification, classification, delineation. While I do not deny that part of the
motivation of the Father’s speech act is identification and revelation, I will argue that the
command is not a natural progression. The revelation establishes an entirely new
relationship and, as a result, an entirely new reality.

Shawcross, in "The Son in His Ascendance: A Reading of Paradise Lost," argues that the theme of Paradise Lost centres on Providence, and the real climax of the
poem occurs at the end of book 6: The victory of the Son gives meaning to the fall of the
angels which opens the poem and to the fall of humanity which closes it. In his efforts to
support his thesis, Shawcross overlooks the importance of the act that initiates the angelic

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rebellion: “The War in Heaven came about through the envy of Satan and his cohorts when God created his Son, and they fall through their own false judgement and choice” (394). Shawcross appears to read the exaltation quite perfunctorily as a literal creation or generation of the Son. While the exaltation is not the focus of, or even an adjunct to, his argument, his cursory comments on the act that initiates the rebellion reveal an important attitude. Shawcross presumes freedom of will; if one assumes freedom of the will, then God’s illocutionary act is, quite simply, expository. If the speech act is expository—that is, if it articulates what is clearly evident—then the interdiction that accompanies it must be largely regulative, for it follows naturally from the premise. Shawcross focuses on Providence and assumes the validity of the providential; he does not question or examine the nature of the rebellion or the act which prompts it. The unquestioning nature of Shawcross’s examination ignores the complexity of God’s speech act.

Danielson, in Milton’s Good God, demonstrates how the exaltation serves the theodical function of rendering pre-fall existence meaningful through the agency of the Son. Danielson recognizes that God’s speech act is creative. Presupposing free will, he argues that obedience provides a purpose for creation. In other words, obedience gives us something to do. Danielson demonstrates that the Son’s position is not purely redemptive; the merit of the Son is not only a consequence of his initiative in book 3. I argue, however, that God is doing more than simply rendering pre-fall existence meaningful; God is making meaning itself possible through the creation of freedom. Again, Danielson’s argument presupposes that the interdiction is regulative, that it follows from the given state of affairs. The purpose of the command is our happiness. However, before the exaltation, choice or the exercise of free will, if we would even call it that, is restricted to the non-moral realm, just as, chronologically later, Eve’s choice of fruits in the garden is a non-moral act of choice. When we speak of freedom of the will, however, we usually mean choices made in the moral realm. The exaltation constitutes the moral realm.
The depth of the scene lies in its complexity. Each of the approaches I have surveyed brings out an important aspect of the scene. However, the various approaches do not adequately address the unique nature of this particular speech act of the Father. The exaltation is a deliberate act and is provocative; on this point, I agree with Empson and Carey. The command does not naturally follow from the revelation of the Son’s glory and identity; that is, the command is not simply a regulative illocutionary act.

Understanding God’s speech act at the exaltation as regulative proves problematic because of the issue of individuation. Critical to Milton’s project is the notion of freedom of the will. As discussed in earlier chapters, freedom of the will was not a given assumption in the seventeenth century but was under attack from both secular and religious perspectives. Milton further compounds his problem by introducing creation ex Deo. With this perception of creation come unique problems, as Spinoza discovered. Spinoza’s concept of creation, akin to Milton’s, clarifies the problem of individuation. Spinoza rejects human freedom on the grounds that we are modes or limitations of one divine substance. To say that we are distinct from God is like saying our hand or our foot is distinct from our body. Spinoza could not discern (nor did he see the need for) a mechanism which renders beings distinct from God. From Spinoza’s perspective, God becomes the only true free agent; we simply exist as modes of the divine. More importantly, regulative illocutionary acts do not make much sense without individuals to whom they apply.

The problem for Milton is how to reconcile his notion of creation with his belief in freedom of the will. Assertions by God and the angels that freedom of the will exists satisfy only a certain dramatic need for the reader. The assertions are reassuring, but they alone are not overly convincing. We need a sense of how God enables freedom and what constitutes that freedom. The exaltation provides that moment of insight.

The nature of one of Milton’s tasks, to show the importance of individuation and validity of freedom, reveals the flawed nature of any reading that sees the exaltation as a
regulative illocutionary speech act. If regulative, the command exists in a given state of affairs that presupposes freedom to choose. That presupposition, namely, that freedom of the will exists, was simply not self-evident when Milton wrote his poem. Given Milton’s belief in creation ex Deo, which is expressed within the poem, we are given no concrete indication how the angels can be anything but modes or extensions of the Father. As Spinoza points out, monism renders freedom meaningless. Milton’s innovation is the introduction of a divine speech act which creates--demands--choice. This possibility introduces a new notion and a new reality: that which falls outside the parameters of the promise or the territory claimed by God. Suddenly, nothing exists, at least as a possibility, and the angels are distinct entities tied to or severed from God by their response to the promise. In short, the demonstration of the grounding of freedom is the point behind the exaltation of the Son.

**Defining No-thing**

While the critical history of the exaltation illuminates much about the propositional content and the perlocutionary and illocutionary acts, the critical bias tends to see God’s speech act as regulative. However, if the act is a regulative act, the charge of arbitrariness on God’s part is a legitimate challenge within the poem. Just as seriously, freedom does not seem to be an authentic possibility without some sort of mechanism to enable it. I argue that the reader is to understand the entire scene as constitutive: outside of the context of a community of language users, the exaltation is, essentially, meaningless nonsense. Within the context of language, however, God does something profound: God defines negation itself and, by doing so, creates the basis for freedom.

Negation is an experience confined to language. Naturally, I do not mean that negation does not refer to the world outside of language; negation certainly does refer to the world. However, negation best applies to propositions whose truth value is being contradicted or denied. For example, for me to say “not!” without some context to which the negation can refer is to utter a meaningless statement. On the other hand, I can readily
negate or deny the following statement: “The Son is king of the universe and of the angels.” Moreover, outside of language and propositions, what does it mean to say that something is not there? We experience presence directly; however, we contemplate or, through language, create absence. For example, when Satan states, “Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell” (4, 75), his statement is grounded in personal experience. On the other hand, a statement such as Eve’s, “The tongue not made for Speech” (9, 749), only makes sense in the context of language where statements about tongues made for speech make sense. Without the affirmative possibility being meaningful, the negation cannot bring to bear its force.

The significance of the community of language users is demonstrated in the poem by the stress placed on gathering and identifying them. The poem attempts to show that the exaltation makes no sense without an audience. Raphael begins by recalling the summons: “th’ Empyreal Host / Of Angels by Imperial summons call’d, / Innumerable before th’ Almighty’s Throne / Forthwith . . . appear’d” (5, 583-86). Moreover, the gathering is formalized, ritualized: “Under thir Hierarchs in orders bright” (5, 587). The order already existent is significant. Distinction between rank and rank, order and order, is already evident, even if distinction seems to serve little purpose at this point. We are not given any criteria for the ordering, only a description: “Ten thousand thousand Ensigns high advanc’d . . .” (5, 588-91). The scene reveals little about the nature of the ordering but impresses upon the reader that an order exists.

After having gathered the angels, God demonstrates a keen awareness of audience. The opening address begins with a “Hear all ye” (5, 600), but the contents or purpose of the address is deferred by a process of naming. Any act of naming by God in the poem is a significant act. The act of naming acknowledges the legitimacy of presence; naming recognizes or establishes identity. The importance of naming in the poem is suggested by the significance of unnaming: “Satan, so call him now, his former name / Is heard no more in Heav’n” (5, 658-59) and “Though of thir Names in heav’nly Records
now / Be no memorial, blotted out and ras’d...” (1, 361-2). At any rate, before beginning the decree, God proceeds to list various titles or orders of the Angels: “Angels, Progeny of Light, / Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers” (5, 600-01).112 After listing the names, God again declares, “Hear” (5, 602), but this time the word is linked to the purpose of the gathering: “Hear my decree, which unrevok’t shall stand” (5, 602). The ordering of the introductory passage is important. God addresses the audience according to their titles and the existing hierarchies before embarking on the decree itself. The ordering draws our attention to the nature of the act, a speech act, specifically, a decree to a specific audience.

The decree opens with a declarative statement about, an appointment of, and a promise to the Son. The first passage is informational:

This day I have begot whom I declare
My only Son, and on this holy Hill
Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
At my right hand. ... (5, 603-6)

God declares to the Angels his act of anointing and begetting: “I have begot” and “Him have anointed.” The consequence of this declaration becomes apparent when God delineates the relationship between the Son and the Angels: “your Head I him appoint” (5, 606). Thus, the reason for the extensive naming in the opening becomes clear. After indicating the identity of his audience, God defines the relationship between this audience and the third entity, the Son. The relationship makes sense only when both parties involved are identified and defined. The next phrase can best be described as a promise, albeit a strange one: “And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow / All knees in Heav’n, and shall confess him Lord” (5, 607-8). This promise brings us to the crux of the matter: how can God promise what others must perform? In other words, God can, of course, quite legitimately anoint and beget and appoint, but to swear on the behalf of another is

112 Satan repeats the formula before addressing his gathering: “Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers” (5, 772).
an entirely different matter. God proceeds to establish appropriate consequences for
behaviour that aligns an individual with God’s promise or that disrupts God’s promise. In
establishing consequences, God defines—constitutes—the parameters of obedience and
disobedience.

By establishing parameters, God establishes a sense or meaning to the words
“obedience” and “disobedience”; more importantly, the context of promise reveals the
constitutive nature of the exaltation. God specifically does not use the word “obedience”
in the passage: “Under his Vice-gerent Reign abide / United as one individual Soul” (5,
609-10). The verb is to “abide.” The rest of the passage deals with where and how we are
to abide. The use of the word “abide” emphasizes the continuity of the relationship, a
relationship built upon promise not servitude. The idea of obedience only arises through
the emergence of the word “disobedience” in the latter part of the promise twice
mentioned (5, 611-12). “Obedience” only exists insofar as we discern its existence from
its opposite, disobedience. The language of the exaltation, however, is not concerned with
obedience as such, but with abiding and with disobedience. Obedience exists only as a
component of disobedience; the real imperative of the passage is to abide.

After the scene of exaltation (ideally before Satan interprets it for his Legions), the
reader must determine the significance of the promise to the Son. Prior to the
establishment of this new relationship, a state of affairs obviously existed. The reader
now must determine whether that state of affairs continues independently of this
arrangement or whether that state of affairs has been fundamentally changed. If the
former (that the state of affairs continues), then the exaltation is a regulative speech act
and God appears to be introducing a provocative novelty. If the latter is the case (that God
has created a new state of affairs), then the act becomes constitutive and a new reality is
born.
The nature of any new reality needs to be demonstrated. The new element that God introduces is negation. When defining disobedience, God utilizes language of removal and rupture:

him who disobeys  
Mee disobeys, breaks union, and that day  
Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls  
Into utter darkness, deep ingulf'd, his place  
Ordain'd without redemption, without end. (5, 611-15)

Unlike the description of the Son--"By whom in bliss imbosom'd sat" (5, 597)--whose description implies an intimacy and harmony with God, the disobedient are "Cast out from God." In book 3, God has been identified with light: "God is Light, / And never but in unapproached Light / Dwelt from Eternity, dwelt then in thee" (3, 3-5). In book 5, the disobedient individual "falls / Into utter darkness" (5, 614). God makes a distinction between those who abide and those who may disobey: The obedient share an intimacy and unity with God--"United as one individual Soul" (5, 610)--while the disobedient experience removal, even absence of God--"Cast out from God . . . Into utter darkness" (5, 613-14, emphasis mine). Moreover, there is a redemptionless place associated with this potential fall. God is, in essence, defining the limits of himself. Given the nature of the promise, God creates an inside and an outside, followers and opponents. Previous to this moment, God created ex Deo, from "one first matter all" (5, 472); all was extension of God; all was contained in God. At the exalitation, however, God defines a place he apparently is not. God states what it means to be not of God, to be cast out from God. A possibility emerges for the severance of the relationship. Upon this possibility lies individuation and choice. This new state of affairs, a state of individuation and moral freedom, is the new reality constituted by the speech act of the exaltation. By defining what is not God, God grounds individuation and gives meaning to freedom.
An Answer?

Free will had been attacked on a number of grounds in the seventeenth century. Hobbes argues that the word “will” is simply a word for the last stage in a process. According to Hobbes, mechanistic cause and effect rules us. Calvinism stressed the utter depravity of humanity and the omnipotence of God. For many such thinkers, the assertion of free will, particularly post-lapsarian free will, threatens the omnipotence of God. People like Spinoza argue that the world is but extension of God; there can be no freedom because there is no authentic differentiation. Free will appears to collapse under the weight of mechanist materialism, the need for divine omnipotence, or creation ex Deo. The exaltation addresses all three positions.

Stephen Fallon, in *Milton Among the Philosophers*, demonstrates how Milton’s “animist materialism” allows him to embrace materialism and reject mechanism. According to Fallon, Milton and Hobbes share a belief in materialism: “Milton and Hobbes shared a significant assumption: all that exists is body, even if the type of body that goes under the name of incorporeal is inaccessible to the senses” (107). However, as Fallon also points out, Milton rejects the mechanism of Hobbes. Milton can reject the notion of mechanism on the grounds of his “animist materialism”: “life is the usual condition of matter. Milton gladly strips soul of its special status--and . . . of its natural immortality--in order to celebrate the vitality of all matter” (107). Fallon’s argument demonstrates how Milton avoids the dangers of mechanism, but the materialism he argues for has problems of its own. Milton’s materialism, like Spinoza’s, does not seem to allow for true individuation. If all is from God, then all assertions of freedom of the will seem to be little more than quibblings with words. Moreover, theologically, God’s omnipotence and goodness must still be maintained.

God creates freedom within the poem by making a promise to the Son. The promise divides creation into those who fall inside the parameters of the promise and

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those who step outside the promise. Those who dwell within the promise “abide / United as one individual Soul” (5, 609-10); those who dwell outside are rendered “disobedient.” Unity with God means maintaining one’s place within the promise. Consequently, differentiation and rupture from God become real possibilities. As long as God has defined what exists outside himself, outside his self-imposed boundary of promise, freedom exists. In other words, God limits the extent of his being to the realm of promise to the Son. This space is a profoundly linguistic space, at least in its origin. Moreover, the words “obedient” and “disobedient” have no meaning outside the context of the promise. As an analogy, marital infidelity only makes sense within the relationship of marriage or within a prior understanding of fidelity. I could not walk up to a woman on the street and legitimately accuse her of betraying our marriage bed. In the same manner, obedience and disobedience are built upon a promise made to the Son. Disobedience brings the nature of obedience into relief. The potential to fail enables freedom. God creates consequences for accepting and rejecting the promise. Consequence creates, in its turn, a space that falls outside the domain of God. Upon this space, or, more accurately, upon the border between this space and the presence of the Father, rests freedom and individuation. The force of choice distinguishes creatures from their creator, be that choice in the form of affirmation or negation.

Thus, Milton preserves the omnipotence of God--God chooses to create freedom--and the goodness of God--God creates choice, not evil. Evil is the actualization of the “not-God,” something which occurs in the rebellion. Choice allows for individuation, and freedom.

Milton’s solution is an admittedly religious argument and is not philosophical in the strictest meaning of the word. However, *Paradise Lost*, for all its philosophical matter, is not offering proofs or arguments of the philosophical kind. Milton’s solution deals with the viability of faith: Can one reasonably believe in free will in the context of
the religious and philosophical debates about the issue? For Milton, the exaltation scene demonstrates that freedom of the will is a legitimate and reasonable option of belief.
Chapter 6: Actualizing Place: Chaos, Hell and the Paradise of Fools

Having discussed the importance of the promise of the exaltation—the divine speech act that defines what it means to be of God—I will, for the rest of the thesis, explore the effects of this speech act. In this chapter, I focus on its implications for the physical universe. The exaltation and God’s use of a speech act—a promise—creates a new possibility, a new reality. In short, God, who creates ex Deo, distinguishes creature from creator through a promise. The promise to the Son creates an imperative for the angelic audience: Do they abide within the promise or do they reject the promise, that is, disobey? The rejection of the promise defines disobedience; freedom becomes an imperative with which we must live, an imperative which defines us and the world.

The definition of disobedience has consequences for the physical universe as well. By defining what it means to be disobedient, God establishes what it means to be not of God. In other words, God, who has been all in all, creates privation or, more accurately, the possibility of privation. The moral imperative created by the promise to the Son manifests itself in the physical universe: Heaven stands within the promise. This chapter will deal with those physical places whose relationship with the promise is less clear: chaos, hell, and the paradise of fools.

The significance and enigmatic nature of chaos bears out the importance Milton places on this aspect of his epic. Satan’s journey through chaos in book 2 reveals much about the nature of chaos and pure potentiality. I argue that chaos is not antagonistic to creation but is simply manifesting its nature as unactualized potentiality. Consequently, chaos proves inadequate as a basis of difference; creation from chaos remains an extension of God, a manifestation of a continuum of potential being.

Paradise Lost holds that, essentially, the possibility of a creation distinct from God depends upon the possibility of a Hell. Heaven, post-rebellion, finds a counterpart in the physical space of Hell. Without the negation of God entailed by the potential for Hell,
all remains God, potentially or actually. God permits, commands existence to be distinct from himself: Freedom grounds this distinction. The potential for nothingness, the not-God, or privation allows us to recognize and experience differentiation and distinction. With this distinction, things emerge. Creation stands apart from God on the grounds of this distinction.

The strange liminal outpost of the paradise of fools or limbo becomes, in this light, more than an anti-Catholic joke on Milton’s part. The paradise of fools further clarifies the meaning of negation and is the consequence of ignorance. Hell, for its part, is the negation of the promise to the Son and incarnates disobedience; the paradise of fools arises from our own efforts to actualize goodness. Those condemned to the paradise of fools have not explicitly rejected the promise, but neither have they abided within it. Thus, every choice finds its correlative in the universe.

