THE HUMANISM OF PARADISE LOST

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Abstract

Problem: If humanism is the study of man through letters, the humanism of Paradise Lost should be a matter of the poem's study of man, its criticism of life. But it is not clear how a poem whose action turns on a divine rather than moral imperative can afford a criticism of life.

Approach: To place the problem in a context of discussion, I

1) examine how neoclassical humanism developed as a study of man and how it accommodated the Christian study of the will;

2) compare The Lusiad, Jerusalem Delivered, Paradise Lost, and Absalom and Achitophel as expressions of neoclassical humanism.

Conclusions: 1) Neoclassical humanism was based on eloquence. For neoclassical studia humanitatis and poetics, literature is the didactic application of moral ideas to life. Epic is the institutional form. The Lusiad, Jerusalem Delivered, Paradise Lost and Absalom unfold in universal schemes of moral images. But Paradise Lost goes beyond ideal imitation. Answering to Aristotle's idea of imitation, its action unfolds as an analysis of volition.

2) Although based on eloquence, neoclassical humanism developed a serious criticism of life. Out of the rhetorical notion of the commonplace developed a method reading and making observations, at work in Montaigne's Essays and Pope's Moral Essays. Out of the notion of eloquence as discourse fitted to human concerns urbanity developed, a sense of what humans are like. A literary culture capable of making critical discriminations developed from an uncritically classicising one. The fine adjustment of Dryden's
eloquence to the actual conditions of authority and civilisation
contrasts with the simpler ideal discriminations of Camoens' or
Tasso's. In *Paradise Lost* Milton tries to realize an ideal of human
conversation.

3) The notion of eloquence as discourse fitted to human concerns
implied a critique of discourse and learning that had no bearing on
human concerns, notably of speculative science and the scholastic
curriculum. Milton's treatment of forbidden knowledge belongs to
this humanist critique of vain learning. With this critique went
a view, featured in the invocations of *Paradise Lost*, of the
creaturely condition of man in his middle state. The actions of
*Paradise Lost* and *Absalom* turn on the loss and restoration of finite
creatureliness, whereas those of *The Lusiad* and *Jerusalem Delivered*
featuring an earlier, less critical, humanism, are directed to the
divinisation of man.

4) In many of their moral and civilizing concerns Christianity
and neoclassical humanism overlap. Protestantism particularly might
agree with humanism on the importance of textual studies and human
creatureliness. The Christian study of the will, however, remained
inaccessible to humanist interpretation. Yet while Milton's
*Christian Doctrine* falls short of Paul's or Luther's insights into
the free and bound will, the analysis of volition in *Paradise Lost*
works out some of these insights as an imitation of a human action.
In this interpretation of the Christian study of the will *Paradise
Lost* both makes its most valuable criticism of life and goes beyond
the usual neoclassical humanist study of man.
5) **Summary**: In its concern with the creaturely limits of human learning and the middle state, *Paradise Lost* belongs to a stage of humanism realised more characteristically by Montaigne and the Augustan humanists. But Milton's study of the will is exceptional in neoclassical humanism in both its penetration into how Christian ideas apply to life and its literary form of imitation. Yet it is here we can most fully talk of Milton's criticism of life and so of the humanism of *Paradise Lost*. 
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Preface


My argument falls into three parts: an introduction, which lays out the problem of the humanism of Paradise Lost and suggests the lines of approach; chapters one to four, an essay in ideas, which attempts to characterize the Protestant study of the will and the neoclassical humanist study of man; and chapters five to seven, a literary analysis of Paradise Lost, which discusses its treatment of the fall and restoration of man and its idea of forbidden knowledge in the context of the preceding discussion.

In the second part, the essay in ideas, I have set out to establish the problematic relations of Christianity and humanism by considering two extreme statements, the Pauline and Lutheran study of the will, in Chapter one, and Montaigne's discussion of Christianity in Chapter two. In Chapters three and four, I have taken eloquence as the informing principle of neoclassical humanism and attempted to show how it developed a mature study of man and a critique of vain learning. I argue from this development that, however extreme their statements, Luther and Montaigne penetrate to the underlying configuration of Christianity and neoclassical humanism. In the terms set up by this discussion Milton's treatment of the Christian study of the will is characterized as anomalous for a work of neoclassical humanism.
In the third part, which turns to literary analysis, I have tried to show how *Paradise Lost* is both at one with the concerns of neoclassical humanism and goes beyond them. In chapter five I take up the humanist idea of eloquence as it informs the poetry of ideal imitation. Through a comparative study of four neoclassical epics, I try to bring out a development towards a mature criticism of life similar to the one emerging in chapters three and four. *The Lusiad* and *Jerusalem Delivered* represent an earlier and less critical stage, *Paradise Lost* and *Absalom and Achitophel*, a later and maturer stage of neoclassical humanism. In chapter six I analyse the action of *Paradise Lost* in terms, not of ideal imitation, but of the Aristotelian notion of the imitation of an action. This brings out how *Paradise Lost* does not entirely fit inside the ordinary forms of neoclassical humanism. The form is, moreover, adapted to representing what is an unusual concern for neoclassical humanism, namely the Christian study of the will. I draw the conclusion that *Paradise Lost* is greatest as a humanist study of man precisely where neoclassical humanism generally relinquished the study of the will to purely religious and devotional treatment. In chapter seven, I turn from the singularity of *Paradise Lost* to what it shares with the development of neoclassical humanism, arguing that Milton's treatment of forbidden knowledge and his poetic inspiration goes with the humanist critique of vain learning and a sharpened sense the precarious standing of man in his middle state.

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INTRODUCTION

A Humanism and Humanist Criticism

We can talk of the humanism of Paradise Lost in two ways. Historically there is the question of the place of Paradise Lost in what I shall call neoclassical humanism. Critically, there is the question of the poem's place in our own humanism. An answer to the first question is not necessarily an answer to the second. Still I propose to approach the critical question through a discussion of the historical one.

Before I lay out these questions more fully, I should say something about the sense in which I shall be talking of humanism and humanists. A humanist, as I shall speak of him, is a student of letters who thinks his study is useful. The use of his study is that it looks at what humans are like or ought to be like; or if one prefers a less definite formulation, it looks at what human experience is like or ought to be like. In other words for the humanist, the study of the letters is the study of man. But, and this is an important qualification, the student is human himself and his study is a way of enlarging his humanity. He studies man through man's traditions in order to acquire for himself what is valuable in them. His study of man is a means of becoming human. This description holds I think for neoclassical humanism as well as for our own. Neoclassical humanism, of course, approached the study of man in very different ways from ours and involved many concerns that are not ours. Nevertheless, I think the description I have offered lays hold of what is essential to humanism as an ongoing concern of civilisation in any age.

We should distinguish the humanist study of man from a study of man that dissociates the student from the humanity he studies. It seems to me that much social science is dissociative in this way and at the same time reduces
the humanity it studies. It is with such a study of man as with those Metaphysical poets of whom Johnson wrote, "They never enquired what, on any occasion, they should have said or done, but wrote rather as beholders than partakers of human nature; as Beings looking upon good and evil, impassive and at leisure; as Epicurean deities making remarks upon the actions of men, and the vicissitudes of life, without interest and without emotion".

The study of literature may also be dissociative. The theory of criticism Northrop Frye proposes in his *Anatomy of Criticism* is a case in point. In the system he outlines there, the study of what a work of literature has to say about experience, its intelligence about life, would be dealt with on what he calls the "formal" level. In his hierarchical scheme, this level is subsumed finally under archetypal criticism. For archetypal criticism is the study of the master forms of literature and in Frye's scheme the highest level of criticism, the closest to realizing what he conceives to be the nature of literature. Whatever its virtues, the whole thrust of Frye's system is away from the study of literature as the criticism

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4 Consider the phases of his second essay, "Ethical Criticism", *Anatomy*, pp.71--128.
of life, which is the humanist study of literature. The problems of the content of the individual work and how it reflects and represents experience are displaced onto the level of literary form. And in this, Frye's system is like Cassirer's philosophy, where philosophical problems are displaced onto a level of the phenomenology of symbolic forms. But it is not simply because the Anatomy plays down the study of the literary work as a criticism of life that we may contrast its proposal for a systematic criticism of literature with the humanist study of literature. The vision of man to which archetypal criticism leads is dissociated from the condition of being human. "When we pass into anagogy, nature becomes, not the container, but the thing contained, and the archetypal universal symbols, the city, the garden, the quest, the marriage, are no longer the desirable forms that man constructs inside nature, but are themselves the forms of nature. Nature is now inside the mind of an infinite Man who builds his cities out of the Milky Way. This is not reality, but it is the conceivable or imaginative limit of desire, which is infinite, eternal, and hence apocalyptic." As Frye makes clear, he does not mean to be taken too literally. Still it is, I think, significant that

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5 Frye's study of literature comes in fact very close to what (I hope without confusion) I shall call Cassirer's idealist humanism. A brief statement of this can be found in Ernst Cassirer, The Logic of the Humanities, tr. Clarence Smith Howe (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1961), p.20: "The very fact that man is capable of this productivity is precisely what stands out as the unique and distinguishing characteristic of human nature. "Humanitas", in the widest sense of the word, denotes that completely universal — and in this very universality, unique — medium in which 'form', as such, comes into being and in which it can develop and flourish". The position is worked out in detail in the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, 3 vols. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1955—57). See also his Essay on Man (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1944). Compare this attitude with the idealist humanism of Coleridge's critical position on Milton (note 19 below). See also Charles Altieri, "Northrop Frye and the Problem of Spiritual Authority", PMLA, 87 (1972), 964—65.