The Non-Opposition of Chaos

Chaos, in Paradise Lost, does not fall into the domain of what is evil. In its essence, however, chaos is ever random, ever threatening. Chaos should not be seen as the enemy of creation but as the pure potentiality from which God draws creation. In the same way that the articulated thought, the single paint stroke, the decisive chisel mark on the marble removes an artist’s work from the internal domain of unfettered creativity, so the presence of an ordering principle disrupts the pure potentiality that is the essence of chaos’s being. Order violates disorder, but the antagonism is a false one. Chaos is not the antithesis of creation: Chaos is part of a continuum from which emerges creation.

In 1963, A.B. Chambers argued that “the material chaos of Paradise Lost is unmistakably opposed to God” (55). Refuting the supposed “atomism” of Paradise Lost, Chambers argues that “Milton’s chaos resembles Plato’s more closely than any other of the cosmological antecedents” (65). According to Chambers, Chance rules Milton’s chaos as it does Plato’s. As he states, “Chaos, qua chaos, remains confusion, a

receptacle swayed by Necessity and Chance, removed from God and opposed to him only less than hell itself” (69). This argument is significant for the way it draws attention to the incapacities of chaos. Chaos, unswayed by the Providence of God, is incapable of generating or actualizing: “Chaos, like hell, can of itself produce nothing of worth” (68). However, Chambers leaps from pointing out the incapacity of chaos to equating that incapacity with evil and opposition to God. Chambers himself draws attention to the essential difference between chaos and hell. Discussing Augustine’s explanation of creation, Chambers writes,

If these pregnant causes within chaos are in fact the universal seeds of things, then the passive principle of matter becomes chaos when implanted with certain active powers or causes which supply the first rudiments of form . . . though filled with pregnant causes and embryon atoms, [chaos] is powerless of itself to produce anything but chaos. (78-9)

Chambers is absolutely correct: Chaos cannot produce anything of its own account. This incapacity to produce is its essence and the ground for its “opposition” to God. But the opposition of chaos, unlike the opposition of hell, cannot actualize itself:

But all these in thir pregnant causes mixt
Confus’dly, and which thus must ever fight,
Unless th’Almighty Maker them ordain
His dark materials to create more Worlds. . . . (2, 913-16, emphasis mine)

Hell, on the other hand, is actualized opposition, actualized rebellion:

out flew
Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs
Of mighty Cherubim; the sudden blaze
Far round illumin’d hell: highly they rag’d
Against the Highest, and fierce with grasped Arms
Hurling defiance toward the Vault of Heav’n. (1, 664-69)

Hell is the rejection of God; Chaos simply is.
More recently, Regina Schwartz casts Chaos on the side of Satan and doubts the neutrality of Milton's chaotic matter.¹¹⁵ Schwartz points out that many assumptions about chaos in the poem are grounded more in De Doctrina Christiana than in the poem itself. She attempts to link the programs of both Satan and Chaos, arguing that "the distinction between chaos and hell is blurred repeatedly in the poem" ("Hostile Chaos," 352). Both are opposed to the order of God and, in this sense, are evil. But we can easily distinguish the "evil" of chaos from the evil of hell. The "evil" of Chaos is disorder or, more accurately, pre-order: "Havoc and spoil and ruin are my gain" (3, 1009) and "I upon my Frontiers here / Keep residence; If all I can will serve, / That little which is left so to defend" (2, 998-1000). The evil of Satan consists of disobedience: "all Good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my Good" (4, 109-10). Chaos expresses no freedom; he is there to be actualized by either good or evil forces. In book 7, we read that "Chaos heard his [Messiah's] voice" (7, 221). In book 10, Death and Sin build a bridge through and from Chaos:

The aggregated Soil
Death with his Mace petrific, cold and dry,
As with a Trident smote, and fix't as firm
As Delos floating once.

.........................
... with Pins of Adamant
And Chains they made all fast, too fast they made
And durable. . . . (10, 293-320)

Chaos responds equally well to both sides. The words of Chaos to Satan simply reinforce his essential nature within the poem: His nature is that of disorder and unactualized potential ("Chaos Umpire sits, / And by decision more imbroils the fray" (2, 907-8, emphasis mine)). Firstly, Chaos's speech is "falt'ring" (the word itself is incomplete, stumbling over its own syllabification) and his speech says surprisingly little. Chaos's

ringing endorsement of evil amounts to “If that way be your walk, you have not far . . . go and speed; / Havoc and spoil and ruin are my gain” (3, 1007-9). This “endorsement” amounts to little more than an affirmation of identity. That which is indeterminate, that which is in upheaval and flux and disequilibrium, that which has returned to a confusion that contains potentiality and is indecisive and undecided in its essence falls within the domain of chaos. As Stephen Fallon puts it, “Chaos serves in the text as a mirage of evil. . . . But like all mirages, the evil Chaos disappears when we get too close to it.” (191, footnote 44).

Schwartz, however, draws attention to the prejudice concerning chaos in the poem: Too often we read Milton’s poetry through De Doctrina Christiana and fail to attend to the words of the poem. Today, when some continue to question the authenticity of the De Doctrina Christiana, the importance of grounding an argument in the poem itself is even more urgent. Following the explicit theology of De Doctrina Christiana can lead us to misread the poem.

Any encounter with chaos-- the preserve of the potential--is essentially false, an attempt to comprehend what is incomprehensible. Any and every encounter diminishes chaos, reduces it to categories within our comprehension, even when the descriptions of those encounters deny the validity of those categories. I will examine a number of passages within the poem where we encounter chaos and will argue that within each passage the same pattern emerges: Chaos is pregnant with potential and has an intimate relationship with order or an ordering mind. Chaos is thus integrated into the continuum of being.

In book 2, chaos is the principle of potentiality, of unactualized being. The reader’s encounters with the domain of chaos emphasize the liminality and potentiality of the space (if one might call it a space): “Of neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire, / But all these in thir pregnant causes mixt . . . Into this wild Abyss the wary fiend / Stood on the brink of Hell” (2, 912-18). We understand through the tangible--sea, shore, air, fire--
but chaos is described as being none and all of these. The other way to understand a place, through its relation to other places, is equally enigmatic. Satan stands on “the brink of Hell,” but the narrator can only comment, “no narrow frith / He had to cross” (2, 919-20). The narrator’s description, or purposeful failure to describe, is an exploration of the fathomless depth of infinite possibility. Twice the phrase “Into this wild Abyss” (2, 909; 917) appears, stressing the bottomlessness of chaos. Throughout this passage, one senses without actually discovering; evasiveness marks the tangibility of the place.

The narrator senses that to remain authentically formless and potential, to remain pure potentiality, chaos must be evasive and fleeting. Chaos must hint at presenting itself but retreat before it is ever actualized, even as an authentic possibility. Chaos appears with the opening of the great gate which contains hell:

Before thir eyes in sudden view appear  
The secrets of the hoary deep, a dark  
Illimitable Ocean without bound,  
Without dimension, where length, breadth, and highth,  
And time and place are lost. . . . (2, 890-94)

Parameters which are negated serve as the means to reveal and unveil chaos.

The parameters of comprehensible being—dimension, time, and place—“are lost.” Twice the passage employs the simple preposition “without,” a word built upon the notion of contiguity. The passage, however, seeks to unravel conceptions such as relation and contiguity. The descriptive words that are so carefully negated in this passage are the very things that introduce us to this place. The narrator struggles between description and non-description to arrive at a conceptual compromise. “Illimitable” (a word which nicely negates itself while introducing the very concept of limit), “bound,” and “dimension” bring in basic conceptual understandings in order to destroy them. All three words imply measuring, measurability. The point of the passage, however, is the impossibility of these activities in chaos. The presentation of chaos is very much an acknowledgement of the inadequacy of language to comprehend pure possibility.
Within this incomprehensibility lies the potency of all being. The poem declares that Satan plunges himself

Into this wild Abyss,
The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave,
Of neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire,
But all these in thir pregnant causes mixt
Confus’dly. . . . (2, 910-14)

The words “Womb” and “pregnant” both relate chaos to the feminine potentiality for birth. They are strange words to apply to the swirling tumult of chaos. These words startle: Chaos is fecund, bursting with the potential for life. Chaos, however, is not only linked to pregnancy, it is also linked to death: “The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave” (2, 911). In other words, chaos assumes the parameters of our being. Birth and death bracket our existence; what falls within these brackets is our all. As Satan (and we the readers) hang over the Abyss of chaos, we see the potentiality for all contained within the tumult and confusion. J. H. Adamson argues that Milton belongs to a great tradition of *ex Deo* thought, including that of Scotus Eriugena. In this passage, we do have hints of an emanation and return. The phrase “perhaps her Grave,” in this context, implies a startling materialism. Scotus Eriugena divided Nature into four movements, the first and fourth being properly contained in God: 1. Nature which creates and is not created, 2. Nature which creates and is created, 3. Nature which does not create and is created, 4. Nature which does not create and is not created. Chaos is typically identified with the second movement: Chaos contains the πρωτότοκα or *praedestinationes*. The third movement contains nature as we recognize or know it, while the fourth movement is the return to God, where God, the final cause, becomes all in all. The suggestion that chaos may be the grave of nature implies, ultimately, a return to chaos. A return to chaos, rather than God proper, suggests that chaos is somehow beyond that which is created. While the

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hesitancy of the "perhaps" diminishes the force of the passage, the sense is nonetheless there and supports John Rumrich's position that chaos is "part of the deity, arguably feminine, over which the eternal father does not exercise control, from which, in other words, the father is absent as an active, governing agent" (1043). This pattern of potency and intimacy with God recurs whenever we encounter the indeterminacy of chaos.

In book 7, the account of creation continually juxtaposes the masculine agent of creation with the feminine potency of that to be created. As the Word and the Spirit "view'd the vast immeasurable Abyss / Outrageous as a Sea" (7, 211-12), the description balances the initial view of Satan in book 2. In the case of book 7, however, "On heav'nly ground they stood" (7, 210). Chaos remains the same entity which Satan encounters in book 2: "[an] immeasurable Abyss / Outrageous as a Sea, dark, wasteful, wild . . . and with the Centre mix the Pole" (7, 211-15). The difference lies in the response of chaos to the Son and the Spirit. For Satan, the journey through chaos is an ordeal: "O'er bog or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare, / With head, hands, wings, or feet pursues his way, / And swims or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies" (2, 948-50). For the Son and Spirit, chaos responds readily and appropriately. After the Son bids the sea to be silent and for discord to end, "in Paternal Glory [he] rode / Far into Chaos, and the World unborn; / For Chaos heard his voice..." (7, 219-21). There is none of the unpredictability or instability that Satan encounters. More importantly, "Chaos heard his voice..." As I have mentioned before, the root of obedience means "to hear." Obedience proceeds from a proper hearing or listening. Moreover, the "Paternal Glory" encounters the "World unborn," linking masculine generation (the Son) and feminine potency of chaos. The short passage again draws attention to the potency of chaos and the intimacy of its relationship with God.

The creation of Heaven and Earth, before the creation of light, consists of an impregnation of chaos. On the “Darkness profound” (7, 233), the Spirit of God spreads “His brooding wings” (7, 235). The Spirit then proceeds to discharge a “vital virtue” into chaos:

And vital virtue infus’d, and vital warmth
Throughout the fluid Mass, but downward purg’d
The black tartareous cold Infernal dregs
Adverse to life: then founded, then conglob’d
Like things to like. . . . (7, 236-40)

The passage emphasizes both the potency of chaos and the relationship it has with God. Chaos receives the discharge of the Spirit of God, a reception which stresses the potential of chaos and the intimacy of its relationship with God. The passage portrays chaos as the feminine counter to a masculine God. Rumrich argues on the basis of Milton’s monism that “chaos is God’s womb, essential to his deity” (1043). Whether this aspect is integrated into the personhood of God or whether it is an emanation of God, what is certain is that Milton’s chaos can hardly be evil, given its intimacy with God.

Other language in the creation account of book 7 further serves to portray creation as a process of pregnancy and birth. The passage on the third day of creation states, “The Earth was form’d, but in the Womb as yet / Of Waters, Embryon immature involv’d, / Appear’d not . . . with warm / Prolific humor soft’ning all her Globe, / Fermented the great Mother to conceive” (7, 276-81). As God acts upon chaos and transforms it or actualizes it, chaos emerges more and more as a mother: “The Earth obey’d, and straight / Op’ning her fertile Womb teem’d at a Birth / Innumerous living Creatures” (7, 453-55). Of course, worked upon chaos is no longer chaos, but the point is that when God makes chaos recognizable, chaos appears to us as a feminine being. The language in the creation account is clear: Chaos, worked over by God, represents feminine potency and potential fecundity. The birth imagery charges the relationship between chaos and God with a powerful sense of intimacy.
In examining the book 7 account of creation, we can notice a pattern emerging: the further along the road of creation, the more direct the references to birth and femininity. The culmination of this progression occurs in book 9 after Adam has eaten the fruit: “Earth trembl’d from her entrails, as again / In pangs, and nature gave a second groan” (9, 1000-1). At this point, a potency for obedience or disobedience has been actualized. A child has been born. The further we travel from the purely potential origin in chaos, the more recognizable this feminine aspect becomes. Sin’s account of her history is another example of this potency/realization continuum:

\[
\begin{align*}
\ldots & 
\text{Pensive here I sat} \\
& \text{ Alone, but long I sat not, till my womb} \\
& \text{Pregnant by thee, and now excessive grown} \\
& \text{Prodigious motion felt and rueful throes.} \\
& \text{At last this odious offspring whom thou seest} \\
& \text{Thine own begotten, breaking violent way} \\
& \text{Tore through my entrails, that with fear and pain} \\
& \text{Distorted, all my nether shape thus grew} \\
& \text{Transform’d.} \ldots (2, 777-85)
\end{align*}
\]

Sex and birth transform even an allegorical figure like Sin. However unnatural the birth of Sin, emerging as she does from the head of Satan, sex and birth naturalize her, locate her within the sphere of beings. Fallon argues that Sin and Death are the actualization of privation (183-90). Nonetheless, while arguing that the effects attributed to Sin and Death are actually “attributable to other, ‘real’ agents” (189), Fallon recognizes that “Sin and Death appear to be all too unpleasantly real in *Paradise Lost*” (189). Sin and Death appear real because they are part of the same process we all find ourselves in: of potential to actual, thought to act, conception to birth. The presence of the potential as a feminine aspect heightens the sense of indeterminacy that exists in the universe. All characters, allegorical or real, good or evil, human or angelic, experience this process of potential to actual. The language that surrounds this process—the language of pregnancy and birth—shows the unity of being in Milton’s universe, a unity rooted in the chaotic.
When examined closely, chaos appears to be part of a natural continuum of being in *Paradise Lost*. Creation, the fall, the birth of Death, all follow the pattern of pregnancy/birth imagery. Moreover, the intimacy of the relationship between God and chaos negates the possibility of a morally evil chaos. Chaos underlies all beings within the poem. To understand how beings stand apart from God, we must turn away from the indeterminacy of chaos to the determinacy of Hell.

**Hell and the Distinctiveness of Beings**

Freedom is built upon the possibility of negation. The distinction between nature and God depends upon the possible or actual negation of being. If created beings stand apart from God and are not to be merely extensions, then something must allow them to stand as not-God, as distinct. *Paradise Lost* presents a morally charged universe. What distinguishes the created from the creator is the possibility of obedience or disobedience, affirmation or rejection. Disobedience and obedience (the latter described as an abiding within the promise) lie potentially in every expression of the divine will. As we are confronted with these alternative possibilities, we experience freedom. For authentic freedom to exist in heaven and in the universe, the possibility for disobedience must also exist. Every decision or actualization means that an alternative possibility or potentiality remains unrealized. In short, the further we are from chaos, the more morally charged the universe becomes. Hell is the not-God, actualization of negation.

Hell, or the not-God, becomes central to the discussion of freedom within the poem. What distinguishes both heaven and hell from chaos is the desire for order. Order cannot be morally neutral. Moreover, throughout the poem, the narrator goes to some lengths to establish a relationship between good and evil: Evil is the inversion of the good, the negative counter. Satan, the archfiend, brings hell into focus: Hell becomes actualized through the activity of Satan and the demons. The physical hell that receives Satan, however, is prior to the hell that is Satan. The space of hell arises because of the possibility for negation within language itself. As God creates the promise to the Son, he
uncreates to the extent that he establishes a realm outside of God. In short, God suggests evil by defining good; Satan makes it real, actualizes it.

Robert M. Adams has argued that Satan assists us in our struggle against chaos.\textsuperscript{119} For Adams, chaos is the ever-present threat to creation: “Heaven apart, it is quite explicit that everything else in the cosmos is disguised (i.e., organized) Chaos, which could be jolted back, with relative ease, into Chaos again” (74). Moreover, chaos inheres in the structure of the universe and is a force “beyond good and evil” (76). If chaos is the true threat to creation, Satan actually assists God in preserving order. As Adams puts it, “Satan by establishing his headquarters in Hell--Down There--creates a range of physical and moral possibility for man; he structures the cosmos” (76). Adams argues that Satan provides a ground for the universe both spatially and temporally (77-78). In short, the indeterminacy of chaos threatens the very structure of the universe, and Satan, with God, counters this indeterminacy by morally grounding the universe into good and evil. Order in the universe seems to depend upon the existence of these polarities.