6 Anatomy, p.119.
This strangely gnostic vision of man is what Frye's study of literature leads to. It is remarkably like the Renaissance platonists' vision of man, Ficino's, for example, in his *Platonic Theology*:

In works of art one may observe how man lays hold of all the materials of the universe as if all things were subject to him. He lays hold, I say, of the elements, stones, metals, plants, and animals and makes them into many forms and figures (something no animal ever did). Nor is he content with one element or several, as animals are, but he uses them all. He strides the earth, ploughs the water, and ascends the air in soaring towers, not to mention the wings of Daedalus or Icarus. He kindles fire, uses it familiarly at his hearth and delights in it especially when alone. It is with justice that only a heavenly creature takes delight in a heavenly element. By his heavenly virtu he ascends to heaven and passes beyond. By his more than heavenly intellect he transcends heaven .... Man, therefore, who oversees the entire totality of things, animate and inanimate, is something of a god. 

Later I shall try to distinguish neoclassical humanism from Renaissance platonism on the grounds that the platonist study of man does not attend to the experience of being human but seeks a manhood dissociated from the condition of being human. And it will be one of my arguments about Milton's

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8 See below, Ch.4, pp.168ff.
humanism that his picture of man, his vision of human nature in its complete and harmonious perfection, is of a finite creature attentive to his creaturely standing. Imaginative or figurative ways of conceiving the human condition are very much part of the literary study of man. Frye's vision of man, dissociated or transported from the human condition, is not accidental or idiosyncratic but representative of a sort of study of literature that I should contrast with the humanist one. There are, of course, many other studies of literature, beside Frye's, that because in one way or another they are dissociated from the humanity they study, are not humanist. But the Anatomy with its vision of infinite man supplies the most arresting example.

The chief consideration for the humanist study of literature is the work as a criticism of life, which the student shares in, which as a student of literature it is his business to gather to mind. Such a sort of criticism, it may be said, can never be objective. And certainly, if by objectivity we mean only the sort of judgement that can be made by dissociating ourselves from our humanity, the charge will hold. The judgements, the attempts to see what things are really like, that humanist criticism can make are indeed provisional, limited by the experience on which they are based, for example. But this need not imply complete subjective or historical relativism. Experience is only to be had by individuals in time. But a literary work that is a criticism of life is an enlarging and generalizing of experience. And because it shows a likeness of things, it calls on the reader for a weighing of his sense of what things are like against the work's. In this weighing up there is an opportunity for a detachment from mere time-bound subjectivity, an opportunity for the education of experience. Such a sort of criticism will, I repeat, be inevitably

9 See below, Ch.5, pp.284ff; Ch.7, passim.
provisional and probably fumbling. Yet in the work of the great humanist critics, Johnson comes to mind, or Arnold, or Leavis, or Winters, amidst much that is impermanent or half-true, there occur enduring insights and problems. One keeps returning to them to get one's bearings. It might be thought perhaps that Johnson's critical judgements are time-bound, of interest only to a historian of taste. Yet his judgement of *Paradise Lost*, for instance, far from being the echo of prevailing fashions, aroused indignation when it was published. What Johnson did was to take a reading of the poem, fairly conventional at the time, and ask how it measured up as a criticism of life. Here his judgement was adverse: *Paradise Lost* in his view was too sublime to have much bearing on human experience. While this judgement is, I think, mistaken, it remains valuable. The quality of his affirmation of the humanist concern with the criticism of life cannot be passed by; and his judgement is just that read more or less as Addison had read it, *Paradise Lost* is wanting by exacting standards of the criticism of life. Johnson's judgement is of its time in the sense that he saw in *Paradise Lost* more or less what Addison had seen. But he goes beyond that by no means negligible understanding to a greater clarity about what had been seen. And there he seems to me to pose the central problem for the humanist criticism of *Paradise Lost*: how can a poem which is so taken up with imagining things outside experience reflect upon the concerns of experience? We might take Johnson's achievement here as an example of the sort of thing humanist criticism might aim for, though hardly hope to attain, the winning of a partial clarity about the reflection of a work of literature upon life.
B Humanist Criticism of "Paradise Lost"

Nothing is gained by huddling on "our great epic poet," in a promiscuous heap, every sort of praise. Sooner or later the question: How does Milton's masterpiece really stand to us moderns, what are we to think of it, what can we get from it? must inevitably be asked and answered. (Matthew Arnold, "A French Critic on Milton")

I. The Problem

Paradise Lost is a problem for humanist criticism because it is religious in such a way that one asks whether its theological concerns exclude, or at least damage, a concern with the study of man. The question is not imported from an idle antithesis of humanism and theology; it is obvious and inevitable. Milton's three major works turn rather on obedience to the will of God than on an issue of ordinary morality.

I doubt whether Milton would have found a distinction between morality and the will of God a paradox. At any rate, while presumably he held that obedience to the will of God included ordinary morality, he chose to treat extraordinary cases of obedience to the will of God not included in ordinary morality. The Christ of Paradise Regained may exemplify temperance, and other virtues besides, but they are incidental to his singular calling from God to recover Paradise. He has to distinguish in his temptations, not between general good and evil, but between what is of God and what is not in terms of his divine mission. The crux comes when he rejects with asperity the learning of Athens, the basis of humanistic culture. As for Samson, he may exemplify a development of the spirit from despair to a regained confidence in his own worth, but Milton presents that development not as a general human experience but as a special waiting on a divine summons and a

rejection of all those notions that are not it. When it comes, it is to the performance of an act hard to square with ordinary morality. And the issue in *Paradise Lost* is also theologically absolute. The eating of the apple may feature a range of failings, as Milton himself argues in the *Christian Doctrine*. Yet it is from the transgression of God's prohibition that the general failing follows in terms both of the epic's moral logic and of the plot's narrative unfolding. Consequently *Paradise Lost*, like *Paradise Regained* and *Samson*, seems to be concerned with divine rather than human morality, and there are points where the divine morality seems not merely arbitrary but even at odds with a morally developed human nature. In *Paradise Lost* there is the additional difficulty that the creation and the innocence of man are not matters of experience, even of religious experience (a form of human experience after all) but belong to a revealed or mythical narrative that represents a state of affairs we can imagine but not know.

The difficulty I am raising is certainly not new. The problem of how the religious scheme of the poem bears on human concerns has, in one form or another, occupied most serious criticism of *Paradise Lost*. A brief historical survey of the way the problem has been met will serve two purposes, first to place my own approach, second to distinguish various senses in which "humanism" has been invoked for or against the poem and by placing them to keep them from interfering with the issue. The writers I shall be concerned with fall into two classes, critics and historians of literature. Naturally there is no sharp line dividing the two.

2. Critics
   
a. Addison and Johnson

   Eighteenth century criticism probably comes closest to the sort of study of literature I have called humanist, though it does not lay claim to the title. At any rate, both Addison and Johnson deal with *Paradise Lost* as a criticism of life. A neoclassical discussion of epic could hardly avoid doing so since the epic was supposed to be a didactic form and consequently to represent human life in an indisputably critical fashion. Addison conceded so much to Le Bossu as to discover a moral in the poem, "the most universal and most useful that can be imagined", "that obedience to the will of God makes man happy, and that disobedience makes them miserable". Yet even if *Paradise Lost* does illustrate this moral (can one deny that *Paradise Lost* is didactic or that it enjoins obedience?), the problem of how it bears on human concerns is by no means solved. This emerges clearly when a modern critic contends that the poem "is essentially a moral work, not a metaphysical one" and that it teaches obedience. What one wonders, does

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12 The Spectator, 369, The Works of Joseph Addison, ed. Richard Hurd and Henry C. Bohn (London: Bell, 1893), 3, 282. Addison's way of qualifying Le Bossu's opinion is worth noting: "Those who have read Bossu, and many critics who have written since his time, will not pardon me if I do not find out the particular moral which is inculcated in *Paradise Lost*. Though I can by no means think, with the last mentioned French author, that an epic writer first of all pitches upon a certain moral, as the groundwork and foundation of his poem, and afterwards finds out a story to it: I am, however, of opinion, that no heroic poem ever was or can be made, from whence one great moral may not be deduced." For Le Bossu, see R.A. Sayce, The French Biblical Epic in the Seventeenth Century (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1955), pp.8ff.

the modern critic mean by "obedience to God"? If he means merely that that was how Milton understood his moral, then one is still left with the question whether Milton's religious moral makes sense outside his religious frame of reference. For Addison, on the other hand, obedience to the will of God probably meant obedience to the laws of nature and society enjoined by the Supreme Lawgiver, to morality in short. It looks for a moment as if the religious moral were much the same as the moral concerns of mankind. The trouble is that the obedience by which Adam and Eve stand or fall is to a divine command that has little to do with ordinary duties because of its arbitrary terms and the peculiar situation of the human pair. Milton states the singular nature of their obedience in the Christian Doctrine, if that is allowed to weigh as evidence:

It was necessary that one thing at least should be either forbidden or commanded, and above all something which was in itself neither good nor evil, so that man's obedience might in this way be made evident. For man was by nature good and holy, and was naturally disposed to do right, so it was certainly not necessary to bind him by the requirements of any covenant to something which he would do of his own accord. And he would not have shown obedience at all by performing good works, since he was in fact drawn to these by his own natural impulses, without being commanded. (Bk. 1, Ch. X)14

Though Addison may rightly epitomize the moral of Paradise Lost as an injunction to obey God, a general moral sense does not follow without a certain absence of attention to the actual terms of the poem.

Of course, much of Addison's criticism, dealing as it does with the beauties and sentiments of the poem, points out how Paradise Lost does in

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14 Complete Prose, 6, 351--52.
fact represent human life. But those sentiments and beauties, if the moral, the essence of the action, is alien to human concerns, will be incidental to the poem's design. And this is the drift of Johnson's criticism, which takes over so many of Addison's observations but reverses his judgements. On the one hand, Johnson grants the usefulness of the poem's moral, extended from Addison's version to include "the reasonableness of religion" along with the "necessity of obedience to the Divine Law;" on the other hand, the implication of his criticism is that he doubts the effectiveness of the moral's presentation in the poem. Paradise Lost treats "the history of a miracle ... the probable therefore is marvellous, and the marvellous is probable. The substance of the narrative is truth; and as truth allows no choice, it is, like necessity, superior to rule." Because it deals with such unparalleled matters, the strength of the poem lies in sublimity of imagination rather than in just and vivid representation of experience. But the sublimity is also the poem's weakness, for "the reader finds no transaction in which he can be engaged; beholds no condition in which he can by any effort of the imagination place himself; he has therefore, but little natural curiosity or sympathy." For Johnson then, Milton does not and could not succeed in bringing the truths of revelation into contact with the truths of experience except intermittently. Wherever he does, Johnson allows that he made the most of his opportunities; but the opportunities are rare and incidental to his scheme.

16 "Life of Milton", p.137.
17 "Life of Milton", p.143.
In the sense that they are both concerned with *Paradise Lost* as a representation and criticism of life, Addison and Johnson share a humanist conception of literature. But Johnson brings out the difficulty which Addison passed over. Johnson overstated his case. The judgement that "the reader beholds no condition in which he can, by any effort of the imagination, place himself" might apply to Shelley better than to Milton. Still his objections are crucial for the humanist criticism of *Paradise Lost*. The point they urge is that while one cannot help feeling that *Paradise Lost* is a grand production, as a study of man its grandeur is not of the first order; while its handling of its theological and biblical material is admirable, the poem falls short as a criticism of life.

b. **Arnold**

Arnold's position is different, though also humanist. His criticism moves away from Johnson's definite formulation of the poem's difficulties to more general concerns. It is therefore in my view at least, less crucial than Johnson's. But it is still pertinent to the issue of the religious as distinct from the moral nature of the poem. And it is important because it has been influential. The chances are that if a critic feels his difficulties with *Paradise Lost* are a struggle of humanism with a theological poem, his presuppositions are Arnoldian, though they probably owe more to Arnold's writings on Culture and Hebraism than to his rather meagre criticism of *Paradise Lost*.

For Johnson, as for the Eighteenth Century in general, Milton's theology was broadly acceptable. Even Voltaire has it that *Paradise Lost* rescued the
biblical narrative from ridicule. The Romantic view by contrast was that Milton's theology was oppressive to the human spirit. Arnold made this view respectable: "Milton was born a humanist, but the Puritan temper, as


The opinions of Shelley and Blake are too famous to cite. Wordsworth and Keats felt they had passed beyond the limitations of Milton's theology to a more generous view of things. Wordsworth's views may be gathered from these lines, though they are put in the mouth of a bard:

All strength — all terror, single or in bands,
That ever was put forth in personal form —
Jehovah — with his thunder, and the choir
Of shouting Angels, and the empyreal thrones —
I pass them unalarmed. Not Chaos, not
The darkest pit of lowest Erebos,
Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
By help of dreams — can breed such fear and awe
As fall upon us often when we look
Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man —
My haunt, and the main region of my song.

Keats thought Wordsworth's views much deeper than Milton's but ascribed the superiority to the progress of the mind rather than to Wordsworth's individual superiority. See his letter to Reynolds's "Letter 80" Sunday, 3rd May, 1818: Letters of John Keats, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cam.: Cam. Univ. Press, 1958), 1, 281. Coleridge understood the difficulty of writing a theological poem and Milton's skill in this respect. But he points to the greatness of Milton's mind rather than to the sense of what he thought. So that while he did not find the theology oppressive to the human spirit, his stress is still on the spirit rather than the theology, and in this he accords with the other Romantics. The sublimity of the poem, far from being an uncertain strength as for Johnson, becomes a putting forth of the creative faculty that for Coleridge's idealist humanism, for Cassirer's and Frye's, is what makes us man. See "Lecture 10", A Course of Lectures in the Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge (London: Pickering, 1836), 1, 166–184, and especially p.177: "In all modern poetry in Christendom there is an under-consciousness of a sinful nature, a fleeting away of external things, the mind or subject greater than the object, the reflective character predominant. In the Paradise Lost the sublimest parts are the revelations of Milton's own mind, producing itself and evolving its own greatness".
we know, mastered him". 20 By "humanism" Arnold meant that intellectual
temper he called "Hellenism". 21 By the "Puritan temper" he meant not merely
lack of "amenity", but the dogmatic cast of a contentious spirit. 22 So the
theology of Paradise Lost is a Puritan recasting of Pauline inspiration in
rigid doctrinal forms, and the representation of God there, one supposes, a
particularly shocking example of the substitution of "a magnified non-
natural man" for "that stream of tendency by which all things seek to fulfil
the law of their being" or "the Eternal that makes for righteousness". 23
For Arnold the theological and supernatural matter of the poem cannot command
assent, whereas for Johnson it could, even if it was scarcely enlivening. 24
Johnson's objection was that it limited the human interest of the poem;
Arnold's is that it is at odds with the full development of the human spirit.

21 This is clear from the discussion of "Hebraism and Hellenism" in Culture
Cf. "The disinterested curiosity, the humanism of the Renaissance are not:
characteristics of Milton" ("A Guide to English Literature", Essays Religious
and Mixed, p.246).
22 "Equality", p.296; Arnold speaks of "a defect which above all others, is
signal in Milton, which injures him even intellectually, which limits him as
a poet; it is the defect common to him with the whole Puritan party to which
he belonged, -- the fatal defect of temper. He and his party have a thousand
merits, but they are unamiable" (% French Critic on Milton,"p.233). For the
Protestant habit of hardening inspiration into dogma, see St. Paul and Pro-
testantism, Dissent and Dogma, ed. R.H. Super (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Mich.
Press, 1968), 10--16, where a speech from the Father in Paradise Lost, Bk.3,
11, 203--12, is cited as evidence.
23 St. Paul, p.10; Literature and Dogma in Dissent and Dogma, p.215.
24 "Life of Milton", p.172.
Johnson's humanism is concerned with the accurate representation of human life; Arnold's humanism is committed to its free and harmonious expression. Accordingly, his humanism, a general matter of attitude and temper and their cultivation rather than a particular sort of critical attention, moves in a wider and vaguer sphere than Johnson's. This does not mean that Arnold is confused, though one may disagree with him, nor that the considerations that he brings into criticism are beside the point, though one may prefer the closeness of Johnson's judgements. As the passage I have quoted by way of epigraph to this section shows, Arnold made it his business to open the discussion of *Paradise Lost* to the sort of criticism that takes in experience of the world contemporary with the critic. To that extent his humanism coincides with Johnson's and belongs to the humanism I have described earlier. Arnold's criticism of *Paradise Lost* is admittedly sketchy. It is typical that far from repeating Johnson's damaging reservations about Milton's sublimity, he should find the permanent Milton, not in what he says but in how he says it, in his grand style and its power to elevate the mind. Nevertheless Arnold's stress on the spirit rather than the letter is less unsatisfactory than it can be made to look. Much subsequent criticism shows how his version of the humanist issue can be elaborated with a close regard to the text. Walter Raleigh's *Milton* is an example, though it shows how easily Arnold's humanism may become a bland attitude and an urbane style. The theme of how an obsolete and unhumane theology distorts Milton's narrative and censors his finer imagination and feeling receives more solid treatment from Waldock, Peter,

even Tillyard. 26

c. Empson

At this point Empson enters and with him another sort of humanism. Most representatives of Arnold's sort of humanism have at least a literary interest in religion; Arnold has a good deal more; none of them say Christianity is pernicious, only that Milton's form of it is objectionable. But Empson holds that Christianity is pernicious and that Milton's form of it is less objectionable than most. Empson is in other words a humanist in an old-fashioned and militant sense. "A humanist, as I understand the term, says 'This world is good enough for me, if only I can be good enough for it'; an anti-humanist, however noble in personal character, at least appears to be committed to saying 'Nothing but Heaven is good enough for me; I ought to be there already' — nobody but God is aristocratic enough for him. The attitude is not always combined with interest in Hell, but that seems to fit