Adams’s article, while mistakenly identifying chaos, or moral indeterminacy, as the enemy, is correct in identifying Satan as the actualization of the evil polarity. Satan is the actualization of evil and disobedience. Before I expand on this point, however, I must mention that the threat of the universe collapsing into chaos appears to be false. In book 2, Chaos claims “Havoc and spoil and ruin are my gain” (2, 1009). This statement, however, contradicts Chaos’s earlier complaint:

\begin{quote}
I upon my Frontiers here  
Keep residence; if all I can will serve,  
\textit{That little which is left} so to defend,  
\textit{Encroacht on} still through our intestine broils  
Weak’ning the Sceptre of old \textit{Night: first Hell}  
Your dungeon stretching far and wide beneath;  
\textit{Now lately Heaven and Earth} . . . (2, 998-1004, emphasis mine)
\end{quote}

The result of the rebellion has been the diminution of Chaos’s realm. Moreover, Satan’s success results in a superhighway across chaos:

a Bridge
Of length prodigious joining to the Wall
Immoveable of this now fenceless World
Forfeit to Death; from hence a passage broad,
Smooth, easy, inoffensive down to Hell. (10, 301-05)

Chaos is never an actual threat to creation; on the contrary, the moral dichotomy that establishes heaven and hell threatens chaos. Adams suggests that authentic evil is disorder or anarchy; moral evil and moral good both oppose the metaphysical evil of disorder. Good and evil become ways to stave off annihilation by chaos and are merely a result of which “team” one is on. If such were the case, however, Milton would endorse a profound voluntarism, and no such voluntarism is supported by the poem. God may determine the rules of the game, but then he follows those same rules. Milton specifically addresses the voluntarist question when God declares, “Die hee or Justice must” (3, 210). If the simple exercise of God’s will determines what is good, there can be no issue about Justice. Justice will be served by the simple decision of God, however arbitrary that decision might be. But the fact that there is a debate in heaven at all indicates that God must indeed attend to standards and principles. These standards can, arguably, be traced to the previous exercising of the divine will, a sort of divine precedent principle. However we may wish to trace the origins of these principles, the poem clearly indicates that God works within the confines of these principles. Both Creator and created must exercise morality. Adams’s suggestion that both God and Satan, by morally dichotomizing the universe, implicitly conspire against the true enemy, chaos, reduces morality to a secondary issue within the poem. Order and disorder are not the primary concern of the poem, however. What is at issue is the moral implications of any order. Not Hobbes but Milton wrote *Paradise Lost*. 
What are we to make of Chaos's attitude towards Satan's project—"go and speed; / Havoc and spoil and ruin are my gain" (2, 1008-9)? This statement suggests that Chaos is linked to evil, endorses evil. As I have argued, however, chaos is, by nature, unresistant to actualization; chaos is pure potentiality. Satan's journey through chaos is as much an encroachment upon the reign of chaos as God's creation of the earth. The endorsement or condemnation by the character Chaos is utterly irrelevant; it has no power to change things because it has no power to bring things into being. To bring things into being would deny the very essence of Chaos, encroach upon its own territory, destroy its very self. Even its speech is "falt'ring" and its "visage incompos'd" (2, 989); Chaos neither assists nor resists.

Satan is the actualization of evil. While this actualization is unnecessary for freedom to exist, evil, if only potentially, is necessary for freedom. Satan embraces the negative option implicit in any command. Adams is correct: Satan does locate evil spatially and temporally. That, however, does not mean that he locates the universe spatially and temporally. He simply brings the implicit dichotomy between obedience and disobedience into relief. Evil ceases to be intangible.

Walter Clyde Curry, in his *Milton's Ontology, Cosmogony, and Physics*, anticipates Adams's article by suggesting that chaos embodies the evil of alterity or "otherness." Examining the position of Proclus, Curry states that "evil may also flow from the natural alterity, contrariety, and otherness subsisting between the essences and productive powers inherent in the distributed species of things" (70-71). By this, Curry means that innumerable possibilities can thwart the natural orderly progression of a developing nature. If a developing nature cannot actualize its existence, it flounders in the realm of the potential and is alienated from itself. This alienation or alterity is an evil of sorts: "This so-called evil observed in chaos, however, possesses no independent

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existence; it subsists only in proportion as it participates of good" (71). Curry's point that
the evil of chaos possesses no independent existence is significant. Chaos possesses the
potentiality for both good and evil, but, in itself, chaos is neither. Any shift from
potentiality to actuality will also be a realization of this inherent good or evil. Moral
ambiguity, or the realm of chaos, is not the true threat or enemy within the poem. The
transformation of that indeterminacy into actuality thrusts that former indeterminacy into
the moral realm. For Milton, only the actual is morally charged.

Hell is a negative actualization of the divine imperative resulting from the promise
of the exaltation. In other words, hell is the embodiment of disobedience. In this light, the
activities within hell counter or parody the activities in heaven. Moreover, whenever
either good or evil encounters chaos, it leaves a concrete remnant. Finally, hell originates
not with its colonization by Satan and his cohorts, but with the command of God for
obedience. This does not mean that God anticipates evil and actively creates hell. Rather,
evil and hell are implicit in God's command for obedience. Hell arises because of the
restrictions of language; it is a physical actualization of the word "no."

One parallel between hell and heaven is indicated by the perverted trinity at the
end of book 2. The characters of Satan, Sin and Death invert the divine characters of
Father, Son and Spirit. Sin emerges, like Athene from Zeus's head, fully formed from the
head of Satan:

... till on the left side op'ning wide,
Likest to thee in shape and count'nance bright,
Then shining heav'nly fair, a Goddess arm'd
Out of thy head I sprung. . .  (2, 755-58)

Of the Son, we are told that

Thee next they [the angels] sang of all Creation first,
Begotten Son, Divine Similitude,
In whose conspicuous count'nance, without cloud
Made visible, th' Almighty Father shines. . .  (3, 383-86)
The very language surrounding Sin and the Son—the names themselves resonate with each other—are remarkably similar: “Likest to thee” suggests “Divine Similitude,” “count’nance bright” matches “conspicuous count’nance . . . shines,” “shining heavenly fair, a Goddess” parallels “without cloud / Made visible, th’Almighty Father shines.”

The apparent differences between the divine and perverse trinities reveal much about the nature of each. The most obvious is the gender of the offspring of Satan and the Father. Satan “fathers” a daughter while the “Almighty Father” begets a Son. The second difference involves Satan’s incestuous desire for his offspring: “Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing / Becam’st enamor’d, and such joy thou took’st / With me in secret, that my womb conceiv’d” (2, 764-66). Satan begins a pattern of incestuous coupling that reveals the self-absorbed nature of evil. Death is the offspring of the unnatural coupling of Satan and Sin. Death, in turn, incestuously couples with his mother, producing monstrous offspring. Opposed to this, the divine trinity consistently looks outward: the Father creates, the Son offers himself as a sacrifice for humanity, the Spirit impregnates chaos. The Son’s self-negation for humanity is the most revealing. Through negation of self he discovers and becomes himself: “By Merit more than Birthright Son of God” (3, 309). Moreover, through the sacrifice, the Father recognizes the true identity of the Son. Satan, on the other hand, cannot recognize his offspring: “I know thee not, nor ever saw till now / Sight more detestable than him and thee” (2, 744-45).

The description of the building of Pandaemonium indicates how hell inverts or negates heaven. For example, the apparent concreteness of hell indicates its dubious nature. In book 7, after the “Spirit of God outspread, and vital virtue infus’d,” the rest of creation proceeds as an act of language: “Let there be Light, said God, and forthwith Light / Ethereal . . . began” (7, 243-6). The creation of Pandemonium, on the other hand, involves physical labour: “Soon had his crew / Op’n’d into the Hill, a spacious wound / And digg’d out ribs of Gold” (1, 688-90). As well, the location of the material with which the demons build Pandemonium involves familiar language: “in his womb was hid
metallic Ore, / The work of Sulphur” (1, 673-4). Once again, we encounter the imagery of the womb. Ultimately, the irony of the demons building a capitol which reduces their grandeur tells us much about this alternative kingdom. As the demons enter the hall, they become “As Bees / In spring time” (1, 768-9). Entering the hall, “incorporeal Spirits to smallest forms / Reduc’d thir shapes immense” (1, 789-90). This new kingdom involves a reduction, a diminishing. The entire passage, rather than revealing the dark glory of the place, reveals how it is an inversion, or indeed a perversion of heaven.

The contrasting imagery of darkness and light again demonstrates how hell is a negation of heaven. The experience of darkness dominates the descriptions of hell:

```
   waste and wild
   A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round
   As one great Furnace flam’d, yet from those flames
   No light, but rather darkness visible
   Serv’d only to discover sights of woe,

   ...................................................
   ... a fiery Deluge, fed
   With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum’d

   ...................................................
   In utter darkness, and thir portion set
   As far remov’d from God and light of Heav’n
   As from the Center thrice to th’ utmost Pole. (1, 60-74, emphasis mine)
```

The “darkness visible” contrasts sharply with the celebration of light that opens book 3:

```
   Hail holy light, offspring of Heav’n first-born,
   Or of th’ Eternal Coeternal beam
   May I express thee unblam’d? since God is Light,
   And never but in unapproached Light
   Dwelt from Eternity, dwelt then in thee,
   Bright effluence of bright essence increate. (3, 1-6)
```

Of course, this celebration of light in book 3 closely follows the description of another experience of darkness in the poem: “with him [Chaos] Entron’d / Sat Sable-vested Night, eldest of things, / The Consort of his Reign” (2, 961-3). How does the darkness of “Sable-vested Night” differ from the “darkness visible” of hell? To put it bluntly, the physical darkness of chaos differs qualitatively from the moral darkness of hell. In the
account of creation in book 7, the reader is told that "Darkness profound / Cover'd th' Abyss" (7, 233-4, emphasis mine). After the "Spirit of God" infuses "vital virtue" (7, 236), the text states, "then founded, then conglob'd / Like things to like" (7, 239, emphasis mine). This darkness is a fundamental darkness, one open to actualization. From this fundamental darkness springs light (7, 243-45), a light which is the "first of things" (7, 244). God proceeds to distinguish light and darkness: "Light the Day, and Darkness Night / He nam'd" (7, 251-2). The moment of naming clarifies how Night can be "eldest of things" and Light can be "first of things." Both possibilities depend upon the other, define themselves against the other. The darkness of night, however, is clearly physical, even though light appears to be more intimately connected with God--"God saw the Light was good" (7, 249). This darkness is more an absence of light than a negation of goodness. The darkness of hell, however, is experiential and moral: "As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n / As from the Center thrice to th' utmost Pole" (1, 73-4). The darkness of hell arises from the rejection of heavenly light. The physical light that does exist in hell is generated by the demons themselves. When resolving for war, "out-flew / Millions of flaming swords ... the sudden blaze / Far round illumin'd hell" (1, 663-66). In Pandaemonium, "from the arched roof / Pendant by subtle Magic many a row / Of Starry Lamps and blazing Cressets fed / With Naphtha and Asphaltus yielded light / As from a sky" (1, 726-30). The light of hell is artificial; it does not naturally exist. Hell light is created by Satan after the fall and is the antithesis of the divine light of heaven. Hell becomes a counter kingdom of heaven, carved from chaos and dependent upon those who reject God to actualize and mold and shape it. More significantly, hell depends upon the existence of a God who can be rejected.

Paradise Lost portrays hell as being an inversion or perversion of the divine reality of heaven, but what of its origin? The potential for hell arises from the language of God, particularly the language of imperative and interdiction. The physical reality of hell is the actualization of the potential for disobedience. The poem indicates quite clearly that
hell, to some extent, predates Satan's occupation, suggesting that hell emerges as a possibility with the elevation of the Son. In the opening passages of book 1, the text states of hell,

Such place Eternal Justice *had prepar'd*
For those rebellious, here thir Prison ordained
In utter darkness, and thir portion set
As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n
As from the Center thrice to th' utmost Pole. (1, 70-4, emphasis mine)

The careful use of the past perfect, "had prepar'd," indicates that the creation of hell precedes any fall, that the action has been completed in the past. The displacement and rout of the Satanic hordes also indicates that hell precedes and accepts the fallen:

Hell heard th' unsufferable noise, Hell saw
Heav'n ruining from Heav'n, and would have fled
Affrighted; but strict Fate had cast too deep
Her dark foundations, and too fast had bound. (6, 867-70)

The personification and symmetry of line 867, "Hell heard . . . Hell saw," emphasizes its physical presence. Hell becomes the presence that allows the fall to exist. One cannot fall without a locale to fall towards. In a Heideggerian sense, hell takes the role of *Dasein* for the event of the fall; hell's seeing and hearing the fall calls it forth into being. The other point that arises from this passage is the immovability of hell. Hell is fixed fast. There is nothing ephemeral or hasty in its emergence. The text states that hell has been a fixed presence for some time, even if its presence has been undisclosed to or undetected by the angelic and demonic forces. Thus, Adams's statement that "Satan by establishing his headquarters in Hell--Down There--creates a range of physical and moral possibility for man; he structures the cosmos" (76) ignores something clearly stated by the text: hell already exists when Satan falls. In this sense, the cosmos has already been structured, has been polarized, into realms of good and evil. What Satan does achieve is an actualization of hell, an actualization of the non-God. Satan's rebellion sequentially follows the
existence or creation of hell. Hell receives the rebel band; hell has been created prior to its colonization.

Heaven is where God dwells in fullness; hell is the rejection of God: “As far remov’d from God and light of Heav’n / As from the Center thrice to th’ utmost Pole” (1, 73-4). That this is the case is clear from the words of Satan: “Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell” (4, 75). As God is the source and fullness of being within the poem, hell becomes the antithesis of being; hell is the “naught.” Satan lives within the negation of the promise to the Son, the negation which defines disobedience or the not-God.

Hell and Heaven emerge as distinct entities, concepts, or possible entities, with the elevation of the Son. The poem links the emergence of hell with the rejection of the Son early in book 1: “Such place Eternal Justice had prepar’d / For those rebellious” (1, 70-1). At this point, the exact nature and cause of the rebellion are unclear to the reader. Rebellion, however, and the possibility of rebellion are clearly linked to the creation of hell. In book 5, the reader encounters the decisive moment when the Son is elevated and the interdiction against rebellion secured. Before all the angels, God declares, “This day I have begot whom I declare / My only Son” (5, 603-4). The crux of the elevation, however, is the statement “your Head I him appoint; / And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow / All knees in Heav’n, and shall confess him Lord” (5, 606-8). Accompanying this statement is a condemnation of all who do not accept the Son:

... him who disobeys
Mee disobeys, breaks union, and that day
Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
Into utter darkness, deep ingulf, his place
Ordain’d without redemption, without end. (5, 611-15)

Immediately, a dichotomized universe arises. Obedience and disobedience become possible because there is now something to abide within or to disobey. Hell is severance from God. Because God is the fullness of being, to be “Cast out from God” is to be cast out from being itself. The very phrasing “Cast out from God” indicates the force of the
passage and the nature of hell. The disobedient are not cast out from the midst of God; they are “Cast out from God” (emphasis mine). An outside now surrounds the inside; something can be cast from God. In other words, something can be not-God. If God has created everything from himself, *ex Deo*, then something authentically new emerges. God has created the possibility for this difference. Actualized hell is the embodiment of that negation, predicated upon the possibility of disobedience, a possibility formed by a speech act.

Hell is neither built for Satan nor does it conceptually emerge as a consequence of rebellion. Hell conceptually exists as a result of a speech act by God. The promise to the Son creates the possibility of disobedience. God vows to reject those who reject the Son. Alienation from God is hell. Hell, in other words, is simply embracing the not-God. Hell exists because the command exists; *actualized* hell, however, results from the act of rebellion against God.

**On the borders of creation**

As Satan passes from chaos into creation, he enters a space called the Paradise of Fools. The Paradise of Fools, like hell, appears to exist before it has been inhabited and demonstrates our integral relationship with language.

The Paradise of Fools exists in the liminal space between creation and chaos. This space stands apart from creation proper--“All the unaccomplisht works of Nature’s hand,/Abortive, monstrous, or unkindly mixt” (3, 455-6)-- and is markedly unnatural, a home of “Embryos, and Idiots, Eremites and Friars / White, Black and Grey” (3, 474-5). Unnatural as it is, the Paradise of Fools becomes the depository of legends, philosophy, hagiography, and superstition: “Translated Saints, or middle Spirits hold / Betwixt th’ Angelical and Human kind” (3, 461-2) and “then might ye see / Cowls, Hoods and Habits with thir wearers tost / And flutter’d into Rags, then Reliques, Beads, / Indulgences, Dispenses, Pardons, Bulls, / The sport of Winds” (3, 489-93). Human thought, arrogance and vanity populate the region: “ill-join’d Sons and Daughters born / First from the
ancient World” (3, 463-4). The space is a distinctly human one, born of human speculation and vanity.

If an embodiment of vanity and emptiness, why is the Paradise of Fools not contained within hell? The answer to this question reveals the difference between the negation of hell and the vacuity of human vanity. In book 5, Raphael points out the difference between angelic and human reason:

... reason is her being,
Discursive, or Intuitive; discourse
Is oftest yours, the latter most is ours,
Differing but in degree, of kind the same. (5, 487-90)

Human reason, which is discursive, depends upon the proper use of language. If we misuse language, reason can and will stumble. In other words, human choice depends to a great extent upon the proper use of language. Without corrective discourse, disobedience through neglect becomes a distinct possibility.

Even before Satan enters the garden, humanity almost stumbles when left to its own devices. Eve is beguiled by her own reflection until “a voice thus warn’d me” (4, 467). Eve desires the pleasure of the night, “This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes” (4, 658), until admonished by Adam. Adam inquires into the movements of the cosmos and is told by Raphael to “Think only what concerns thee and thy being” (8, 174). Raphael’s visit to Adam is to prevent the possibility that “Wilfully transgressing he pretend / Surprisal, unadmonisht, unforewarn’d” (5, 244-5). Humanity demonstrates a tendency towards the obtuse, to reflection on things beyond control or understanding. In order to remain within the bounds of obedience, Adam and Eve depend upon each other and upon divine intervention. The Paradise of Fools exposes the natural dangers that beset prelapsarian humanity. Without discourse, the human mind wanders. A wandering
mind, even with good intentions, will mire itself in this Paradise of Fools. Community
and communication are, thus, central to this vision of prelapsarian humanity. In Paradise
Lost, we are language users, dependent upon one another.

The Paradise of Fools demonstrates the essential difference between humanity and
angels. There is no Paradise of Fools for the angels: There is only hell. The intuitive
nature of the angels allows them to confront freedom directly. For the angels, the choice
is clear: to abide within the promise or disobey. On the other hand, language displaces
humanity to some extent from direct disobedience. In book 3, God makes the reader
aware of the difference between the two:

The first sort by thir own suggestion fell,
Self-tempted, self-deprav’d: Man falls deceiv’d
By th’ other first. . . (3, 129-31)

Moreover, the interdiction given to the angels is much clearer than that given to
humanity. To the angels, God states,

... him who disobeys
Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day
Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
Into utter darkness, deep ingulft, his place
Ordain’d without redemption, without end. (5, 611-15)

God unambiguously tells the angels the consequence of disobedience. The consequence is
clear and absolute: Disobedience means eternal rejection. While to Adam, God declares,

... of the Tree
Which tasted works knowledge of Good and Evil,
Thou may’st not; in the day thou eat’st, thou di’st;
Death is the penalty impos’d, beware. . . (7, 542-45)

Instead of the threat of being “Cast out from God,” God threatens Adam with Death. As
Adam has no acquaintance with Death, either as a character or an experience (Satan
himself did not recognize or know Death or what Death meant) the threat is veiled. In
other words, the meaning of the consequence is uncertain. Being rejected by God is clear; dying is unclear. The intuitive nature of the angels compels them to make a direct choice. The discursive nature of humanity forces us to make decisions based on language. Our dependence upon language to understand makes us vulnerable to lies and deception. But we are also threatened from within. Solitude allows us to entertain words and thoughts without the checks and balances of the community or from God. Our tendency towards self-deception leads us to the Paradise of Fools; Satan, however, reveals another path.

Through temptation, Satan heightens human awareness of the moral imperative built into creation. The universe stands apart from God because it is free. For the individual, to be free means either to remain within the domain of God or to reject God. The ability to reject God, to choose disobedience, means that a choice grounds creation. Satan’s escape from hell forces God and the angels to confront Adam with this reality:

Converse with Adam ... 

... and such discourse bring on,  
   As may advise him of his happy state,  
   Happiness in his power left free to will,  
   Left to his own free Will, his Will though free,  
   Yet mutable. ... (5, 230-37)

The repetition and variations of the words “free” and “will” make clear the imperative Raphael is to discuss with Adam. Moreover, the imperative has cosmic consequences after the fall:

... The Sun  
   Had first his precept so to move, so shine,  
   As might affect the Earth with cold and heat  
   Scarce tolerable, and from the North to call  
   Decrepit Winter, from the South to bring  
   Solstitial summer’s heat. (10, 651-56)

The moon, planets, stars, wind, poles, and beasts all feel the change. The presence of Satan creates the possibility of fall through error, through deception. Therefore, God
teaches Adam, through Raphael, the severity and consequences of free will. In other words, because of Raphael’s instruction, Satan’s presence only heightens Adam’s and Eve’s awareness of the nature of freedom. Adam and Eve, prior to their falls, are given not only the original interdiction against the tree, but also the interdiction received by the angels. The historical consequences of disobedience are laid before them.

**A Free Universe**

Chaos has sometimes been misread as being the true threat within *Paradise Lost*. The essence of the conflict, however, is not between order and chaos but between obedience and disobedience. In terms of obedience or disobedience, chaos is completely malleable to whatever forces encounter it. As much as the character Chaos may complain, he puts up little resistance either way. Moreover, to do otherwise would betray his nature. Within the poem, chaos is pure, unactualized potential; Chaos is the unpredicated. Chaos is not an enemy of creation but an extension of the creative aspect of God. Chaos is the feminine recipient of the creative process.

Freedom, which underscores the entire poem, does not naturally exist in a world which is simply an extension of God. If creation stands distinct from God, something must allow it to be distinct. Through a call for obedience, through a simple divine language act, God severs the universe from himself. Choice now exists because within the command lies the possibility for disobedience. Hell does not have to be populated in order for freedom to exist. Satan is not a hero who shows us the path to freedom. Freedom exists historically from the moment God demands obedience.

The Paradise of Fools serves as a uniquely human region. Milton’s narrator discusses the Paradise of Fools because it makes us aware of human weakness, where and how we falter. We are language users; idle speculation, if not checked by vigorous discussion, can lead us astray. This drifting may or may not lead us into disobedience, but it does set us off from obedience.
The space where the action occurs demonstrates profoundly the importance of freedom within the poem. The universe of *Paradise Lost* is radically free. God does not create the world from nothing; God, through a promise, allows the world to be distinct. Choices made by the individuals within the poem shape the physical universe.
Chapter 7: Abdiel: Obedience as Choice

This chapter explores one of the consequences of the elevation of the Son: the process of choice. In the opening chapters, I discussed the nature of the problem of freedom from both philosophical and theological perspectives, as well as the theological response of De Doctrina Christiana. Eve’s dream, however, heightens our awareness of the puzzling question of the interdiction. Raphael’s subsequent narration of the events that led to the war in heaven, particularly the elevation of the Son, clarifies the importance of interdiction. Through a constitutive speech act, God elevates the Son and thrusts freedom of the will upon creation. God’s promise to the Son creates an imperative “to abide” within the promise and, at the same time, the possibility “to disobey.” Freedom lies in the choice, not in the actualization of either option. In the last chapter, I explored the impact of choice on the physical universe by examining the regions that appear to fall outside of the parameters of God: chaos, hell, and the paradise of fools.

The contrast between Abdiel and Satan reveals what it means to abide and what it means to disobey. The process of choice, however, is the same for both. This chapter focuses on the process by which a choice can be declared authentic.

After the exaltation in book 5 and before Satan leads his legions to the North, moral neutrality has been shattered. The promise to the Son at the exaltation—“by my Self have sworn to him shall bow / All knees in Heav’n, and shall confess him Lord” (5, 607-8)—creates a world in which its inhabitants’ actions have consequences. Abiding within the promise brings unity; disobedience brings God’s wrath and rejection. These consequences establish our distinctiveness from God: we are not simply extensions or modes of God. One cannot evade this choice: One is either within the promise or outside of the promise. Moreover, while choice between the affirmation or negation of God’s promise allows for freedom and independence, actualization of negation is not essential to the experience of freedom. That is, freedom would exist without, even if Satan had
never rejected God. Freedom is thrust upon us whether we desire it or not; the way we live only reveals our choice.

The story of Abdiel in *Paradise Lost* serves to highlight the actions which constitute a completely free act: awareness, rejection of a certain possibility, and affirmation of an alternative possibility. The perception exists that obedience is simply abstention from disobedience: “I see that most through sloth had rather serve” (6, 166). As a result, a very real danger confronted Milton: His readers might conclude that without Satan, or Satan’s rejection, freedom would be an empty and meaningless term. That is, without experiential knowledge of disobedience, free will is meaningless. This issue arises again, with greater significance, when Adam and Eve lack any sort of knowledge about Death. Does such ignorance lessen the validity of choice? If we assume that choice is limited by experiential knowledge, then freedom becomes grounded in Satan’s rejection of the Father. Satan then becomes the father of freedom, a Prometheus figure, a benefactor to humanity. However, in the chapter on the exaltation, I have demonstrated how God’s *words* sufficiently establish freedom: Our response or the angelic response is not pertinent to the experience of this freedom. Abdiel demonstrates that obedience is a choice as demonstrative and vigorous as disobedience, and Abdiel counters the disobedience of Satan and, thereby, provides a counter-model of the exercise of freedom. Consequently, Adam and Eve discover that freedom grounds experience itself; freedom is not a consequence of disobedience.

**The Puzzle of Abdiel**

Over the years, scholars have wrestled with an angel as enigmatic as Jacob’s: Abdiel. The puzzling problem of Abdiel is that there is no obvious paradigm for him. Why did Milton not use one of the known archangels who already appear in the poem? Why give such importance to this unknown entity? The answers have been imaginative, to say the least.
One popular method of approaching Abdiel has been to see parallels with other biblical or classical figures. In this vein, George W. Whiting argues that Abdiel and the prophet Abdias or Obadiah share characteristics: “Aiming at universal truth, Milton, it seems, raised Abdias’s oracle from the historical or legendary to the absolute and spiritual plane.”

Jack Goldman points out that in Hebrew Abdiel can also mean “to separate.” Goldman proceeds to draw parallels between Abdiel and the biblical characters Noah, Phineas, and Elijah (252-4). Francis C. Blessington sees Abdiel as a Christianized version of Homer’s Thersites, inverting the classical tradition. Like Thersites, Abdiel questions heroic posturing: “Both poets [Milton and Homer] use an inconspicuous character for the purpose of contrasting heroic and anti-heroic behaviour” (111). However, the reader does not feel compelled to reject Abdiel as he or she does Thersites. Abdiel succeeds in creating a new understanding of the meaning of heroic for the reader.

A number of people, instead of trying to determine how Milton dreamed up the character of Abdiel, focus on the purpose of Abdiel within the poem. Diana Benet, for example, argues that Eve wants to emulate Abdiel and that Adam wants to emulate the Son. Both Adam and Eve are mistaken in their interpretations of Raphael’s instructions, but the roots of their disagreement at the separation scene spring from their understanding of the Abdiel story. Charles W. Durham argues, quite convincingly, that the point of Abdiel is to demonstrate how merit supersedes rank in Paradise Lost. The story of Abdiel illustrates how “hierarchical rank can be superseded by merit, and that the order of creation, except in the absoluteness of the Father/Son relationship, is secondary, if not ultimately insignificant, both in heaven and on earth in Paradise Lost” (19). Mason Tung asserts that “We should also examine the significance of this episode in light of the

contexts of the epic as well as of Milton’s thought.” He argues that “Abdiel may be a foil to Satan, but in the total context of the epic he is really a foil to both Eve and Adam” (605). In other words, Abdiel’s actions contrast more with Eve’s and Adam’s than with Satan’s. Benet, Durham, and Tung bring out important elements of the Abdiel episode; however, Abdiel appears almost utilitarian with such readings. His value is not as a character but as a function, a place holder. Such a reading reduces Abdiel to the status of the allegorical figures in the poem such as Sin and Death. On the other hand, Abdiel puzzles us because, even though we do not know of him prior to the poem, he is a realized character. Abdiel does not simply show us the error of Satan or the possibility of steadfastness; Abdiel emerges as a character because he embraces choice.

Satan's Negative Option

Satan embodies the negative option offered by God at the exaltation. As I argued in chapter 5, the exaltation offers two distinct consequences: 1. Abiding within God’s promise to the Son brings unity and happiness (“united as one individual Soul / For ever happy” (5, 610-11)); 2. Disobedience brings separation from God and rejection by God (“Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls / Into utter darkness” (5, 613-14)). The striking feature of the exaltation is how it grounds obedience and disobedience in language: Obedience and disobedience relate directly to God’s promise to the Son, a distinct speech act. How Satan breaks the promise brings into relief the nature of freedom as established by the exaltation. Satan’s process of negation involves an awareness of the import of the exaltation, a rejection of the promise to the Son, and an affirmation of a new doctrine or alternative version of the state of affairs.

The first step in the authentic exercise of freedom is awareness. Satan appears to recognize immediately the novelty introduced by the exaltation of the Son. The first words that follow the Father’s proclamation are the following: “So spake th’ Omnipotent, and with his words / All seem’d well pleas’d, all seem’d, but were not all” (5, 616-17).

Two things are worthy of mention about this passage. First, the narrator draws attention to the linguistic nature of the exaltation. The words “thus spake” (5, 599) immediately precede God’s actual utterance, while the words “So spake” immediately follow. Moreover, the narrator states, “with his words / All seem’d well pleas’d” (5, 616-17, emphasis mine). Second, there is the proximity of the Satanic questioning of the Father’s utterance. As soon as the Father finishes speaking, as soon as the narrator has reminded us that the Father has spoken, the process of rejection begins: “all seem’d, but were not all” (5, 617). The word “all” appears three times in the passage, four if one counts the prefix “Omni-”: “So spake th’ Omnipotent, and with his words / All seem’d well pleas’d, all seem’d, but were not all” (5, 616-17, emphasis mine). The repetition of the word “all” serves a purpose similar to that of the repetition of the words “all seem’d”: Repetition draws attention to the final negation or contradiction of the term. In other words, the whole passage builds towards the final negation of the “all,” showing that negation is intimately linked to the Father’s utterance.

Raphael proceeds to identify various motives for Satan’s rebellion, but these motives appear less important than the pervading image of an awakening. After a long digression about the activities of the angels around God’s throne by day and their need for rest—“they slept / Fann’d with cool Winds” (5, 654-5)—Raphael mentions how the angels’ “Melodious Hymns about the sovran Throne / Alternate all night long” (5, 656-7). This dutiful awakening so that God might be continually praised contrasts with another awakening: “but not so wak’d / Satan” (657-8). Raphael shifts from Satan’s wakefulness to attribute various motives for it, such as envy (5, 662), pride (5, 665), and malice (5, 666). What is interesting is that none of these lead directly to disobedience, but they lead Satan to resolve “to dislodge, and leave / Unworship, unobey’d the Throne supreme” (5, 669-70, emphasis mine). Disobedience is neither random nor impulsive: One can leave something “unobey’d” without necessarily falling into “disobedience.” Wording is always important for Milton, and “unobey’d” is unique in the poem and never recurs. As yet,
Satan has not articulated, even to himself, his grievance. Without that articulation, there can be no disobedience because disobedience must be deliberate. Satan needs to utter, to put into words, his dissatisfaction. Consequently, Satan turns and “his next subordinate / Awak’ning, thus to him in secret spake” (5, 671-2). Satan’s speech immediately contrasts a state of sleeping with a state of awakening: “Sleep’st thou, Companion dear, what sleep can close / Thy eye-lids?... Both waking we were one; how then can now / Thy sleep dissent” (5, 673-79). Sleep becomes associated with innocence, even ignorance. Satan awakens his listener to a new potentiality: “infus’d / Bad influence into th’ unwary breast / Of his Associate” (5, 694-96). The structure of book 5 itself bears out this continuous play with sleep and awakening: The book opens with Adam surprised “to find unwak’n’d Eve / With Tresses dispos’d, and glowing Cheek, / As through unquiet rest” (5, 9-11). Upon awakening, Eve finds that her world has been altered by the Satan-inspired dream. While Adam awakens an innocent Eve, Eve’s dream awakens in Eve an awareness of disobedience; later in the book, Satan awakens in Beelzebub a similar awareness. The awakenings that permeate book 5 highlight the importance of awareness. Not surprisingly, Raphael’s visit, central for the book, is for this very purpose, awareness: “this let him know, / Lest wilfully transgressing he [Adam] pretend / Surprisal, unadmonisht, unforewarn’d” (5, 243-45). Thus, Satan’s motives and the revolt itself recede in importance, and book 5 anticipates the idea of awareness.

The question remains: Awareness of what? Satan highlights the idea of novelty in God’s ordinance and suggests that this novelty violates an implicit equality of beings. Satan explicitly rejects the order and hierarchy contained in the promise because it supposedly falls outside of experience. Satan’s first complaint reads as follows:

... new Laws thou see’st impos’d;
New Laws from him who reigns, new minds may raise

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127 I am not speaking of Satan’s authentic motives—envy, pride, and so on—but the actual wording of his rebellion. One must not forget that, since the exaltation, language can as easily be used to conceal as reveal meaning.
In us who serve, *new Counsels*, to debate
What doubtful may ensue. . . (5, 679-82, emphasis mine)

The dominant word of the passage is, quite evidently, “new.” Twice the word is attached to “Laws,” in each case suggesting something to the hearer about God. In the first phrase, “new Laws” precedes the clause for which it is the object: “thou see’st impos’d.” The clause, by placing the object before its subject and verb, stresses both the newness of the laws and the manner in which the laws have been “impos’d.” In this clause, there is no mention of the one who has established the laws, only that they have been “impos’d.” The next line reiterates that the laws are “New Laws,” but this time care is taken to identify the lawmaker: “him who reigns.” Satan, in this passage, carefully identifies God strictly in terms of relationships of politics or power: “reigns” and “impos’d.” Balancing these twice mentioned “New Laws” are “new minds” and “new Counsels.” The matching and repetition of “new” creates a sense of balance and symmetry. This aural and structural sense of balance is disrupted by the rhyme “ensue,” which is, indeed, the question: What will ensue? Strictly on the level of sound, a rupture also occurs in the third line of the cited passage. Until the third line and the words “new Counsels,” the passage is strictly iambic. “Counsels” introduces a rhythmic shift, and regularity does not re-emerge until the next line. Thus, on different levels, Satan questions the current order, particularly the alleged newness of that order.

The newness of the order is not the only objection Satan raises; Satan also objects on the grounds of a presumed equality. Satan tries to capture this sense of equality visually with his choice of gathering and his naming of the place. He gathers the angels around a mount which the narrator explicitly parallels with the mount of exaltation:

... he [Satan]
Affecting all equality with God,
In imitation of that Mount whereon
*Messiah* was declar’d in sight of Heav’n,
The Mountain of the Congregation call’d. . . . (5, 762-66)
Like the pairing of "new minds" and "new Counsels" with "new Laws," Satan physically matches God's place of declaration with another mount. At the exaltation, the angels are summoned to gather "before th' Almighty's Throne" (5, 585); on Satan's mount there is also a "Royal seat / High on a Hill" (5, 756-7). However, Satan deliberately names his "The Mountain of the Congregation" and wants his mount to be associated with counsel, deliberation, conversation. Conversely, God's mount is associated with declaration on the part of the speaker and obedience on the part of the hearer: "Hear my Decree . . . I declare . . . I him appoint" (5, 602-06). Satan's mount appears, against the relief of its counterpart, a space of participation and process. Thus, Satan physically and verbally tries to create a sense of equality within the congregation and to match it with the might of God.