26 Walter Raleigh, Milton (London: Arnold, 1900); A.J.A. Waldoek, "Paradise Lost" and its Critics (Cam.: Cam. Univ. Press, 1947); John Peter, A Critique of "Paradise Lost" (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960); E.M.W. Tillyard; Milton (London: Longman, 1930). The question of style is tangential. After Arnold had stressed its power to elevate the soul, and, followed by Raleigh, severed it from an unsatisfactory narrative, it was not surprisingly found to be petrified with moral intention and defective in sense. This, which is more or less F.R. Leavis's position, states in terms of stylistic analysis what had already been said about the contents; Milton's theology was incapable of fine and humane expression. See Revaluation (London: Chatto, 1936), pp.42--67.
in to it very easily, as one of the aristocratic pleasures of Heaven". 27

The Arnoldian complaint about the Christianity of *Paradise Lost* is that Milton's puritan literalism cast in epic form involves an unmanageable and theologically coarse representation of "a magnified and non-natural man". Empson's point is that Milton's literalism and the narrative consistency imposed by the epic form show the horrible truth about such doctrines as God's omnipotence, the Fall, the Atonement, while a refined theology would obscure it, or at any rate would not prompt the same searching scrutiny. Milton's greatness lies for Empson in the dogged way in which he tried to conceive what God's justice meant and in his radical grasp of what it meant to be its adversary. The tactlessness, the gigantic embarrassments, the painful inharmoniousness, which for Arnoldian humanism are signs of a defective spirit, are for Empson signs of a human integrity wrestling with a monstrous tradition and with the strain itself becoming monstrous. 28

d. Johnson, Arnold, Empson Reviewed

Empson's book has at least the merit of making it hard to be comfortable about *Paradise Lost* as an orthodox and traditional poem -- the line


taken by much criticism in the pious Fifties.\textsuperscript{29} But it will have become obvious that the humanist issue as I have posed it has become squeezed out of shape. The question was how, given its peculiar theological terms, \textit{Paradise Lost} could justly represent human life. The eighteenth century critical approach bore most directly upon it, but I allowed that Arnoldian humanism was relevant if less directly. For clearly human life cannot be represented justly by a spirit that is defective in humanity, and if the spirit of Milton's theology is defective, then the representation will also be defective. With Empson the representation of life is no longer the issue. He is concerned with \textit{Paradise Lost} as the representation of Christian beliefs and with their wickedness. He thinks they lend the poem a barbaric power like that of Benin sculpture (so much for sublimity).\textsuperscript{30} But this can only be considered in terms of the pathology of cultures, and there can be no question for him of Milton's providing a criticism of life. I don't wish to let the humanist issue be pushed onto Empsonian grounds. Clearly a poem that sets out to justify God asks for a moral consideration of its

\textsuperscript{29} It is in fact one of the paradoxes of literary criticism or at least of literary fashion that while \textit{Paradise Lost} was out of favour with the anti-humanists of the early part of this century (Pound, Eliot, Hulme) a criticism deriving its positions from theirs could combine with neo-orthodoxy to celebrate it as a monument to a cultural tradition. Besides the chapter, "Critics", in Milton's God, Kathleen Nott, \textit{The Emperor's Clothes} (London: Heinemann, 1953) and M.K. Starkman, "The Militant Miltonist; or the Retreat from Humanism", \textit{ELH}, 26 (1959), 209--28, are noisy but fairly acute protests.

\textsuperscript{30} Milton's God, pp.275--76.
What interests me, however, is the poem's moral action, that is the fall and restoration of man. Of course theology bears on it and of course Empson treats the fall as an action as well as a doctrine. But I think he is too taken up with Christian theology and neo-Christian critics to grasp what the poem is really about. As far as humanist criticism as I understand it is concerned, the important question is whether Milton's treatment of the moral action makes sense as a representation of human experience.

If it should, then, however Milton saw the matter, the theology of *Paradise Lost*, Empson's objections to its morality, and Arnold's to its spirit are not the really important issues for humanist criticism.

e. Further Treatments

Two post-Empsonian books may be thought to have some bearing on the moral action of *Paradise Lost*. The first, Stanley Eugene Fish's *Surprised by Sin* does not. Perhaps I should point out why. Giving another name to the overworked notion of irony, Fish argues that Milton's art elicits a "reader response" (usually some previous critic's protest), which it then shows to be mistaken or rather sinful. Corrected, the reader passes on to

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31 L.A. Cormican, "Milton's Religious Verse", From Donne to Marvell, Pelican Guide to English Literature, ed. Boris Ford, 3 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956), pp.173–92, argues that Milton's justification of God is illuminative and poetic, not intellectual and argumentative. But it is not easy to separate poetry and argument in *Paradise Lost*. I cannot see how an illuminative experience can ignore theology. On the other hand, there is a vast range of poetry (e.g. celebrating the creation) that implicitly justifies God, which Empson ignores. Stanley Eugene Fish, "Discovery as Form in Paradise Lost", New Essays in "Paradise Lost", ed. Thomas Kranidas (Berkeley: Univ. of Cal. Press, 1969), pp.1–14, argues that the ineptitude of Milton's justification of God is intentional and is meant to force us to look beyond the poem to Christ. The poem and theology are bad in order to induce a pious frame of mind.

further tests and shocks. *Paradise Lost* is then a kind of teaching machine or Skinner cage. But it must be a strangely docile and simple reader who lets himself be manipulated in this way, and it is no friend of Milton's who thinks that such a moral programme is the moral sense of *Paradise Lost*.33

The second book is Dennis Burden's *The Logical Epic*.34 Burden sets out to show how Milton develops his epic from the recalcitrant material of Genesis logically, that is as coherently and reasonably as possible, given the story he had to work with, in terms both of narrative probability in Aristotle's sense and of theology. But a narrative, however "logically" developed within a given frame of reference may have little relation to reality -- the example of science fiction comes to mind. So that while Burden's argument disposes of many incompetences that Milton's critics have enjoyed coming up with and while it makes a good case for the fineness of his shaping care and systematizing intelligence, it does not in itself establish that he does not make the best of what may be a bad job, "a monument to what the mind can achieve"35 but still perhaps a monument to dead ideas. Yet Burden's tone endorses what is not so much the system as the systematic mind, the virtues of system, orderliness, lawfulness, obedience. He thinks the fall was a failure in those virtues and comments that, seen in this way, "Milton's account of the Fall is ... a deeply human and moral episode".36

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33 I imagine that is why Barbara K. Lewalski in an otherwise favourable review is moved to protest that "the poem's spirit is more humane than Mr. Fish's highly intelligent book suggests" (*JEGP*, 68 [1969], 521).


35 p. 201.

36 p. 177.
This is to contend that, however hard pressed by truth to scripture or theology, Milton succeeds in representing a serious issue of human life. But it seems to me that the same difficulty arises here as with Addison's moral. The obedience at stake is unlike any ordinary duty. Perhaps this is why Burden urges on our approval not so much the moral content of the narrative as the moral temperament that it is the expression of. The suggestion is that approval of such a temperament is the mark of the fit audience. Such approval need not mean self-approval, of course. But one's uneasiness that what Burden calls logical rigour is exercised in a field hedged off from real issues is not allayed.

3. Historical Critics

I hope this survey has cleared up what I mean by the humanist issue of Paradise Lost and established that it is far from having been exhausted. But the humanist issue can be raised in another way. It can be raised historically rather than critically. Critically it was a question of the place of Paradise Lost in a permanent humanism, a question of whether the poem bears on general ethical experience. Historically it is a question of the poem's place in the tradition of neoclassical humanism. Clearly an answer to the second question is not an answer to the first. But they are involved with one another and easily confused.

Arnoldian humanism assumes the identity, mutatis mutandis, between

37 p.176.

38 The suspicion is aroused particularly by Burden's account of Milton's treatment of Adam's fall where he shows the difficulties Milton faced and the shifts he resorted to (pp.159, 89--93). While this may arouse admiration for the artist, it must lessen concern with the actions he represents. One responds to "the deeply human and moral episode" as a display rather of virtue and skill in the author than of fateful moral choice in the actors.
itself and Renaissance humanism, as the sentence I have already quoted from "Equality" shows: "Milton was born a humanist but the Puritan temper, as we know, mastered him". So H.J.C. Grierson supplies a rather wistful account of a struggle of seventeenth century humanism with the evangelical temper and Milton's place in it; and the historical analysis corroborates the Arnoldian critical position. In the same way the historical researches of James Holly Hanford and Edwin Greenlaw into Milton's humanism reflect their critical doctrines. But their views deriving from the neo-humanism of Babbitt and More oddly reverse the Arnoldian ones. They find Milton a champion of the inner check and call him humanist. This is to translate Milton's theology into an ethic of self-control, and so, in the guise of Spenserian platonism, Milton's Puritanism becomes his humanism. That the seventeenth century humanism which Grierson or Hanford and Greenlaw speak of should correspond to their own is not a confusion of the critical and historical issues, even if one finds their criticism and their history unsatisfactory. Greenlaw, for example, makes an implicit case for the permanent seriousness of Milton's narrative by interpreting the moral action in terms of temperance with reference to a general historical background of platonic idealism. Here evaluation, interpretation and the study of the historical context are each distinct yet each related.


41 Edwin Greenlaw, "A Better Teacher than Aquinas", SP, 14 (1917), 196--217. See especially his summing up of his procedure, pp.216--17, and compare with Hanford, p.142.
With Douglas Bush, on the other hand, the critical and historical issues do become blurred. And as he has probably said the most influential things about Milton's humanism, it is important to see why this is so. He took over the neo-humanists' account of the poem, but he placed it against an enormously expanded history of ideas and assimilated Milton's humanism to something he called "Christian humanism". By "Christian humanism" he meant a frame of mind the Renaissance inherited from the middle ages, an ordering of things at once rational and Christian, in which human nature found its full and harmonious development. The notion of a "Christian humanism" seems a happy one, an ideal tempering of the best elements of Christianity and of humanism and possibly a means of drawing together the theology and the moral action of *Paradise Lost*. Of course, one wonders if such a frame of mind really existed. But what I am concerned with here is the critical posture Bush takes up on his historical thesis.

The essential point is that he thinks "Christian humanism" was something that existed in the past. It was according to Bush, an outlook that came to an end more or less with Milton, when historical conditions became unpropitious and the intellectual currents of Europe set in the direction of the modern world and what Bush sees as a generally regrettable state of intellectual affairs. Hence while he writes of "Christian humanism" elegiacally and while he sees in it a reproach to the modern world, it is

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43 Ren. and Eng. Hum., p.101: "Milton is the last great exponent of Christian Humanism in its historical continuity"; p.103: "the last voice of an essentially medieval tradition".
not for him, for "Christian humanism" is not something a modern intelligence can maintain, though it might wish to. Whereas Greenlaw or Hanford find that Milton's humanism is fairly close to their own, Milton's humanism and Bush's regret for it are worlds apart. As for Christianity, one gathers that Bush thinks that time has made it impossible.

Actually Christianity is not central to Bush's reading of *Paradise Lost*. It plays much the same role as platonism in Greenlaw's and Hanford's interpretations: it provides a structure for the moral drama of temperance and right reason. This emerges clearly if one reads "Paradise Lost" in our *Time* alongside M. Mahood's *Poetry and Humanism*. For Mahood, the humanism of *Paradise Lost* is Christianity, a theocentric view of things that guarantees man's proper nature; for Bush the Christianity of *Paradise Lost* is humanist because the theocentric view of things underwrites neo-humanist ethical views. Christianity is then more of a container of Bush's "Christian humanism" than the actual contents. But for all that it seems clear that the sort of humanism that Bush is talking about cannot exist without the Christian container and that for him it lives only in the history of ideas.

Now there is no reason why one should not write about a historically superseded intellectual outlook. And in so far as Bush's historical account of "Christian humanism" helps him to interpret the moral action of *Paradise Lost*, I have no quarrel with his approach. What I object to is the

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44 See for example his talk of "the defeatist intellectuals" of the "Armistice period", who disparaged Milton, in *Paradise Lost* in Our *Time*, p.4.
46 pp.12--15, 195.
tendency, a tendency he has helped to establish, to confuse the history of ideas with criticism, to assume that further elaboration of the Renaissance Christian outlook or of Milton's place in the tradition of "Christian humanism" is the same thing as a critical interpretation, that the historical fact of "Christian humanism" settles the question for a humanist criticism of Paradise Lost. What disguises this confusion is Bush's admonitory tone approving the past and deploring the present. We think that he is arguing for the permanent value of Milton's criticism of life. But a tone of voice is not an argument. And in fact Bush as the historian of "Christian humanism" hedges as a critic on what Arnold rightly saw as the real issue for criticism. He evades the critic's responsibility of asking what Paradise Lost really means to a modern mind. Yet if we are to understand what humanism has to do with Paradise Lost, that is the question we must ask. If "Christian humanism" sidetracks us from asking it, then we are not concerned with the real bearing of humanism on the poem.

4. A Proposal for the Historical Criticism of "Paradise Lost"

Such a confusion of history and criticism need not, however, attend an attempt to view Paradise Lost at once historically in terms of the humanism of the Renaissance and the seventeenth century and critically in terms of the sort of humanism that is concerned with literature as a criticism of life. I mean to make such an attempt, to approach the critical question through a treatment of the historical one. Before I justify this

procedure, I should point out that Milton's place in neoclassical humanism is a sufficiently interesting topic as mere history to be worth taking up. Bush's thesis, though dated, has not been answered and still lies behind those nostalgic references one encounters to the last of the Renaissance humanists. The topic has been left more or less where Bush left it.\(^{48}\) It deserves another look. But now, what bearing does a historical inquiry have on the critical issue? Clearly to place the poem in the context of an intellectual tradition ought to shed light on the terms in which the poem was conceived. But it is not satisfactory criticism merely to explain the ideas behind the poem as if the completeness or coherence of their working out made the poem a system closed against outside standards of judgement.\(^{49}\) That is a dissociative procedure akin to those I described earlier. It is, however, equally unsatisfactory criticism to appropriate or dismiss the poem as a criticism of life without coming to terms with those ideas which, as much as the words, are the materials from which the poem is made. The first unsatisfactoriness cuts the poem off from a serious contemporary concern with life; the second from the historical conditions of life from which the poem was won. Ideally the history should amend the criticism and conversely. At the same time, the historical approach shows how the work is

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\(^{48}\) In addition to Mahood, however, see Malcolm Mackenzie Ross, *Poetry and Dogma: The Transfiguration of Eucharistic Symbols in Seventeenth Century English Poetry* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1954). While agreeing with Bush on the nature of Christian humanism, he denies it to Milton and also (contradicting Mahood) to George Herbert.

\(^{49}\) John M. Steadman, "Mimesis and Idea: *Paradise Lost* and the Seventeenth Century World View", *EJQ*, 20 (1964), 67--80, recommends such an approach. His own *Milton and the Renaissance Hero* (Oxf.: Clarendon, 1967) is a valuable inquiry, nevertheless, because it goes beyond this position. The comparative study shows how *Paradise Lost* is a thoroughgoing and intelligent criticism of the heroic tradition.
time-bound, how even so monumental a work as *Paradise Lost* is provisional as a criticism of life. Yet as I remarked earlier any intelligence about experience must be provisional. To come to *Paradise Lost* historically is to realize not only that it is provisional but how it grasps and indeed enlarges the literary intelligence about experience.

Finally an admission, which I hope will forestall criticism. The humanism which Hanford and Greenlaw found in Milton reflected their own neohumanism. Similarly the historical humanism which I find relevant to *Paradise Lost* reflects the preoccupations of the first part of this introduction. This is not I think a disqualification of my historical inquiry as a prejudice writ large. The question is not whether a historical inquiry reflects the writer's views but whether his views are just and useful. Criticism by the standards of justness and usefulness of course I cannot forestall. I can, however, say, returning to the question of prejudice and presupposition, that my historical inquiry is a reflection about the critical position I have called humanist not merely a reflection of it. This reflexive relation satisfies the description I have given of the humanist study of man, except that here the focus is on history and the historical conditions of the literary work rather than on the work's representation of human life. The study of man, I maintained, proceeds by studying other studies of man; criticism criticizes criticisms of life. So the study of literature allows that "return upon its own thoughts, and upon the elements of its being" Arnold speaks of and becomes a study at once detached and engaged, which by cutting into experience makes it possible, however partially, to enlarge the mind.\(^50\) In the same way the humanist study of humanism cuts

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\(^50\) *St. Paul and Protestantism*, p.7.
into its history to understand itself in time.

C. An Approach to Paradise Lost and Neoclassical Humanism

I shall discuss the humanism of *Paradise Lost* in the context of the humanism developing from Petrarch to Pope. That context takes in both Renaissance and Augustan humanism, and it would be useful to have a name that would cover both. To label the whole tract "Renaissance humanism" would be too much of a wrench, and besides it is helpful to be able to contrast a Renaissance humanism with an Augustan one. I propose to use "neoclassical humanism" as an inclusive name. The reason for doing so is that the imitation or emulation of antiquity is characteristic of the humanist enterprise of the whole period; the objection to doing so would be that "neoclassical" is pre-empted by its use in English literary history as a synonym for "Augustan". Yet in normal literary talk "neoclassical" is more inclusive than "Augustan"; one may without confusion or violence speak of the Renaissance as a neoclassicizing movement; the restrictions upon "neoclassical" in English arise surely from a too rigid division of literary periods. The convenience outweighs the difficulty. I shall use "neoclassical" in an extended sense only in the phrase "neoclassical humanism", trusting that with such restrictions the term will be found neither insidious nor confusing.