Satan's speeches continue to develop this theme of an equality that, appearing to acknowledge difference, actually resents difference. The opening line of Satan's address matches exactly the order and phrasing of God's address at the exaltation: "Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers" (5, 601; 772). Satan, however, begins his address with these titles while the Father precedes them with the phrase, "Hear all ye Angels, Progeny of Light" (5, 600). God draws attention to the idea that angels are progeny, offspring, and, as such, are subservient to, and different from, God. The ordering of angels into different titles and ranks follows naturally from their status as progeny. Satan, careful to eliminate reference to origin, builds his argument from the titles themselves: "If these magnific Titles yet remain / Not merely titular . . . " (5, 773-4). Satan argues that God has stripped the titles of their meaning through the elevation of the Son; in other words, God has stripped the titles--titles which themselves acknowledge difference in rank and purpose--of meaning by creating difference! Of course, the tension within Satan's argument is that difference is one of the things Satan is trying, ostensibly, to preserve: "if not equal all, yet free, / Equally free; for Orders and Degrees / Jar not with liberty, but well consist" (5, 791-3). Satan argues that the exaltation asserts a difference
which negates equality, and “equal” or “equality” appears four times in the second half of Satan’s speech (5, 791, 792, 796, 797). The argument is elusive. It acknowledges, on the one hand, difference in rank and order. On the other hand, it states that the exaltation imposes an inequality which negates the equality implicit within the existing order. Thus, Satan appears to preserve order and rank by rejecting God’s imposition of order and rank.

What Satan ultimately resents is the imposition of freedom itself. Freedom, in Paradise Lost, is built upon difference. Until God asserts the possibility of difference, a difference rooted in obedience or disobedience to a promise made to the Son, all is extension of God. In this sense, Satan is quite correct that before the exaltation all are equal: equally extensions of the divine. Freedom is the innovation brought forward at the exaltation of the Son. Freedom rests upon difference: The individual is not an extension of God but is free to abide within or reject the promise to the Son. The exaltation sanctifies difference, rank, and order. Freedom is not grounded in equality but in difference, in variation. Satan introduces the true innovation by suggesting that freedom depends upon the notion of equality. In book 4, Satan acknowledges that the innovation in thinking was not the exaltation but the idea of equality: “he [God] deserv’d no such return / From me, whom he created . . . lifted up so high / I sdein’d subjection, and thought one step higher / Would set me highest. . .” (4, 42-51). Later, in the same speech, Satan muses, “O had his powerful Destiny ordain’d / Me some inferior Angel, I had stood / Then happy; no unbounded hope had rais’d / Ambition” (4, 58-61). The heightened awareness of difference that the exaltation brings increases Satan’s resentment of that difference. The proximity to the Father makes Satan acutely aware of the distinction between them. However inappropriately, Satan accepts nothing but equality with God. To wish, even hypothetically, for a reduction of status by “his powerful Destiny” displays a resentment of the freedom he has been granted. Freedom brings awareness of inequality, and for Satan, awareness brings resentment of that inequality.
Having articulated his grievance, Satan proceeds to reject the Father’s promise to the Son. This rejection manifests itself both physically, in the removal of the angels to the north and to darkness, and verbally, in Satan’s address to the congregation of angels. Interestingly, the first consequence of disobedience, as set out in the exaltation, is to be “Cast out from God and blessed vision” (5, 613). However, as soon as Satan contemplates disobedience, he himself begins a movement which physically removes him from the Father. Satan, speaking to “his next subordinate” (5, 671), states that they must remove themselves from the proximity of the Father:

... I am to haste,
And all who under me thir Banners wave,
Homeward with flying march where we possess
The Quarters of the North. ... (5, 686-89)

Moreover, the movement must be made under the cover of night. Satan states that the rebel angels must gather, “ere yet dim Night / Her shadowy Cloud withdraws” (5, 685-6). As the movement to the North begins, the text draws our attention to the darkness: “Now ere Night, / Now ere dim Night had disincumber’d Heav’n” (5, 698-9). Satan chooses night and the north as his space for rebellion. Even before he is thrust into “A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round / As one great Furnace flam’d, yet from those flames / No light, but rather darkness visible” (1, 61-3), Satan yearns for darkness. Before arriving at “thir Prison ordained / In utter darkness, and thir portion set / As far remov’d from God and light of Heav’n / As from the Center thrice to th’ utmost Pole” (1, 71-4), Satan begins a movement that physically distances himself from God. Thus, the text portrays the situation of hell, a situation which echoes the words of the exaltation--“Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls / Into utter darkness, deep ingultf. ...” (5, 613-14)--as one of distance from God and of physical darkness. The story of the genesis of the rebellion, however, places Satan’s removal from God and the darkness that Satan inhabits prior to any activity by God.
Even more telling than the genesis of the rebellion is the portability of hell. In spite of the show of strength in the words “Adamantine Gates” (2, 853), Satan receives very little resistance to any of his designs. In book 1, as Satan floats on the fiery lake, the narrator informs us that God actually permits Satan to emerge from the flames:

So stretcht out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay
Chain’d on the burning Lake, nor ever thence
Had ris’n or heav’d his head, but that the will
And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
Left him at large to his own dark designs. . . . (1, 209-13)

At this point, God evidently sees no need to contain Satan or his cohorts; they are given free rein in hell. Moreover, within the poem, hell is less a physical space than a mode of being. Hell is being alienated from God. As God is defined by light in book 3, so the poem links alienation with darkness. Be it the fiery lake or the gates of paradise, the torment remains the same. Satan discovers his incapacity for repose when he leaves the confines of hell: “Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell” (4, 75). Jules David Law, in his article “Eruption and Containment: The Satanic Predicament in Paradise Lost,” argues that the demonic anxiety expressed by Belial, that they will lose “this intellectual being,” is actually a delusion.128 Containment is meaning. Satan cannot be contained because in his uncontainment lies his eternal punishment. The essence of Satan’s uncontainment is his separation from the ground of being in the poem: God. Satan cannot be dissolved because he is, through his alienation from God, already negation embodied.

As Satan addresses the congregation of angels, he does more than simply build within his audience resentment against difference; he actively challenges the title accorded to the Son. Satan, early in his address, declares,

. . . by Decree
Another now hath to himself ingross’t
All Power, and us eclips’st under the name
Of King anointed. . . . (5, 774-77)

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Again, attention is drawn both to the decree and to the naming of the Son. Resentment centres on the title of “King” and the apparent subordination it implies for others. Not surprisingly, Satan refers to the Son as “Another” and avoids use of the term “Son” altogether. This avoidance of “Son” indicates a desire to avoid authentic issues of primacy, merit, and appropriateness. Satan’s concern is as much with the imposition of the title as it is with the implications of the title: “Who can in reason then or right assume / Monarchy . . . or can introduce / Law and Edict on us. . . ?” (5, 794-98). Again, in the same speech, Satan states, “much less for this to be our Lord, / And look for adoration to th’ abuse / Of those Imperial Titles. . .” (5, 799-801). In this speech, Satan rejects the title God has given the Son; Satan denies being subordinate “under the name” (5, 776).

Satan proceeds to the third step: grounding his claim for equality in the idea of self-generation. Satan has acknowledged a difference in ability and rank but maintains that the exaltation of the Son threatens a presumed equality. I have pointed out how Satan evades or negates mention of the angels’ status as creatures. After the confrontation with Abdiel, Satan goes one step further and denies that the angels are creatures at all.

After Abdiel condemns Satan’s argument for equality and claims that the Son is the means by which God has created all things, Satan attacks Abdiel’s suggestion that God creates through the Son and appeals to experience and memory. First, Satan suggests that such a doctrine is an innovation in itself: “strange point and new!” (5, 855). He then proceeds to appeal to solipsism akin to Descartes’s radical method of doubt. Fallon suggests that Satan “acknowledges only empirical evidence” (218). According to Fallon, “The most bizarre product of Satan’s obstinate empiricism is his [Satan’s] claim of self-creation” (218). If we look closely at Satan’s speech, however, memory, not empirical evidence, comes to the fore: “remember’st thou / Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?” (5, 857-8). For Satan, the true test of veracity is internal, intramental: “We know no time when we were not as now; / Know none before us. . .” (5, 859-60). While Satan stresses knowledge in the present, he turns to memory as the source for that knowledge.
From this position of memory and knowing, Satan has sufficiently answered Abdiel’s attack. If we rely on memory as the ground of knowledge, anything authentically unfamiliar or outside of experience is innovative and, consequently, provocative, challenging current notions of existence. Satan ostensibly appeals to experience—“who saw / When this creation was?” (5, 856-7)—but really appeals to memory. By restricting the parameters of the argument to those of memory, Satan can reject anything that falls outside of those parameters.

Of course, Satan is not content to establish uncertainty but proceeds to create an alternative version of creation. Satan presents the case that they are “self-begot, self-raised / By our own quickening power. . . . Our puissance is our own. . . .” (5, 860-64). Satan creates a myth to counter the conventional understanding of angelic descent; consequently, any rejection of God has an alternative myth to embrace, however tenuous that myth might be within the context of the poem. With this new myth, Satan appears to reject the difference sanctified by the exaltation and to embrace the possibility of a freedom grounded in equality. Whether Satan actually holds this self-creation theory or the “ideals” behind it is irrelevant; what matters is that Satan recognizes a need to make a choice that extends beyond simple rejection. To negate God’s promise still demonstrates a dependency upon God: God establishes the parameters of the promise. True rebellion or disobedience pursues an authentically new path, a path which, ironically, is “self-begot, self-raised” (5, 860). God establishes freedom upon the possibility of negation. In this sense only, in the creation of difference and the potential of negation, God creates the possibility for evil. Satan, however, formulates the unique path which evil is to take: Satan actualizes the negative path and is the true father of evil.

Satan embodies the negative side of the promise to the Son. His rebellion follows a path of awareness, rejection, and the embracing of another position. The exaltation awakens Satan to difference. Resenting that difference, Satan rejects the title afforded the Son. Satan’s decision to reject the Father’s promise, however, extends far beyond simple
negation. Satan creates a counter-story of existence to support his claim for a freedom grounded not in difference but in equality. And, by contrast, Abdiel stands as a demonstrative voice for obedience, recognizing that difference or equality are not choices but givens. God has thrust freedom upon the angels, and the acceptance or rejection of that state of affairs simply constitutes the exercise of that freedom. Abdiel testifies to the active nature of obedience.

**Abdiel: A Rebel in the Midst of Rebellion**

As Satan diminishes himself through his denial of difference, Milton elevates an angel little known outside the poem. Abdiel embraces obedience and demonstrates its aggressively active nature. As Abdiel’s story shows, obedience involves awareness or recognition, rejection of negation, and affirmation of the promise or re-integration with the Father. Obedience does not consist of a simple maintenance of status; obedience is grounded neither in ignorance nor on fear. The process of Abdiel’s emergence as a major figure counters the process of Satan’s deterioration as a figure. The exercise of freedom requires awareness, rejection of some alternative, and the affirmation of a counter alternative.

Abdiel recognizes the nature of Satan’s seduction and draws attention to the central issue: equality. After an explosion of epithets—"argument blasphemous, false and proud!" (5, 809)—Abdiel first points to the existing differences in class and rank between Satan and the rest of the angels: "least of all from thee, ingrate, / In place thyself so high above thy Peers" (811-12). Abdiel recognizes the crux of Satan’s argument—equality—and challenges it:

... unjust thou say’st
Flatly unjust, to bind with Laws the free,
And equal over equals to let Reign,
One over all with unsucceeded power. (5, 818-21)

Shortly thereafter, Abdiel repeats the phrase "equal over equals": "But to grant it thee unjust, / That equal over equals Monarch Reign..." (5, 831-32). Abdiel, addressing the
congregation, isolates from Satan's speech the essence of his rebellion: the claim of equality. The repetition of "equal over equals" indicates an awareness on Abdiel's part of the nature of the rebellion.

Abdiel proceeds to reject zealously Satanic claims for equality. His first argument appears to ground his rejection in unknowing: "Shalt thou give Law to God, shalt thou dispute / With him the points of Liberty... ?" (5, 822-23). Somewhat problematically, Abdiel's answer directly alludes to God's enigmatic answer to Job:

Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it... .Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous? Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him? (Job 40: 2-9)

I use the word problematic because, in some ways, Abdiel's answer, like God's to Job, does not really address the question. Does craftsmanship, or the status as creator, override ethical concerns such as Satan raises? Moreover, can or should an artist determine or control the interpretation of his or her work? Abdiel is really putting forward an argument based on authority. Consequently, Abdiel's first retort to Satan's argument appears a bit shallow.

Looking at Abdiel's response more closely, however, one notices that, given the context of the exaltation, Abdiel is not arguing that God, having made everything, can do whatever he pleases. Abdiel wishes to avert the charge that God is arbitrary, random, whimsical, imposing new decrees whenever the fancy strikes him. The key phrase from Abdiel's speech is the following: "who made / Thee what thou art, and form'd the Pow'rs of Heav'n / Such as he pleas'd, and circumscrib'd thir being?" (5, 823-25). Without the context of the exaltation, the passage simply begins an apology which asserts, over and over, that God is good, so whatever he does is good. The verbs "made" and "form'd" do
little to dispel the doubts of Abdiel’s audience, but the passage concludes with the word critical to the argument: “circumscrib’d.” The exaltation is an act of circumscription. With the promise to the Son, God divides the universe into those who abide within and those who disobey; God circumscribes the limits of obedience. Freedom is rooted in the relationship between the individual and the Father; the Son is the shibboleth of the relationship. By drawing attention to the circumscription that the exaltation establishes, Abdiel rejects the idea that freedom rests in equality.

Abdiel proceeds to argue on the basis of past and current experience. This argument, unlike Satan’s argument of experience, does not restrict it to memory and, for the reader, is doubly potent for the way it resonates with Satan’s own words encountered in book 4. Abdiel states that “by experience taught we know how good, / And of our good, and of our dignity / How provident he is” (5, 826-8). In other words, through our past experience we know of the goodness of God, but our present good and dignity reveals “How provident he is” (emphasis mine). Experience encompasses both past and present. For the reader, these lines in turn recall Satan’s own words: “he deserv’d no such return / From me, whom he created what I was / In that bright eminence, and with his good / Upbraided none; nor was his service hard” (4, 42-5). The experience of God—both Satan’s and Abdiel’s—is of goodness. Abdiel projects that goodness into the future: “how far from thought / To make us less” (5, 828-9).

Abdiel then points out the discrepancy between the Son, the Father, and the Angels, and he argues that the freedom of creatures depends upon a decision by God to restrict the extent of his own freedom. Abdiel first implies that Satan’s argument for equality with the Son is invalid: “Thyself though great and glorious dost thou count, / Or
all Angelic Nature join’d in one, / Equal to him begotten Son. . .” (5, 833-35). Moreover, Abdiel asserts that the Son acts as the efficient cause of the Father: “As by his Word the mighty Father made / All things, ev’n thee [Satan]. . .” (5, 836-37). While Satan quickly addresses and dismisses these contentions, he completely ignores another of Abdiel’s contentions: “since he [the Son] the Head / One of our number thus reduc’t becomes” (5, 842-43). Abdiel’s claim is quite remarkable. In essence, he claims that the Son has been reduced by the exaltation. The question is, of course, how the exaltation constitutes a reduction. But it binds the Son to the Angels; the Son can never more be independent of his relationship to the angels. This relationship, established by the language of the Father’s promise, binds Son and angels, even if their union is based on difference. More importantly, the exaltation, by linking the Father through the Son to the Angels, circumscribes both the Son and the Father. While the promise to the Son expands the moral thrust of the angels by creating differentiation from God, the imperative for obedience (which the promise creates) necessitates the possibility of disobedience. The very possibility of disobedience requires a circumscription of God’s power. The Son and the Father are “reduc’t” in the sense that their will can be countered and rejected. Contrary to what Satan argues, the exaltation does not diminish the angels; it restricts God.

Abdiel rejects Satan’s argument that angelic glory and freedom have been threatened by the exaltation of the Son. While Abdiel does put forward an argument based on the Father’s authority and primacy, elements within that argument effectively

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129 The OED identifies two passages from Milton to illustrate the earliest use of reduced to mean “to bring down to a lower rank or position, dignity, etc. Also without const. And with inf.” The second example is the very passage under discussion.
counter Satan’s position and address the concerns of the reader. The most significant element within Abdiel’s argument is the notion of circumscription: the circumscription of creation by the promise to the Son and the circumscription of the Son and the Father by the promise.

After countering Satan’s argument, Abdiel explicitly rejects Satan and his supporters. Isolated from the rebel angels—“alone / Encompass’d round with foes” (5, 875-6)—Abdiel verbally distinguishes himself from the rebel crew:

O alienate from God, O Spirit accurst,
Forsak’n of all good; I see thy fall
Determin’d, and thy hapless crew involv’d
In this perfidious fraud, contagion spread
Both of thy crime and punishment. . . . (5, 877-81)

The rejection explicitly draws attention to the “perfidious fraud” with which Satan’s followers are “involv’d.” Disobedience requires more than association with or awareness of evil (an association of which the zealous Abdiel is now guilty) or even the rejection of good; disobedience requires the promulgation of an alternative system of belief, in this case the “perfidious fraud” of self-generation.

Having rejected Satan’s claims for equality as the ground of freedom and Satan’s myth of self-generation, Abdiel physically returns to God, reaffirming his place within the promise. Raphael pours high praise on Abdiel as he leaves the rebellious angels in order to return to the Father:

Abdiel faithful found,
Among the faithless, faithful only hee;
Among innumerable false, unmov’d,
Unshak’n, unseduc’d, unterrifi’d
His Loyalty he kept, his Love, his Zeal;
Nor number, nor example with him wrought
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind
Though single. (5, 896-903)

The series of negations—"unmov'd, / Unshak'n, unseduc'd, unterrifi'd" (5, 898-9)—emphasize the negative aspect of obedience, rejection of evil. However, to be "faithful found" requires more than a rejection of evil: "His Loyalty he kept, his Love, his Zeal" (5, 890). While book 5 finishes with Abdiel's departure from evil, book 6 begins with Abdiel's reintegration into the camp of the Father: "All night the dreadless Angel unpursu'd / Through Heav'n's wide Champaign held his way, till Morn" (6, 1-2). Upon his return, Abdiel is "received / With joy and acclamations loud" (6, 22-3) because "one / Return'd not lost" (6, 24-5). The Father singles Abdiel out for praise, emphasizing the linguistic nature of the battle: "maintain'd / Against revolted multitudes the Cause / Of Truth, in word mightier than they in Arms" (6, 30-2, emphasis mine). The Father also praises Abdiel for his "testimony of Truth" (6, 33). The exercise of freedom resides mainly in language, but such exercise must be supported by physical action. Thus, after Abdiel rejects Satan with words, after turning his back to Satan, Abdiel affirms his belief in the Father's promise by physically returning to the Father's camp. The return completes the movement of authentic obedience that begins with awareness, proceeds through rejection of disobedience, and culminates with an affirmation of obedience.

The conjunction of language and action is reinforced by Abdiel's confrontation with Satan before the battle. Physical action appears as another language through which we assert our obedience: "His [Satan's] puissance ... I mean to try, whose Reason I have tri'd / Unsound and false" (6, 119-21). The text suggests that the battle is an extension of the earlier debate: "he who in debate of Truth hath won, / Should win in Arms" (6, 122-3). Moreover, Abdiel states that God's armies are arrayed "to defeat / Thy folly" (6, 138-9), not the rebellion itself. Indeed, what occurs before the battle--"this pause between" (6, 162)--is another debate between Abdiel and Satan. However, this debate is punctuated not by a turning away from Satan and a movement towards God; it is punctuated by "a noble
stroke he [Abdiel] lifted high, / Which hung not, but so swift with tempest fell / On the proud Crest of Satan” (6, 189-91). Abdiel initiates the actual battle and puts an end to the debate of words. Nor is there hesitation or indecision in the act; it proceeds naturally from an obedience that cognitively rejects Satan and embraces obedience. Both the initiation and absence of hesitation demonstrate that obedience is active, not reactive. Abdiel’s example strongly counters Satan’s words that “I see that most through sloth had rather serve” (6, 166). Obedience is not simply resistance; obedience is a decision every bit as dynamic and potent as disobedience.

Thus, Abdiel embodies the freedom of obedience in a way that counters Satan’s manifestation of the freedom of disobedience. Satan’s disobedience follows a pattern of awareness instigated by the exaltation, a rejection of the promise to the Son, and an affirmation of an alternative postulate--that of self-generation. Abdiel’s obedience follows the same pattern: awareness instigated by Satan’s speech, a rejection of Satan’s premise of equality and rebellion, a return to and embracing of the Father’s promise. Neutrality is denied to the angels by the exaltation itself: One either abides within or rejects the promise. Abdiel shows that the expression of freedom is not an absence of willfulness or activity but an act as vigorous as that of rebellion. The language of promise thrusts us into the world of moral imperative and consequence: We have no option but to choose. Obedience is the exercise of choice, not a reluctance to exercise choice.
Chapter 8: “Man therefore shall find grace”: Why can grace be found?

This final chapter explores the most enigmatic and important consequence of the interdiction: grace. In a poem which so often stresses personal responsibility and culpability, the very notion of grace is startling. However, when the poem sets out to “justify the ways of God to men” (1, 26), one of “the ways” that needs justifying is grace. Book 3 makes quite clear that mercy and grace are integral to our understanding of the Father: “Mercy first and last shall brightest shine” (3, 134).\(^\text{130}\) Does the reader, however, feel that grace is appropriate, or is the reader like the grumbling brother in the parable of the prodigal son? God must balance the need for both grace and justice: “in Mercy and Justice both, / Through Heav’n and Earth, so shall my glory excel” (3, 131-2). The reader also needs to be taught compassion. Adam’s and Eve’s inarticulate and incomplete rejections of God help to establish this balance between justice and compassion. Each chooses to disobey and transgress, but, unlike Satan, neither explicitly rejects God.

I began this thesis by discussing the nature of the problem of freedom, Milton’s theological answer in *De Doctrina Christiana*, the poetic reworking or rephrasing of the problem in *Paradise Lost* (Eve’s dream), and the poem’s radical solution (the elevation of the Son). I proceeded to elaborate the consequences of the elevation of the Son: the response of the physical universe and the responses of Satan and Abdiel. This final chapter focuses on God’s interpretation of Adam’s and Eve’s choices. On the one hand, the poem clearly establishes culpability. At the same time, it also teaches mercy and compassion.

In book 3 of *Paradise Lost*, God declares that even though Adam and Eve will fall--and fall freely--they shall find grace. In God’s words, “The first sort [the rebel angels] by thir own suggestion fell, / Self-tempted, self-deprav’d: Man falls deceiv’d / By

\(^{130}\text{See also how the Son reflects the Father: “Divine compassion visibly appear’d, / Love without end, and without measure Grace” (3, 141-2). Also note the Son’s responses to the Father: “gracious was that word which clos’d / Thy sovran sentence, that Man should find grace” (3, 144-5) and “Father, thy word is past, man shall find grace; / And shall grace not find means. ?” (3, 227-31).}
th’ other first: Man therefore shall find grace, / The other none” (3, 129-32). The statement strikes the reader as strange coming at the end of a lengthy speech whose main purpose is to establish the sufficiency of Adam and Eve to stand. The conclusion that grace shall be found is striking, given the context. Nonetheless, grace is not imposed, but *found*, and this difference is important when the reader encounters the fall in book 9. The question is, where does God *find* grace? How does the fall of Satan differ qualitatively from the fall of Adam and Eve? How can grace be found for Adam and Eve without suggesting any worthiness on their part? In other words, how does the poem navigate through this treacherous path between suggesting that they *deserve* grace and they deserve a punishment in kind with Satan’s?

The answer lies in the failures of Adam and Eve: Unlike Satan’s rejection, Adam’s and Eve’s rejection of God is incomplete. In the previous chapter, I discussed how both obedience and disobedience rely on three conditions: awareness, rejection of a current situation or possibility, and acceptance of an alternative position. All three conditions relate to the promise that God makes to the Son at the exaltation. To speak specifically of the condition of rejection, Satan rejects the exaltation itself while Abdiel rejects the position of, and the alternative possibilities created by, Satan. In the cases of Adam and Eve, however, I will demonstrate how their rejections are integrated into the act of disobedience and blurred by their choices for an alternative reality. Even though their choices are made freely and knowingly and do contravene the interdiction, Satan does not persuade Adam and Eve to reject God explicitly. Adam’s and Eve’s choices, however bad they may be, appear on a wholly different level from Satan’s choice. God recognizes this difference and, perhaps more importantly, so does the reader. The reader does not so much choose with Adam and Eve, but most readers do feel compassion. The reader, through compassion, encounters the defining characteristic of God: mercy. If he or she is moved by the closing—“They hand in hand with wand’ring steps and slow, / Through *Eden* took thir solitary way” (12, 648-9)—then he or she has come to understand
“Mercy and Justice both . . . But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine” (3, 132-4). The intuition of the appropriateness of grace does not lie in any choice or worthiness on the part of either Adam or Eve, but the incompleteness of their rejections makes this intuition possible.

Separation and Two Falls: Commentaries on Book 9

If one immerses oneself in the debates about the Fall, a number of positions become clear. One discussion focuses on Adam’s inability to rein in Eve at the separation scene before the Fall. Another position examines the role of Eve in the Fall: duped, vain or ambitious? Finally, some discussion centres on motivations for Adam’s choice. All these positions reveal important insights into the Fall, but most fail to notice how Adam’s and Eve’s rejections are of a different kind from Satan’s. Instead of simply examining their failures, we need to look at how their failures differ from Satan’s rebellion.

The separation scene which precedes the Fall has received much attention through the years. Bowers takes the position that Adam really errs in letting Eve go off alone: “in his role as protector Adam had no right to relieve himself from his responsibility to Eve by making her a free agent. In so doing he failed in his duty both to her and to God” (271). For Bowers, the critical scene of the Fall occurs when Adam gives Eve permission to go off alone. More recently, Teresa Michals131 sees the scene as a psychic split of competing values: merit and hierarchy. The split in values expresses itself in attitudes towards gardening. Eve is both garden and gardener. As gardener, she threatens Adam’s position. The physical separation of the two is really an embracing of merit over birth, capitalism over feudalism. While there is no doubt that the separation scene is of immense importance, there is something odd about treating it as a fall before the fall. While experience teaches us that choices indeed lead to other choices, the chain-of-choices thinking (that is, one choice seems to lead irrevocably to the next choice) of both

Bowers and Michals seems more appropriate for Hobbes than for Milton. The inadequacy of such a reading can be shown if we consider an analogous situation in Christianity. The separation scene appears significant because of our knowledge of the Fall. The parallel can be found in the crucifixion: We call Good Friday “good” only from the perspective of the resurrection. The Fall, or our knowledge that the Fall is imminent, leads us to examine the events leading up to it with intense scrutiny. The examination itself is a product of our need for reasons, causes. The danger is that any such narrowly Hobbesian cause-and-effect thinking displaces attention from the actual Fall. Moreover, this tracing of causes leads, ultimately, back to God: Why did God make Adam and Eve capable of falling? As Milton had no desire to excuse Adam and Eve, the question remains why so many scholars feel impelled to excuse their behavior.

Of all the fallen, Eve probably most easily elicits our sympathy as readers. Among the more interesting studies is Deirdre Keenan McChrystal’s article “Redeeming Eve.” McChrystal argues that we can trace Eve’s construction of a concept of self through her use of pronouns:

Eve’s use of self-referential pronouns shows a process of self-construction before the Fall as Eve develops from birth into a genuine feminine subject with her own integrity within the speaking community. After the Fall the pronouns show that, ashamed of her sin, Eve participates in her own objectification and then later struggles to redeem herself. (497)

When developing a healthy sense of self, Eve balances subjective and objective references to herself. For example, “It is the ‘I’ who recalls her birthday, the ‘me’ who with ‘unexperienc’t thought’ is laid down on the bank ... It is the ‘I’ who recalls looking into the pond to find a ‘Shape,’ the ‘me,’ the ‘it’” (501). When her mind falters, Eve sees herself as recipient of the action, even victim, and she puts herself in the objective case or creates contorted constructions where “I” follows the verb. For example, McChrystal points out how, during the seduction of book 9, Eve asks, “‘How camst thou speakable of

mute, and how / To me so friendly grown above the rest' (9. 563-64). Eve’s ‘me’ signals a perceptible shift occurring in her self-identity as she reconceives herself as object of the serpent’s interest” (503). The shift from subjective to objective is an important insight into Eve’s understanding of herself. Whether such an understanding leads her to fall or is a symptom of an internal movement towards the fall, however, still needs to be clarified.

Of the many discussions of Adam’s fall, I shall focus on three: Marilyn Farwell’s, Marshall Grossman’s, and John Reichert’s. Farwell, in her “Choosing by Ambiguity: A Reconsideration of the Fall in Paradise Lost,” argues that Adam is seemingly confronted with two possibilities: Eve or God. As Farwell states, “[Adam’s] cognitive knowledge of the nature of God and his experimental knowledge of the nature of choice both point to the process of working good out of evil, but Adam chooses to abandon this pattern and fall into the Satanic pattern of choice” (219). Throughout the poem Adam has learned enough paradigms of God’s creative approach to problems to see the fallacy of the dichotomy. Farwell sees the purpose of Raphael’s discourse as educative:

The impact of Raphael’s long discourse on the war in heaven and the creation is not merely to warn Adam of disobedience, that could have been accomplished without the story of the creation, but also to provide a knowledge of the God who works good out of evil. (217-18)

In other words, dichotomous thinking is typical of Satan; transformative thinking is Godly. Her argument suggests that Adam does not really reject God but rejects life without Eve; Adam’s fault lies in his lapse in memory and imagination. Farwell’s argument places the fault in the understanding: Adam simply does not think through the situation adequately. The problem of placing the fault in the understanding is that it suggests that if Adam could think or had thought through things better, he would have avoided the fall. The whole poem, however, is a demonstration of God’s statement in book 3: “They trespass, Authors to themselves in all / Both what they judge and what they choose” (3, 122-3). The Fall is no lapse; it is a choice.

Another pertinent argument worth examining is that of Marshall Grossman, who states that a strange mixture of accident and fate pervades book 9. Essentially, the transcendent, comic view of history that Christianity provides colours our reading of the Fall. As readers, we are ultimately concerned more with the Father’s transformation of the Fall than with the Fall itself. Instead of pondering “Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate, / Fixt Fate, Free will, Foreknowledge absolute” (2, 559-60) or hoping that the poem will “assert Eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to men” (1, 25-6), our task is more humble. Like Farwell, Grossman argues that Adam’s response to Eve’s fall is inappropriate: “the reader can see that the Fall arises not from depravity but from error, that Adam’s position in its dramatic context is one in which any individual might have fallen” (215). Once again, Adam is portrayed as making an error in judgement: Adam makes a poor choice, not a choice for evil.

Also worth mentioning is John Reichert’s “A Case for Adam.” He attempts to balance Adam’s ignorance of the impact of the Fall with his knowledge of the consequences of disobedience. Reichert states that Adam’s failure is that he simply “forgets” his own superiority:

Adam’s single, crucial failure appears immediately in the very first words he utters to himself as he stands ‘speechless ... and pale’ before his fallen spouse:

O fairest of Creation, last and best
Of all God’s Works, Creature in whom excell’d
Whatever can to sight or thought be form’d,
Holy, divine, good, amiable, or sweet! (IX, 896-99) (95)

Reichert argues that Adam’s failure is really a loss of perspective, a distortion. Moreover, Adam is presumptuous: Adam fails to see the severity of his own disobedience although

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he is aware that it is disobedience (106-7). Once again, Adam’s failure is portrayed as a lapse of good judgement.

Stanley Fish’s *Surprised by Sin* is, arguably, an exploration into this phenomenon of trying to mitigate Adam’s Fall.\(^{136}\) Why is the tendency to demonstrate how the Fall is merely a *fall*, a stumbling? Fish’s position still raises serious concerns, but, at the same time, should we follow Fish and dismiss all our intimations and empathies towards Adam’s position as merely Satanic rumblings of our own depravity as readers? I would argue that instead of trying to justify, condemn, or excuse Adam’s decision, we should direct our energy to explain why Adam’s speech draws empathy: We empathize because there is no *explicit* rejection of God in Adam’s failure. This lack of an explicit rejection feels to us, as readers, like a mitigating factor. The process that fulfills the requirements of free choice—established by both Satan and Abdiel—feels incomplete. The lack of an articulated rejection of God is enough for God, and the reader, to declare, “Man therefore shall find grace, / The other none” (3, 131-2).

In short, typical approaches to the Fall focus on the separation scene of book 9, the seduction of Eve and the failure of Adam. Readers appear divided: Some want to justify Adam and Eve while others want to justify God. Both positions are potential temptations for the reader. I want to draw attention to the qualitative difference between Adam’s and Eve’s disobedience on the one hand and Satan’s disobedience on the other. Disobedience is, at some level, rejection. However, we all recognize different shades or meanings of rejection. For example, when I ask my four-year-old son to get into his pyjamas and, instead, he runs around the house wrestling with the dog, he is rejecting my instructions; he is disobeying. However frustrated I might be by this state of affairs, I would be depraved if I placed my son’s rejection on a par with Satan’s. In a similar way,

\(^{136}\) “Presented with a fact too unpleasant to contemplate directly, but too large and insistent to suppress, Adam finds a way to think about it without truly confronting it, just as the reader does if he turns away from the Fall to concentrate on its anticipations and finds its cause in some past action or in Eve’s flawed nature. In both cases the mind confers on disobedience a meaning it feels comfortable with...” 262-3.
the reader senses a qualitative difference between Satan’s explicit rejection of and enmity towards God, and Adam’s and Eve’s implicit rejection of God. Whether this difference is simply rooted in our own fallen perspective, or whether it is a legitimate difference, remains to be demonstrated.

**Eve’s Fall: Desire for Independence**

Eve never truly rejects God or Adam in her act of disobedience: Eve seeks an independence or self-sufficiency that prompts her to disobey. This desire has been present since her creation and been previously capitalized on by Satan, even if accidentally, in her dream. Her argument at the separation scene is akin to God’s argument: To serve God authentically, we must be autonomous in the sense of distinct; we cannot simply be modes or extensions of God. Satan succeeds in seducing Eve by taking advantage of her desire for independence. Eve remains aware of her duties and of the interdiction, but she chooses against that awareness. In choosing against that awareness, however, she does not so much reject God as choose in favour of an alternative. To return to the example of my son, my son’s disobedience, while real, is hardly a rebellion. He is choosing to ignore me (often under the guise, “I didn’t hear you”) and to wrestle with the dog. There is no resentment in his disobedience and his love is certainly undiminished: He rejects my command, not me. In an analogous way, Eve opts for temptation, for the alternative opportunity dangled before her. Her desire simply is for the fruit and what it appears to represent: independence, possibility. If it could be, her choice would be both/and, obedience and disobedience. Eve’s act is, as an act of disobedience, an implicit rejection of God; however, she never rejects God with her words. She never articulates her rejection because she does not formulate it within her mind as a rejection. Eve believes that she is rejecting the command, not God.