The governing principle of neoclassical humanism is eloquence. Pre-Petrarchan humanism was governed by the same notion. For John of Salisbury, for Cicero, for the Greek sophists, liberal culture, humanitas, or *paideia* all revolved upon the idea of eloquence. Renaissance humanism is in many respects a revival and flowering of the Ciceronian humanism of the middle ages. But for our purposes it is not necessary to discuss medieval humanism.
The continuity may be assumed. The context in which it is profitable to
discuss Milton's humanism may conveniently be marked out at the beginning by
Petrarch, conventionally and conveniently thought of as the father of Re-
naissance humanism. As for the terminus ad quem in Pope, this is again a
matter of convenience. Augustan humanism takes in Johnson and Gibbon.\[51\]
But as with Petrarch, Pope is useful as a representative figure. The next
representative figure of English humanism after the Augustans is Arnold, a
figure certainly of the greatest importance, whose ideas I shall constantly
draw on to characterize the urge of neoclassical humanism towards a humane
and central notion of culture. But for all Arnold's affinities with earlier
humanism, he came after what is a sharp break in the English and indeed
European literary tradition. After Kant's Critique of Judgement and
Schiller's Aesthetic Letters, after Romantic attacks on eloquence such as
De Quincey's,\[52\] it is clear that eloquence could no longer be the basis of
humanism, as indeed the new direction Arnold gave to criticism shows. I do
not mean to observe the termini, Petrarch to Pope, with great rigour, how-
ever. I put them forward only to mark out roughly a tract of humanism for
examination.

What lies within this tract is an important development, a development
from what is in some ways a mechanical and uncritical literary culture to
one that we can recognize as offering an adequate criticism of life. With
this development went an increasingly sharp sense of the concerns of the
humanist study of man and a critique of learning that did not bear on the

\[51\] See Paul Fussell, The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism: Ethics
and Imagery from Swift to Burke (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), passim; James
W. Johnson, Formation of English Neo-Classical Thought (Princeton: Prince-

\[52\] See Wilbur Samuel Howell, "De Quincey on Science Rhetoric and Poetry",
Speech Monographs, 13 (1946), 1--13.
real concerns of humanity, a critique of speculative philosophy in particular. At the same time humanism adjusted to the claims of Christianity by relinquishing the study of the will to the doctrines of grace and redemption. I do not mean that Christian and humanist concerns came into opposition. They shared a wide field of moral and civilizing interest. The humanist and the Protestant were at one on the primacy of the text. And the evolving humanist picture of the condition of finite man in his middle state agreed with a particularly Protestant stress on human creatureliness. But at the point where Christianity fastened on the motions of the will, humanism came increasingly to leave the study of man to the language and operations of religion. With these various developments went a contracting but also a focussing of interest. And if the grand comprehension of the fusion of Christianity and philosophy with Ciceronian humanism to be seen in the earlier Renaissance gives way to something more narrowly circumscribed, the gain is a sharper comprehension of what makes us human. Representatives of this development are Valla, Montaigne and the Augustan humanists.

Usually Milton's humanism is seen as a survival of the earlier Renaissance humanism. And it must be conceded that as a reformer of the press, of marriage and of the church, as an educationalist who taught the classical languages as an entry into all the arts and sciences, as a theologian who addressed his treatise "To All the Churches of Christ and to All who in any part of the world who profess the Christian Faith", and as a poet whose epic treated the history of the universe, Milton's undertakings were on a Renaissance scale. No argument that Milton was really an Augustan humanist.

53 The Christian Doctrine, Complete Prose, 6, 117.
will be convincing. Nevertheless there are important affinities between *Paradise Lost* and Augustan humanism, both in what it has to show of the human condition as a middle state and in its critique of vain learning.\(^{54}\)

In this respect Milton's humanism seems to me not a survival but part of the critical development of humanism.

Moreover, the treatment of Christian ideas is not satisfactorily accounted for in terms of such a fusion of Christian and humanist concerns as the earlier humanism of the Renaissance offers. The action of *Paradise Lost* is in fact an analysis of volition in terms of the Christian study of the will. Earlier humanist works touched on this subject but their interpretations were unequal to Paul's and Luther's understanding of these matters. Later humanism generally left the study of the will to religion. *Paradise Lost* is an extraordinary work, as far as neoclassical humanism is concerned, in its grasp of the Christian insights and its rendering of them as a human action. Here the place of *Paradise Lost* is peculiar. Milton's interpretation of the Christian study of the will as a human action is the greatest achievement of *Paradise Lost* as a criticism of life and so as a work of humanism. Yet in the history of neoclassical humanism the achievement is eccentric.

What is to be gained then from an examination of *Paradise Lost* in the context of neoclassical humanism is an understanding of how the poem at once belongs to the development of the humanist study of man and goes beyond it.

I should point out that in the following historical and critical discussion I am not attempting to account for the entire intellectual cast of the Renaissance or of the rest of the period. It is probable that neoclassical humanism was formative in the civilization of its time. It is certain that it engaged with other areas of intellectual and social life. I intend, however, to discuss only certain topics where we can mark a development in the humanist attempt to realize culture. By "culture" I mean something like Arnold's "harmonious perfection developing all sides of our humanity", but for our purposes I might narrow it and render it as the attempt to realize through the pursuit of letters a just and extensive intelligence of what humans are like and a complete and generous idea of what they might be like. Clearly culture in this ideal sense can only be realized provisionally. I shall have nothing to say about the relations between culture and the society that tries to realize it. The form these relations take is finely marked by F. R. Leavis in his essay "The Line of Wit". (His view of Dryden is, I think, another matter).

The community to which Jonson as a poet belongs is, though (as we have seen) brought into relation with the life and manners of his time, predominantly ideal; membership is the achievement of creative effort. Jonson's greater fineness and his more assertive robustness go together. The community to which Dryden belongs as a poet is that in which he actually lives, moves, eats and talks; and he belongs to it so completely and, with its assurance of being sophisticated and civilized (it is on the point of considering itself truly Augustan - that is attaining and realizing afresh a kind of absolute civilization), it is so completely engrossing that he has no ear, no spiritual antennae, for the other community.  

56 *Revaluation*, p.32.
Here Jonson represents the creative relationship between humanism and society. But this relationship lies outside the scope of my inquiry. I shall be concerned with the development of humanism more or less on its own, a less interesting but more manageable concern.
CHAPTER 1

Protestantism and the Christian Study of the Will

A Introduction

In this and the following chapter I shall discuss figures whose insights separate Christian and humanist concerns. They cannot be accommodated inside the notion of a "Christian humanism" if by that we understand a harmonious synthesis of Christian belief and Ciceronian humanitas. Such a humanism has been ably characterized by Douglas Bush and I might summarize his account as follows: for "Christian humanism," classical literature supplied an education in the moral and civic values of a Christian society, the master idea was the government of man, society and universal nature by divine reason; not only was man's reason compatible with his spirituality; but his spirituality, cared for by religion, raised his reason to divinity and linked it with God. It seems to me that this general notion of Christian Ciceronianism accounts for much in medieval and Renaissance humanism. At the same time I wish to argue that neoclassical humanism developed away from such a synthesis. Here Montaigne is the significant figure, and I shall look at what he had to say about Christianity and the study of man in the next chapter. In this one, I shall look at Luther's discovery of Paul and argue that that Christian study of the will could not very well be absorbed by neoclassical humanism. What I see developing is not an opposition of Christian and humanist concerns but a separation of interest in which humanism left the study of the motions of the will to religion.

These are, of course, very general trends. Actuality is more confused.

But it seems useful at the outset of our examination to take our bearings by those who separated the spheres of interest most radically. Moreover, what Luther and Montaigne have to say is not only uncompromising, it is also penetrating. Their insights help us not merely to trace a historical development but to understand critically what is at issue between Christianity and humanism. They will help us to understand the problem *Paradise Lost* poses for humanist criticism. It is true that the theological views Milton expresses both in the *Christian Doctrine* and in *Paradise Lost* are rather remotely related to Luther's account of the free and the bound will. And in his controversial writing, Milton's concern with Christian liberty is a matter rather of civil and ecclesiastical discipline than of the delivery of the will. But in the human action of *Paradise Lost*, Milton comes much closer to the insights of Paul and Luther. What I have to say about the study of the will in this chapter will suggest, I hope, not only what Milton is representing in the fall and restoration of Adam and Eve, but how his representation of it as a literary imitation of an action stands in an extraordinary position in the course of neoclassical humanism.

8 The Reformation and Humanism

It is easy enough to make out that Luther was an anti-humanist, a grand adversary typifying some of the forces ranged against "Christian humanism." His eruptive and fervent way of talking lends itself to such an account.