Eve’s dream postulates a displacement of or reorientation away from Adam. In chapter 4, I discussed how Eve’s dream creates a new possibility for Eve: Instead of Adam being the ground of her experience, an object (the tree) or a place (the garden)
becomes the ground of her experience. The familiar, even if that familiar is forbidden, allows her to locate and understand herself. In the dream, Eve assumes that Adam’s voice beckons and finds only the tree and “One shap’d and wing’d like one of those from Heav’n” (5, 55). She shifts from disorientation and confusion to recognition and understanding, but the “Tree / Of interdicted Knowledge” (5, 51-2) is that which brings this reorientation. In short, the dream confronts Eve with an alternative possibility: The forbidden can be more integral to our understanding of ourselves than the one “for whom / And from whom I was form’d flesh of thy flesh, / And without whom am to no end, my Guide / And Head” (4, 440-3).

The dream also attempts to take what is forbidden and make it acceptable and laudable. The dream does not deny Eve’s awareness of the nature of the tree, but it does deny the consequences of consumption. The figure in the dream whose “dewy locks distill’d / Ambrosia” (5, 56-7) thrice uses variants of the word “forbid”: “what reserve forbids to taste?” (5, 61); “Forbid who will. . . .” (5, 62); “Forbidd’n here, it seems, as only fit / For Gods” (5, 69-70). There is little doubt that the tree is forbidden; the dream, however, rejects the consequences: “since good, the more / Communicated, more abundant grows, / The Author not impair’d, but honor’d more?” (5, 71-73). Ignoring the value of obedience itself, the dream postulates other possible causes for the interdiction. The causes for the interdiction appear to reflect negatively on God: “is Knowledge so despis’d? / Or envy, or what reserve forbids to taste?” (5, 60-1). Such intimations or opinions about God are obviously distasteful and disturbing. Satan implies that maintenance of the interdiction supports such erroneous, heretical beliefs about God. To eat of the fruit becomes a statement of belief in the goodness of God, assuming that creation is an extension of God and, therefore, good by extension. Adam will later pick up this motif in his own rationalization for eating the fruit: “Nor can I think that God, Creator wise, / Though threat’ning, will in earnest so destroy / Us his prime Creatures” (9, 938-40). Adam is, essentially, arguing that his disobedience is an expression of faith.
in God. Moreover, this suggestion that partaking in the forbidden can be an expression of faith extends beyond *Paradise Lost*. In *Paradise Regained*, Satan suggests that the failure to stand is also faith: "Now show thy Progeny; if not to stand, / Cast thyself down; safely if Son of God. . . . To whom thus Jesus. Also it is written, / Tempt not the Lord thy God; he said and stood" (*PR* 4, 554-61). Interestingly, the word "fall" does not even appear in this passage until "Satan smitten with amazement fell" (*PR* 4, 562). The word "fall" connotes failure, a lapse; Satan carefully presents a choice between standing and not standing. In the Satanic presentation of the equation, the choice not to stand would serve as an expression of Jesus’ faith in his own identity and in God. As this temptation is the ultimate one in *Paradise Regained*, the ultimate validation of the redeemer, it is appropriate that it should be manifested in *Paradise Lost*. Eve’s dream serves as the paradigm of temptation and reveals the ultimate delusion: failure as a statement of faith. The dream culminates in a flight sequence--"Forthwith up to the Clouds / With him I flew" (5, 86-7)--which rewards the "vent’rous Arm" (5, 64). The dream never intimates that Eve should reject either God or God’s goodness. The dream, rather, suggests that disobedience is the mark of true faith. The dream presents an alternative of service, and the consequences of disobedience are transformed into reward.

Ultimately, Satan will explicate this temptation and argue that transgression of the interdiction is a laudable act. In book 9 of *Paradise Lost*, the serpent no longer suggests or hints at this possibility, but states it directly:

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Shall that be shut to Man, which to the Beast
Is open? Or will God incense his ire
For such a petty Trespass, and not praise
Rather your dauntless virtue, whom the pain
Of Death denounc’ t, whatever thing Death be,
Deterr’d not from achieving what might lead
To happier life, knowledge of Good and Evil
                                . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just;
Not just, not God. . . (9, 691-701, emphasis mine)
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The seduction hinges on belief. The temptation suggests that a lack of faith ensures obedience; obedience amounts to a denial of God’s justice—“Not just”—even of God himself—“not God.” In the context of the dream and of the temptation, Eve confronts an inverted or perverted perspective where the normal understandings of terms represent or hold the place of their opposites: belief becomes disbelief, disobedience becomes obedience, and so on.

Eve has been struggling with her identity since she first awakened into a state of being, as she recounts in book 4. The scene’s obvious connection with the Narcissus myth is not to show that Eve is particularly vain or self-absorbed. The story, which Eve herself narrates (I will continually draw attention to this point), marks the moment her identity becomes linked to Adam. Eve’s awakening is one of uncertainty: “I first awak’t, and found myself... much wond’ring where / And what I was, whence thither brought, and how” (4, 450-2). With “unexperienc’t thought” (4, 457), Eve looks into the waters of the lake and becomes entranced: “pleas’d I soon return’d, / Pleas’d it return’d as soon with answering looks / Of sympathy and love” (4, 463-5). Significantly, especially in relation to her subsequent dream, a bodiless voice pulls her from her reverie and reveals her identity (4, 467-75). Her identity is linked to Adam: “hee / Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy / Inseparably thine, to him shalt bear...” (4, 471-3). Eve is given a possessive in this revelation, “him... Inseparably thine,” but Adam stresses her derivation: “I lent / Out of my side to thee... Substantial Life” (4, 483-5). The use of the word “lent” seems rather out of keeping with the scene, implying that the loan could be recalled, life foreclosed. Adam reinforces this language, which seems designed to subordinate, with his statement “thee claim / My other half” (4, 487-88). Eve’s interpretation—we must again remember that Eve is our narrator at this point—is consistent with Adam’s language: “thy gentle hand / Seiz’d mine, I yielded” (4, 488-89, emphasis mine). The text hints that Adam sees Eve as an extension of himself, a missing part, borrowed and in need of reintegration. Eve senses this interpretation—“without
whom am to no end” (4, 442)—repeating almost ritualistically the story which concludes that the manly “alone is truly fair” (4, 491). Yet, almost hidden within the official story is that delicious moment when Eve was independent of Adam, a moment when her identity was unconnected to her derivation. She tells us, “That day I oft remember, when from sleep / I first awak’t, and found myself...” (4, 449-50). References to self occur three times in these two lines and twice she refers to herself as “I.” McChrystal points out the enormous significance of this presence of the “I,” but these references are not so much a moment of confidence as a moment of reverie, the reverie of a moment when her identity was grounded only in her own experience. This moment, to which she often returns in her memory, is her only moment independent of Adam, the only moment when she did not have to defer to “manly grace / And wisdom” (4, 490-91).

In the scene where Eve and Adam take separate paths, once again Eve desires an independent identity. Eve’s argument centres on the issue of the individual’s capacity to withstand evil. Eve first presents the separation on the grounds of greater efficiency: “Let us divide our labors...” (9, 214). When Adam raises the issue of temptation, Eve refers to her newfound awareness of the danger:

That such an enemy we have, who seeks
Our ruin, both by thee inform’d I learn,
And from the parting Angel over-heard... (9, 274-6)

Eve cites two sources for her awareness, stressing the thoroughness of her awareness. Confirming her “firm Faith and Love” (9, 286), Eve acknowledges that the only danger can be from fraud. Eve lightly shifts from this concern about fraud to his concern about her steadfastness:

His fraud is then thy fear, which plain infers
Thy equal fear that my firm Faith and Love
Can by his fraud be shak’n or seduc’t... (9, 285-7)
Any seduction contains three components: a seducer, a seduction, and the individual for whom the seduction is intended. Adam clearly speaks about the seducer, the "malicious Foe / Envying our happiness" (9, 253-4). Eve’s response focuses on herself, not the seducer. Adam’s response to Eve shifts to a discussion of the seduction itself: “Not diffident of thee do I dissuade / Thy absence from my sight, but to avoid / Th’ attempt itself, intended by our Foe” (9, 293-5). Once again, Eve shifts to a discussion of her own capacities or incapacities. The narrator states, “but Eve, who thought / Less attributed to her Faith sincere. . .” (9, 319-20). Eve fails to listen to any discussion about the seducer or the nature of seduction, preferring rather to focus on her own abilities to withstand any such assaults:

If this be our condition, thus to dwell  
In narrow circuit strait’n’d by a Foe,  
Subtle or violent, we not endu’d  
Single with like defense, wherever met,  
How are we happy, still in fear of harm? (9, 322-26)

According to Eve, “Frail is our happiness, if this be so, / And Eden were no Eden thus expos’d” (9, 340-1). Eve craves independence; moreover, she seeks an identity which is not dependent upon Adam.

Rightly or wrongly, Eve separates herself from Adam in a moment that largely retraces and reconstructs her memories of her first awakening. In book 4, Eve recalls, “thy gentle hand / Seiz’d mine, I yielded” (4, 488-9); in book 9, the narrator informs the reader, “from her Husband’s hand her hand / Soft she withdrew” (9, 385-6). The allusions that accompany Eve’s earlier account of her genesis and the separation scene draw out different possibilities for male/female relations. In Eve’s tale of her genesis, the following description appears:

... with eyes  
Of conjugal attraction unrepov’d,  
And meek surrender, half embracing lean’d  
On our first Father, half her swelling Breast
Naked met his under the flowing Gold
Of her loose tresses hid: hee in delight
Both of her Beauty and submissive Charms
Smil’d with superior Love, as Jupiter
On Juno smiles. . . (4, 492-500)

In this description, Eve can barely stand without being supported by Adam. The scene is one of dependence and hierarchy. The words themselves reflect this attitude: “meek surrender,” “lean’d / On our first Father,” “submissive Charms.” Moreover, the simile used to clarify Adam’s act—“Smil’d with superior Love”—draws parallels with Roman mythology. In Roman mythology, Jupiter is clearly superior in the hierarchic scale. The name “Jupiter” (Jove and pater) itself connects with the earlier expression “our first Father”: Adam is portrayed as a father, as a superior, not as the husband or equal of Eve.

In book 9, on the other hand, Eve is connected to women whose recognition is largely derived from their resistance to male figures. Eve is compared to Delia (Artemis) (9, 388-92) and Pomona (9, 393-4). Virginity is central to the stories of each of these women. Artemis remains steadfast in her independence, surrounding herself with women. Pomona’s story, on the other hand, is unique in Ovid’s Metamorphoses: “No need of force. His [Vertumnus’s] beauty wins the day, / As she with answering love is borne away.” Like so many women in the Metamorphoses, Pomona is uninterested in men: “for fear of rustic force / She walled her orchard in to keep away / The sex she shunned” (14, 641-43). The poem states that Vertumnus could neither trick nor seduce her—“he found no better luck” (14, 642)—but she still acquiesces to his desire—“with answering love is borne away.” Pomona is not forced; she does not rely on outside aid, on a miraculous metamorphosis; she chooses. Even the reference to the goddess Ceres draws our attention to Ceres, a goddess of agriculture and fertility, while “Yet Virgin of Proserpina” (9, 396). Of course, any mention of Proserpina immediately calls to mind her abduction by Pluto. Proserpina too desires to remain a virgin, but, unlike Pomona, she is

abducted, forced and deceived. The passage in book 9 presents remarkable women characterized by a singular feature: virginity or innocence. More importantly, these figures are recognizable because of their resistance to the male order. Artemis ferociously defends her privateness and virginity from male interlopers; Pomona’s resistance and her choice are her admirable qualities; Ceres is, in this allusion, unsullied by her future dalliance with Jupiter; Proserpina is not yet born, let alone abducted by a lascivious god of the underworld. Eve’s “submissive Charms” do not draw our attention in book 9, but the tradition of women who resist male domination. In these two scenes, the narrator takes care to differentiate the submissive from the assertive Eve through the physical description of the scene and the mythic contextualizing.

In the scene of Eve’s actual fall from grace, Satan’s argument is successful when it touches upon Eve’s desire for an independent identity, even if such independence is unnecessary, redundant, or illusory. Satan touches this desire when he appeals to her own experience. After first addressing the tree--“O Sacred, Wise, and Wisdom-giving Plant, Mother of Science” (9, 679-80)--Satan addresses Eve:

> Queen of this Universe, do not believe
> Those rigid threats of Death; ye shall not Die:
> How should ye? by the Fruit? it gives you Life
> To Knowledge: By the Threat’ner? look on mee,
> Mee who have touch’d and tasted, yet both live,
> And life more perfet have attain’d than Fate
> Meant mee, by vent’ring higher than my Lot. (9, 684-90)

Certainly, the naming of the tree as “Mother of Science” connects with the address “Queen of this Universe.” The tree has produced fruit, fulfilled its potential, obtained an identity as “Mother.” Eve has yet to produce fruit; her identity depends, to date, solely upon her relationship with Adam. Satan addresses Eve directly, asks her questions, seeks her opinions, challenges her to rely on her own experience. Whenever Eve has previously

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138 The title “Mother of Science” also reminds the reader of the Biblical title of Eve as “Mother of All the Living” and the title in book 4 of “Mother of human race” (4, 475) and Raphael’s “Hail Mother of Mankind” (5, 388).
pondered the unfamiliar or unknown, such as her dream, she has relied on Adam for interpretation and judgement. Both at the moment of original awakening and within her demonic dream she has naturally followed voices outside of herself. When Eve had encountered an image of “sympathy and love” (4, 465), she was told to reject her own impulse and follow an outside, authoritative voice. The serpent, however, asks her to rely on herself, on her own experience: “look on me.” This appeal to experience is repeated when Satan questions the primacy of God:

The Gods are first, and that advantage use
On our belief, that all from them proceeds;
I question it, for this fair Earth I see,
Warm’d by the Sun, producing every kind,
Them nothing: If they all things, who enclos’d
Knowledge of Good and Evil in this Tree,
That who so eats thereof, forthwith attains
Wisdom without their leave? (9, 718-25, emphasis mine)

Satan uses the first person singular, “I,” and asserts opinions contrary to all of Eve’s received knowledge. He takes a fundamental belief, the primacy (and singularity) of God, and questions it on the basis of physical experience. In book 4, when Eve poses the question, “wherefore all night long shine these, for whom / This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes?” (4, 657-8), Adam instructs her about “Millions of spiritual Creatures [who] walk the Earth / Unseen” (4,677-8). Unseen and part of the nighttime world, which appears in this passage forbidden, these creatures cannot be part of Eve’s experience. Belief means belief in Adam’s authority: “My Author and Disposer ... God is thy Law, thou mine: to know no more / Is woman’s happiest knowledge and her praise” (4, 635-38). Satan does not ask Eve to believe in things unexperienced or unseen; he simply poses questions, asking Eve to affirm or deny propositions on the basis of her own experience and wisdom. The effect is intoxicating: “his words replete with guile / Into her heart too easy entrance won” (9, 733-4).
When we examine the fall, Eve carefully fulfills the prescribed conditions for a free decision. As soon as she approaches the tree, Eve states, “Serpent, we might have spar’d our coming hither, / Fruitless to mee. . .” (9, 646-7). Her awareness is further demonstrated by her musings before she plucks the fruit: “his forbidding / Commends thee more. . .” (9, 753-4) and “what forbids he but to know, / Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise? ” (9, 758-59). The import of her provocative action is never lost on Eve; she is certainly not innocent on this count. The repetition of the word “forbid” demonstrates an awareness that is foremost in her mind. Her rejection of the existing state of affairs is clear enough in both her actions, “she pluck’d, she eat” (9, 781), and in the conclusions which led to her act: “For good unknown, sure is not had, or had / And yet unknown, is as not had at all” (9, 756-7) and “Such prohibitions bind not” (9, 760). Eve’s declaration, “Cure of all, this Fruit Divine . . . Of virtue to make wise” (9, 776-7), reveals her desire for an alternative possibility. Moreover, what truly dispels her final doubt, “But if Death / Bind us with after-bands, what profits then / Our inward freedom?” (9, 760-2), is her experience of the serpent: “How dies the Serpent?” (9, 764). While Eve says to the serpent, “we live / Law to ourselves, our Reason is our Law” (9, 653-4), such is hardly Eve’s experience. Eve relies on the wisdom and insight of Adam or other, external voices (God’s, the voice in the dream) or presences (Raphael) to guide her. The serpent, in one sense, simply constitutes another such voice, but the serpent successfully creates the illusion that Eve is relying not on such voices, but on her own experience. Eve truly hopes, by her act, to embrace her own experience and judgement. Eve states, after eating the fruit, “Experience, next to thee I owe, / Best guide; not following thee, I had remain’d / In ignorance. . .” (9, 807-9). In short, Eve is aware, rejects her current state of being as one based on authority, and embraces an alternative state seemingly based on personal experience.