"One thing, and only one thing, is necessary for Christian life, righteousness, and freedom. That one thing is the most holy Word of God."  


Such evangelical single-mindedness has no place for the study of literature. At least in Luther's opinion, such a study did not fit Erasmus to talk of matters of the Christian faith. He wrote in the *Bondage of the Will*, his answer to Erasmus's *Freedom of the Will*: "You ooze Lucian from every pore; you swill Epicurus by the gallon.... Plato and Socrates may be good friends, but truth must be honoured above all" — truth being what may be drawn with certainty from the word of God. Luther has, then, simply no time for humanism. Some of his comments, however, suggest antagonism as well as impatience, an antagonism for instance to the belief that is said to lie at the heart of "Christian humanism," the belief that reason, aided by religion, is the link between God and man. Against this and other more mystical views of the link between God and man Luther asserted that "the spiritual man [is the] man who relies on faith:" "homo spiritualis per fidem". As for reason, it is "the fountain and headspring of all mischiefs. For reason feareth not God, it trusteth not in God, but proudly contemneth him.... This pestilent beast [reason, I say] being once slain all outward and gross sins should be nothing." In other words, Luther sets himself against, not only anything that could be called natural religion, but any theology that tries to harmonize what we know of the natural world and man with faith. So for Luther "Christian humanism" is an absurdity. Admittedly Luther's vehemence may exaggerate his views. And the contexts from which I have lifted his

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4 Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, Dillenberger, p.175.


6 Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, Dillenberger, p.128.
remarks may qualify their sense. Other pronouncements on reason may show that his considered views were not so extreme as those he threw off in heat. Indeed the admirable scheme of education set up by Melanchthon, his right-hand man, shows that his attitude to humanist learning cannot have been so absolute as his occasional outbursts suggest. Yet when every allowance is made for Luther's extravagance of speech, it seems to me that he still stands against what "Christian humanism" is supposed to stand for.

Here I should add that a certain ambivalence about the standing of human learning in the face of Christianity is fairly characteristic even among those whom it seems reasonable to call "Christian humanists." Among the humanists of the Italian Renaissance, the study of the classics included the study of the Christian fathers, of Jerome and Augustine particularly. Neither of these fathers effected a harmonious reconciliation of the study of letters and Christianity, and accordingly a common theme among Italian humanists is the uneasy conscience of the man of letters. Petrarch imitated Augustine in taking up the confession as a form for casting the inner life into literature and Jerome in confessing to a conflict between literature and devotion. This sort of exploration of the inner life is a genuinely humanist undertaking with a real grasp of the confusing claims of Christianity and humanism and the confused motions of the human will. It is a much more interesting line of inquiry than the commonplace defence of humanist studies as a propaedeutic to Christianity. But the uneasy conscience

7 Oberman, "Facientibus quod in se est Deus non Denegat Gratiam: Robert Holcot O.P. and the Beginnings of Luther's Theology", The Reformation in Medieval Perspective, p.128.

about letters and the defence of letters are equally prevalent, and the same author might defend what at other times he confessed as a weakness. This seems inconsistent and unsatisfactory. Still the relation between Christianity and humanism was confusing, and in a way inconsistency did justice to the real state of affairs.

But Luther's evangelical outbursts are of a different order from these humanist expressions of uneasiness. That will come out more clearly when I turn to what lay behind his outbursts. I hope to show that Luther's insights into the study of the will lay beyond the scope of neoclassical humanism and that given his understanding of the central Christian concerns, there could be no complete fusion of Christian and humanist concerns. Yet in spite of that, over a wide field Protestant and humanist concerns were at one.

In the first place there is no evidence that the Reformation destroyed the humanist Renaissance. In England Ascham and Cheke may not have been the equals of Colet and More, but they represent a high general standard, established by a general renovating of education, which the funds from the dissolution of the monasteries made possible. It is, in fact, hardly too much to say that the Reformation of the Church in England was also a reformation of the clerisy or the establishment of learning. In Germany and Scotland also religious and educational reform went hand in hand. In Bacon's view, it was the need of learned controversialists that allied the Reformation with humanism.

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Martin Luther, conducted (no doubt) by an higher Providence, but in discourse of reason finding what a province he had undertaken against the Bishop of Rome and the degenerate traditions of the church, and finding his own solitude being no ways aided by the opinions of his own time, was enforced to awake all antiquity, and to call former times to his succours to make a party against the present time; so that the ancient authors, both in divinity and in humanity, which had long time slept in libraries, began generally to be read and revolved. This by consequence did draw on a necessity of a more exquisite travail in the languages original wherein those authors did write, for the better understanding of those authors and the better advantage of pressing and applying their words. And thereof grew again a delight in their manner of style and phrase, and an admiration of that kind of writing which was much furthered and precipitated by the enmity and opposition that the propounders of those (primitive but seeming new) opinions had against the schoolmen; who were generally of the contrary part, and whose writings were altogether in a differing style and form; taking the liberty to coin and frame new terms of art to express their own sense and to avoid circuit of speech, without regard to the pureness, pleasantness, and (as I may call it) lawfulness of the phrase or word. And again, because the labour then was with the people (of whom the Pharisees were wont to say Excrabillis ista turba, quae non novit legem), for the winning and persuading of them, there grew of necessity in chief price and request eloquence and variety of discourse, as the fittest and forciblest access into the capacity of the vulgar sort. So that these four causes concurring, the admiration of the ancient authors, the hate of the schoolmen, the exact study of languages, and the efficacy of preaching did bring in an affectionate study of eloquence and copies of speech, which then began to flourish.

Bacon is certainly right in pointing to the part played by the Reformation in establishing a revival of humanist learning in Protestant countries. In Catholic countries the Counter-Reformation, particularly the Jesuits, encouraged humanist learning in the same way and for the same reasons. But Bacon goes further and suggests that the Reformation was actually the cause of the humanist movement and that can hardly be. Before Luther's Reformation, there was a widespread agitation for a reform of the Church particularly in

France and the Low Countries. Some of the more prominent humanists, like Erasmus, Colet, d'Etaples, were involved. It has in fact been argued that Henry's Reformation was an Erasmic rather than Lutheran one.  

But why should humanists be concerned with the reform of the church? They were not conspicuously so in Italy. I cannot explain why Northern and Italian humanism should differ in this respect. On the other hand, I can at least suggest some of the concerns in which humanism coincided with Protestantism. Most strikingly the humanist movement agreed with the Reformers on scholastic theology. Both agreed that it was vain learning or, in a phrase Bacon quoted from Paul, "profane novelties of terms, and oppositions of science falsely so called" (I Tim.6: 20). And both humanists and Reformers could agree why it was vain learning. It was not the proper study of mankind but a presuming to scan God. Both Luther and Erasmus agreed for example, in calling scholastic theorists concerning God's foreknowledge "sophists" -- not because they resembled the ancient Greek sophists but because they spent their intellectual energies on qibbles.
concerning matters that there could be no sound human knowledge about. 14

Most importantly humanists and Reformers agreed in insisting upon the direct bearing of Christian ideas upon life. This is the positive side of their criticism of vain learning. Erasmus with a clearly subversive intention spoke of a philosophia Christi, meaning not a speculative scholastic theology but a lively and practical piety issuing in a life rightly conducted in obedience to Christian precepts. 15 Luther, unlike Erasmus, drew a sharp distinction between faith and works. Nevertheless for him Christian faith is even more intimately involved with conscience than it was for Erasmus. "The place where we ought to live with God like man and wife is the conscience" -- how much is involved in this pregnant statement will emerge shortly. 16 It is enough to say here that conscience is perhaps the most immediate individual consciousness of experience. It is natural that a humanist concerned with Christian ideas should try to apply them to life and that in doing so he should address himself to the conscience. And this attempt was taken up with greater force by the Reformation.

To multiply examples from the Reformers would be tiresome. But it would be a pity to let Calvin go unmentioned here because his reputation for systematic rigour might lead one to think that with him Protestant theology had turned in a scholastic direction. It is true that his Institutes

14 Erasmus, De Libero Arbitrio tr. Ernst F. Winter in Erasmus-Luther (N.Y.: Ungar, 1961), p.10: "Perhaps what the sophists used to say about God, that, given his nature, he is present as much in the cavity of a beetle, as in heaven has some truth in it", 'Luther, Bondage of the Will, Dillenberger, p.172'. Cf. Valla, "Dialogue on Free Will", tr. Charles Edward Trinkaus, The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, ed. Ernst Cassirer et al. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1948), pp.155--56, 179--81, where he takes up the same disparaging line on speculative theology.


is in many ways a codifying of Luther's insights. In this, perhaps it does look forward to the Protestant scholasticism of the 17th century. Nevertheless Calvin "calls his work not a summa theologiae but a summa pietatis" and he begins by asserting that without knowledge of one-self there is no knowledge of God. Admittedly he goes on to assert that without knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self and the sort of knowledge of the self he is concerned with is the self's consternation and sense of nothingness before God's majesty. Still this is to stress that Christianity is something lived and experienced. With philosophic speculations about God's being he is as impatient as Luther or Erasmus. Our nature and God's nature are such that our minds cannot try to understand God without evaporating. Human nature is creaturely and can only understand God's nature through what he has revealed of himself. Such a critical view of the knowledge that man is capable of is probably the most important common ground between neoclassical humanism and the Reformation. Calvin, by the way, wrote as a humanist before he wrote as a divine. His first publication was a commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*.