Eve’s desire for independence blurs her rejection, both for God and the reader. Simply put, Eve’s rejection feels incomplete. The act itself indeed constitutes a rejection
of a relationship, but not the relationship with God: Eve rejects an understanding of her relationship with Adam. To put it another way, Eve rejects being an extension of Adam, a dependent; she does not explicitly reject her relationship with God. The perceived terms of her relationship with Adam are the problem. In the same way the elevation of the Son thrusts independence and freedom upon the angels, so the interdiction concerning the tree thrusts independence and freedom on Adam and Eve. The fruit constitutes a barrier of identity. When they abstain, Adam and Eve assert an identity within the promise; when they taste the fruit, they reject the promise. Yet, this identity built upon a relationship with the forbidden escapes Eve. She is only marginally aware of such a state of being. She feels that she is something of an extension of Adam, dependent and weak. Her rejection of such a state of being may be, in fact, redundant and unnecessary; there may be nothing to reject. That there is little to reject is suggested by Raphael’s immediate and spontaneous address to Eve, “Hail Mother of Mankind...” (5, 388), yet Eve feels only marginally involved in the visit: “That such an enemy we have... from the parting Angel over-heard / As in a shady nook I stood behind...” (9, 274-77, emphasis mine). The image is one of a child listening in on the sly to her parents’ conversation. Eve’s final statement before she separates from Adam in the Garden betrays her feelings: “nor much expect / A Foe so proud will first the weaker seek” (9, 382-3). Eve’s rejection is not of her relationship with God but with the state of her relationship with Adam and the world. Eve longs to be more than “of Adam” or “Adam’s consort”; she wants to be a subject in her own right. This desire mitigates for the reader Eve’s fall from grace, for it is a desire we understand and with which we, for the most part, empathize. God also recognizes her delusion even before the fall: “Man falls deceiv’d / By th’ other first: Man therefore shall find grace...” (3, 130-1).

Adam: Contemplating Living Without

Adam is also quite aware of his decision and openly embraces the alternative of death. What mitigates Adam’s decision is that his rejection is not of God as such (as in
Satan’s case) or even of his created state of being (as in Eve’s case); Adam rejects a new possibility thrust from the authentically new set of circumstances that confronts him: the possibility that Eve will die while he will continue to live. Adam’s anxiety is really about the possible or probable loss of Eve. This concern forms the core of Adam’s fall. The careful deliberation that precedes Adam’s decision assures the reader that Adam’s fall is genuine, more than a lapse of judgement or understanding. The basic intuition that drives Adam’s rebellion is towards complicity, unity with the fallen. This orientation towards complicity with Eve mitigates somewhat an otherwise very self-conscious rejection of God’s directive. Adam’s desire for Eve is not endorsed by the poem, but it does make the rejection of God feel less than complete, less than explicit; it complicates our reading of the rejection. More significantly, it creates the possibility for compassion.

Adam, for his part, is quite aware of what he is doing and takes great pains to delineate his options. Awareness is paramount in his fall. The narrator assures us that Adam, about to eat of the fruit, is aware: “not deceiv’d, / But fondly overcome with Female charm” (9, 998-9). More importantly, however, the poem shows us Adam’s cogitations. At first, Adam’s response to Eve’s fall is one of shock:

On th’ other side, Adam, soon as he heard
The fatal Trespass done by Eve, amaz’d,
Astonied stood and Blank, while horror chill
Ran through his veins, and all his joints relax’d
Speechless he stood and pale. . . . (9, 888-94)

Adam’s response is immediate—“soon as he heard”—and quite physical—“horror chill / Ran through his veins, and all his joints relax’d…” Yet, the physical and metaphysical merge in his stance: “Astonied stood” and “Speechless he stood” (emphasis mine). The repetition of the word “stood” returns us to the words of God in book 3, “Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall” (3, 99). The word “stood” reminds us that Adam, for his part, still stands on the side of innocence, no matter how “astonied” or “speechless” or
“blank” he may be. At this point, the narrator makes the reader aware of the state of innocence which Adam still possesses. Adam’s physical response, however, casts a dark shadow over his innocence; he is standing, but only just.

At first, Adam does not even address Eve, but addresses himself; by addressing himself, Adam assures the reader that he is present to the moment and acutely aware of the import of his decision. Adam first addresses Eve’s transformation:

O fairest of Creation, last and best
Of all God’s Works, Creature in whom excell’d
Whatever can to sight or thought be form’d,
Holy, divine, good, amiable, or sweet!
How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost,
Defac’t, deflow’r’d, and now to Death devote? (9, 896-901)

The repetition of the “d” sound signals the shift: “divine,” “sudden,” “Defac’t, deflower’d,” and “Death devote.” The sounds themselves lead us from divinity to death with a shift sudden and abrupt. The prefix “de-” derives from “off” or “from,” again signaling a shift. The lines go on to emphasize Adam’s awareness of the nature of Eve’s act, again using repetition and alliteration to signal his awareness: “Rather how hast thou yielded to transgress / The strict forbiddance, how to violate / The sacred Fruit forbidd’n! some cursed fraud. . .” (9, 902-4). The words “forbiddance” and “forbidd’n” both pick up the “d” sound, shifting us from the fall to the interdiction itself. The repetition of “forbid” serves to remind us how aware Adam is of the situation. However, the new string of alliteration, the vigorous sound of “f,” is far less clear. Adam recognizes the change but appears to deny its legitimacy: “some cursed fraud / Of Enemy hath beguil’d thee” (9, 904-5). Perhaps an even more dangerous possibility is suggested: that a link exists between “Fruit forbidd’n” and “fraud.” Is the interdiction itself to blame? This question is, indeed, at the heart of the entire epic and of the Biblical story itself: Why the tree? Adam recognizes, but struggles with that recognition. He is aware, but he is uncomfortable in his awareness.
Adam fairly quickly expresses a desire to die with Eve, but the genealogical connection between Sin and Death in book 2 anticipates our reading of Adam’s speech. While the poem presents Sin and Death as distinct characters, it also links them through genealogy and temperament. We do not experience Death apart from Sin (although we do experience Sin apart from Death). The temptation, quite naturally, is to read them together. Adam’s desire to die with Eve is not surprising; perhaps, it is even appropriate. Adam frames his own desire to die as something almost inevitable: “And mee with thee hath ruin’d, for with thee / Certain my resolution is to Die” (9, 906-7). Even though Adam states that the decision is “my resolution,” there is something “Certain” or fixed about that resolution. This contradiction pervades the subsequent lines. Adam is aware that the decision is his and even makes a lengthy speech delineating his decision. At the same time, Adam continually attempts to diminish his own power for the decision. Adam pictures the bond that leads him to fall as being both natural and physical: “I feel / The Link of Nature draw me: Flesh of Flesh, / Bone of my Bone thou art, and from thy State / Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe” (9, 913-16). Later, Adam states to Eve, “So forcible within my heart I feel / The Bond of Nature draw me to my own . . . we are one; / One Flesh” (9, 955-9). Adam keeps returning to the formulaic, biblically-grounded phrase he uttered upon encountering Eve: “Bone of my Bone, Flesh of my Flesh, my Self / Before me . . . And they shall be one Flesh, one Heart, one Soul” (8, 495-6). There is certainly something very adolescent in Adam’s misapplication of the phrase. The link between love and emulation of failure is unclear, but Adam feels it so strongly that he twice repeats the conjugal formula as if the connection were self-explanatory. The narrator reinforces this image of Adam when he describes how Adam turns towards Eve: “Submitting to what seem’d remediless . . . ” (9, 919). For Adam, Eve has bonded with death. As a result, Adam feels that, in order to remain with Eve, he must embrace death as well. As Adam states, “I with thee have fixt my Lot, / Certain to undergo like doom, if Death / Consort with thee, Death is to mee as Life . . . To lose thee were to lose myself”
(9, 952-9). The problem, of course, is that Adam's reasoning applies to death, but he then resolves not to die, but to sin. The deliberate presence of the word "Death" indicates that Adam is aware that he is talking specifically about death; sin becomes a distinct means of obtaining that end.

This portrayal of the relationship as some sort of physical bond that impels comes forth naturally from the way Adam perceives Eve's effect on him. Adam openly admits to Raphael a weakness in the presence of Eve that approaches the physical:

... here passion first I felt,
Commotion strange, in all enjoyments else
Superior and unmov'd, here only weak
Against the charm of Beauty's powerful glance.
Or Nature fail'd in mee, and left some part
Not proof enough such Object to sustain,
Or from my side subducting, took perhaps
More than enough. . . . (8, 530-37)

Adam appears startled at how easily his ability to enjoy with moderation departs in the presence of Eve. More significantly, Adam suggests that somehow he is inadequate against the physical force of passion aroused by Eve's presence. As Adam states, "Nature fail'd in mee, and left some part / Not proof enough. . . ." Raphael warns Adam against succumbing to such emotions--"In loving thou dost well, in passion not, / Wherein true Love consists not" (8, 588-9)--yet Adam denies that his infatuation could possibly mislead him: "Yet these subject not . . . yet still free / Approve the best, and follow what I approve" (8, 607-11). However, Raphael, seemingly dubious of Adam's quick inversion after his gentle reprimand, repeats the warning, stating, "take heed lest Passion sway / Thy Judgement to do aught, which else free Will / Would not admit. . . ." (8, 635-37). Just before the book shifts to the final temptation in book 9, the reader is left in this confusing balance. The angelic voice concludes that Adam is sufficient to stand: "to stand or fall / Free in thine own Arbitrement it lies. / Perfet within, no outward aid require. . . ." (8, 640-2). Adam, even while asserting "yet still free / Approve the best, and follow what I
approve” (8, 610-11), suggests that his passion for Eve may override his reason. Book 8 concludes with this expression of potential vulnerability, or, at least, an excuse for potential vulnerability.

In book 9, Adam’s lengthy speeches, both to himself and to Eve, belie any rashness to the act itself. Adam is “Astonied” by Eve’s tale, but he stands “Speechless” until “at length / First to himself he inward silence broke” (9, 894-95). Adam does not act and then think, even when the moment might make such an action understandable, but he gathers himself together and contemplates his options and makes a decision. Such a process is hardly in keeping with someone ruled by his passion, duped by his emotions. After Adam reflects, the narrator describes him as being “in calm mood” (9, 920), hardly a state of unbridled passion and addled wits. Adam’s speech to Eve parallels the first speech to himself and reiterates the reasons for his decision. The duplication of the decision (“Certain to undergo like doom” (9, 953)), the utter lack of vacillation (“I with thee have fixt my Lot” (9, 952)), and the repetition of the marriage formula (“Our State cannot be sever’d, we are one, / One Flesh” (9, 958-9)) indicate a process formal and deliberate. Adam can protest about the “Bond of Nature,” but even his rashest act follows a process rational and deliberate.

Clearly, Adam fulfills two of the prescribed conditions of a free act: awareness of his options and their consequences and actually choosing an alternative possibility. Even if we, as readers, ignore the lengthy lecture by Raphael about the scenario in which Adam finds himself, Adam can hardly plead ignorance, for the lines leading up to his fall declare astute awareness. Adam also fully embraces the alternative possibility set before him: “Certain my resolution is to Die” (9, 907); “Death is to mee as Life” (9, 954). The problem is the means Adam chooses to obtain that end: sin. The reader cannot forget that the second Adam has already, in book 3, embraced the option of death: “Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life / I offer, on mee let thine anger fall” (3, 236-7). The Son, however, does not equate death with disobedience or sin, and neither should we. The Son
expresses a distress about the state of humanity akin to Adam’s distress at the loss of Eve: “For should Man finally be lost. . . . That far be from thee, Father” (3, 150-54). The Son chooses death and obedience; Adam chooses death through disobedience.

Adam appears quite aware and explicitly chooses death over separation from Eve. Rejection of God emerges as a way of obtaining the desired end of death. Adam’s acute awareness indicates that his act of rejection, eating the fruit, constitutes a full rejection of his current state of being and relationship with God. Adam’s concern, at this point, is not about his relationship with God, but with an impediment to his relationship with Eve. God, or the relationship with God, shifts from an end to a means. Adam rejects a relationship as a means of obtaining a desired end.

Adam does not reject God but God’s alternative. Although rejecting God’s prescriptions and decrees certainly constitutes a rebellion not unlike Satan’s, Satan’s rebellion, unlike Adam’s, rejects the authority of God. Adam’s rebellion accepts the authority and decree of God:

How can I live without thee, how forgo
Thy sweet Converse and Love so dearly join’d,
To live again in these wild Woods forlorn?
Should God create another Eve, and I
Another Rib afford, yet loss of thee
Would never from my heart; no, no, I feel
The Link of Nature draw me: Flesh of Flesh,
Bone of my Bone thou art, and from thy State
Mine shall never be parted, bliss or woe. (9, 908-16)

Adam assumes the loss of Eve and bases his decision upon this loss. Even when he contemplates that God may not destroy them according to His decree (9, 928-51), Adam returns to the decree and grounds his decision on the decree: “if Death / Consort with thee, Death is to mee as Life” (9, 953-4). Moreover, the Argument that precedes book 9 prepares us for just such a reading: “Adam at first amaz’d, but perceiving her lost, resolves . . . to perish with her” (9, Argument). This acknowledgement of the legitimacy and potency of God’s decree proves to be the mitigating factor; it is the reason “Man
therefore shall find grace, / The other none” (3, 131-32). Adam steps outside of the promise deliberately, but his reason for doing so, strangely enough, reinforces the promise. Adam cannot accept the consequences of the decree, yet he never challenges the legitimacy of the decree.

Adam fulfills all the requirements for a free act: he is aware of his actions, he rejects an existing state, he chooses an alternative state. When we step outside the strict confines of the decree and consider the nature of the decree--standing within the promise to the Son and acknowledging the authority of God--Adam’s rejection is incomplete. Adam rejects only the consequences of the decree. His rejection of the decree asserts the legitimacy of the decree. Deliberately stepping outside the law, Adam reinforces the nature of the law. The beauty of the passage of Adam’s fall from grace lies in its deliberateness. Adam is “not deceiv’d” (9, 998), but his rejection of being separated from Eve brings the appearance of nobility to his action:

[Eve] Tenderly wept, much won that he his Love
    Had so ennobl’d, as of choice to incur
    Divine displeasure for her sake, or Death. (9, 991-3)

Adam chooses to fall. No matter how frustrated we may be with Adam’s reasoning or decision, we find it difficult to condemn him outright. We comprehend an incompleteness in Adam’s rejection, an incompleteness anticipated in book 3 of the poem. The poem asserts and reasserts Adam’s sufficiency, but, in the end, the Fall fails to satisfy our desire for justice. The poem allows us to experience what God knows: Adam desires to die, to be with Eve, not to reject God.

Conclusion

In *Paradise Lost*, a free choice relies on awareness, a rejection of some real or perceived state of affairs, and the acceptance of an alternative possibility. While we can fret over the guilt or innocence of Adam and Eve, such concerns are largely unnecessary. Examining the fall, we see that the conditions hold and the fall remains authentic;
however, compassion allows us to see the difference between Adam's and Eve's falls and Satan's. Eve rejects her apparent state of being; Adam is looking for a means to death. Satan, on the other hand, rejects God: "Evil be thou my Good" (4, 110). The poem, in order to justify God's condemnation of humanity, simply needs to establish the authenticity of the fall, which it does, but the poem does more by justifying grace. If we, as fallen readers, can see the appropriateness of grace, then certainly the God of the poem can see the appropriateness of mercy. The poem gives us cause to pity both Adam and Eve. God, who, till this point, has seemed quite severe ("Die hee or Justice must" (3, 210)), suddenly emerges as a God capable of compassion: "him through their malice fall'n, / Father of Mercy and Grace, thou didst not doom / So strictly, but much more to pity incline" (3, 400-2). Our pity and empathy for Adam and Eve mirror the pity of the Father; our compassion and understanding are akin to God's compassion and understanding. The description of the Fall creates an intriguing sense of intimacy: between the reader and fallen humanity; between the reader and God.
Conclusion: Creation and a Promise

Throughout this thesis I have been arguing essentially one thing: The decisive moment in *Paradise Lost* occurs at the exaltation of the Son when God makes a specific type of speech act: a promise. The moment is constitutive and establishes both obedience and disobedience.

I initiated the discussion by laying out objections to free will and establishing a context within which we could understand Milton’s work. I began with Thomas Hobbes, who explicitly attacks the notion of free will, seeing it as a misuse of language. According to Hobbes, the motions of external objects not only constitute our thoughts, they also generate responses in us from which our actions flow. I then examined a number of theological positions on the will and on freedom, particularly those of William of Ockham, William Ames, John Preston, and William Perkins. I completed this contextualization of the issue by examining the position delineated by *De Doctrina Christiana* on our involvement in the good work.

After philosophically and theologically contextualizing the work, I examined Eve’s dream. My point was that the issue of the dream is not Eve’s innocence or guilt, but her identity. Until the dream, Eve has linked her identity to Adam. The dream reveals that Eve’s (and Adam’s) identity is connected with the interdiction against eating the fruit of the tree.

Chapter 5 discussed the nature of the exaltation. The problem is one of individuation: How are entities distinct when they are extensions of God (created *ex Deo*)? I examined the text through Searle’s concepts of constitutive and regulative speech acts. The exaltation is a definitive moment which establishes both obedience and disobedience through a promise. If one sees the act as regulative, a sense of arbitrariness pervades God’s decree. However, God’s promise is more than regulative: it is constitutive. God promises to his Son that all creatures will obey him. God, having
expressed his will, creates consequences for abiding within that will or for rejecting that
will. Thus, the consequence defines what it means to be of God or to be not of God.

The last three chapters discussed the consequences of the exaltation. Chapter 6
discussed the effects on the physical universe, particularly on the regions of chaos, hell
and the Paradise of Fools. Chapter 7 discussed the conditions of choice, examining the
responses of Satan and Abdiel. Chapter 8 examined grace as a consequence of the
exaltation. Using the conditions of choice established in the fall of Satan and the triumph
of Abdiel, I demonstrated how Adam’s and Eve’s falls adequately fulfill the conditions
for a free choice. However, I also argued that Adam’s and Eve’s rejections of God strike
us as somehow inadequate. The inadequacy occurs at the level of rejection. The
significance of this perceived inadequacy is that it leads us to feel compassion.

When the narrator of Paradise Lost states that he seeks to “justify the ways of
God to men,” we should not understand that project solely as being theodical. The poem
also explores the nature of freedom and grace. If nothing else, the experience of the poem
should ultimately lead us to understand how language circumscribes not only our
understanding of experience, but experience itself.
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