A further respect in which the Reformation was at one with humanism was the place it assigned to textual study. This is part of the attack on vain learning, only here the learning is vain because it is out of touch with the proper use of language and what authors actually said. It is

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18 See *Institutes*, Preface, p.6; Bk.1, Ch.2, p.41, Ch.5, p.65.

tempting to think that the authority the Reformers placed in the Bible is an extreme example of the humanist recovery of authors. Like the humanists, the Reformers seem to have thought of themselves as restoring a text to its original simplicity, and recovering with the plain words of its author an authority that had been dispersed in glosses and digests. The corruption of the church had a vested interest in the corruptions of the text and the vain learning founded on them. This is perhaps to draw too simple an analogy between ecclesiastical and textual restoration. But at least the Reformation probably owed to humanism a new way of reading the Bible. Scholastic theology typically worked with collections of sentences such as Lombard's. The endeavour was to educe a philosophic and systematic theology from them. Erasmus followed an entirely different line of Christian study. His translation of the New Testament prefaced each book with a commentary on the book as a whole. In other words he read the biblical books as he would any other book and not as a collection of sentences. In the same way Colet had drawn his audiences at Oxford, not with a dissertation on a theological topic but with an exposition of the text of the Epistle to the Romans. In its turn Reformation theology is more or less the rediscovery of the Epistle to the Romans. But this astonishing work could hardly have been taken in unless the Reformers had first learnt

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20 On the primacy of the text for the 16th century mind and how the attempt to restore it led to a never ending accretion of commentary see Michel Foucault, The Order of Things (London: Tavistock, 1970), pp.40--42. Erasmus was preceded by Valla. Valla in many respects anticipated the Reformers' position on the primacy of the text. See Trinkaus, In Our Image, :2,574--75: "What was essentially radical in Valla's textual criticism was his grasp of theological implications or of the support that could be offered or removed from particular doctrines by 'correct' or 'incorrect' philology".
how to read a book. 21 Luther may first have reached his insights by other methods. 22 But what seems to me his most important treatise, *The Freedom of a Christian*, is a work that could only have come out of a reading of the *Epistle to the Romans*, and a reading of the sort that the humanists called for.

There are no doubt other important connections between the humanist movement and the Reformation. The Protestant view came to be that the revival of learning was inevitably succeeded by the Reformation and the revival of Christian learning. 23 But such a view is clearly partisan. It seems fairly clear from the division of humanists between Catholic and Protestant camps that the Reformation was a religious issue, which humanists, like other men, settled on religious grounds.

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21 See Melanchthon's complaint about Scholastic theology: "it is absurd for dialecticians and men who have spent a lifetime in that one art, never to see (and this is the very business of dialecticians) what David or Paul is saying, what are the beginnings of their arguments and what their ends.... So it is that because they could not understand a discourse, they build a new edifice of theology" (Quirinus Breen, "Melanchthon's reply to G. Pico Della Mirandola", *JHI*, 13 [1952], 425).


I have argued that for Luther a "Christian humanism" was an impossibility. And still on many matters, neoclassical humanism, whether Protestant or Catholic, was at one with the Reformation on the subject of human learning. This is not a contradiction if we accept that the central concern of Lutheran Christianity was different from the humanists' concern with culture. While there could be no fusion of Luther's sort of Christianity with humanism, reformer or humanist might agree on a subject such as human learning. There was no reason why a Lutheran like Melanchthon should not also have been a humanist, though he could not have represented a "Christian humanism."  

With Milton the position is different. As I have earlier remarked, the Christian Doctrine does not really take up Luther's disturbing insights into the Christian study of the will. Maurice Kelley has indeed argued that on subjects such as the Trinity, Milton's theology follows an essentially Erasmic and rational line, a line that might very naturally develop out of the concerns of neoclassical humanism. Moreover, Milton's method as a theologian of assembling passages under heads (loci communes) shows at once a humanist concern with the text and a Protestant scripturalism. The attempt to restore religion to something of its pure original state suggests as much the humanist urge to get back beyond the accretion of gloss and error to what the text actually said as the Protestant reaching back for doctrines unadulterated by later church traditions. In all this there is no problem about how Milton's humanism was adjusted to his Christianity.

It is with *Paradise Lost* that the problem arises. There Milton is concerned with the Christian study of the will that Luther gave disturbing yet authoritative expression to.

C  **Paul and Luther on the Will**

1)  **Introduction**

Of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Luther wrote, "This epistle is in truth the most important document in the New Testament, the gospel in its purest expression." What Luther discovered there was Paul's study of the will. It is a discovery of great importance. For what Paul in his Epistle and Luther in his treatise on *The Freedom of a Christian* have to say about the freedom and bondage of the will is of the greatest interest for any complete study of man. What I have to say in a later chapter about Milton's treatment of these matters in *Paradise Lost* will help I hope to establish that contention. Both Paul and Luther, however, write as theologians, and what they have to say is wrapped up in the special language of Christianity. It is difficult to interpret what they have to say in the language of the study of man. Arnold attempted to assimilate Paul to the humanist study of literature. And his is certainly a remarkable attempt. It goes beyond any neoclassical humanist attempt at interpretation known to me, apart from *Paradise Lost* in its special way. But Arnold does not do justice to what Paul has to say. His failure is instructive, for the terms in which he works are surprisingly close to those of the neoclassical *studia humanitatis*. His failure then to grasp what Paul has to say about the will brings out more fully and intelligently than any treatment of neoclassical humanism just where the Christian study of the will as Paul and Luther understood it was

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marked off from the concerns of neoclassical humanism. To establish that division will be the first task of the examination that follows. The second will be to offer a general reflection on Paul and Luther on the free and bound will. I go about these tasks with diffidence. I am not a theologian, but then I shall not be offering a theological interpretation. I shall try to explain how Paul's and Luther's study of the will bears on the study of man and prepare the way for my examination of how Paradise Lost brings their insights to bear on the fall and repentance of Adam and Eve.

2) Arnold and the Pauline Crisis

Caravaggio's picture in the church of Santa Maria del Populo of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus puts in a striking visual way the experience that speaks through the Epistle to the Romans. Saul lies tumbled from his horse upon his back with his head towards the viewer so that beside his horse and groom he appears upside down. The topsy-turvy posture might appear merely grotesque, but that his fall is no ordinary staggering is shown in the blind eyes and the gesture, which convey the extraordinary inner reversal going on. Thom Gunn's "In Sante Maria del Populo" talks about Caravaggio's picture and suggests that what Caravaggio saw, or at least painted, of "Saul becoming Paul" was "the large gesture of the solitary man/Resisting by embracing nothingness". Obviously this Sartrean conversion is not the same as Paul's Christian one, as Gunn in fact makes clear. But at least the poem bears witness to a painting that in turn bears witness to some extraordinary commotion, however it is to be interpreted.

The peculiar power of the Epistle to the Romans expresses itself through

thoughts that effect a similar commotion and reversal of perspective. And one might say the same of Luther's Copernican revolution in theology. What the commotion is about, or where the power comes from, I find myself unable to explain except in the conventional terms that it speaks of the way God meets man. One may turn hardly enlightened from explanations such as this and indeed this aspect of the matter lies outside the scope of my inquiry. On the other hand, it is idle to talk about Paul or Luther and pretend that an extraordinary and unaccountable reversal has not taken place. For them Christianity means an extraordinary disturbance. This being so, it is evident to the most superficial glance why Luther's Christianity and humanism do not fuse. Humanism is the study of man through human traditions. It is concerned with the universalizing of experience and with becoming human. But Paul and Luther talk of an overturning of what we know about humans and not so much of a becoming human as of a transformation.

It is here that Arnold's interpretation of Paul is misleading. I have no quarrel with his judgement that Protestantism has hardened religious intuitions into dogma. My criticism is that he has not done justice to


31 Cf. Rudolph Bultmann's distinction between the humanist's preoccupation with becoming and the believer's with decision in "Humanismus und Christentum", *Studium Generale*, 1, (1947—48), 73+: "Der Humanist nimmt sein Leben, gleichsam in die Hand; er bildet sich, er schreitet fort, er entwickelt sich, er wird immer mehr der, der sub specie der Idee schon ist. Der Glaubende bildet und entwickelt sich nicht zum immer vollkommener Glaubenden, sondern ist, was er als Glaubender ist, entweder ganz oder gar nicht. Die Augenblicke der Entscheiden, durch die er hindurch geht, mögen, menschlich gesehen, wohl im Zusammenhang einer Charakter Entwicklung, eines Fortschritts; dann sie verlangen, dass sich der Glaubende in ihnen jedesmal ganz aufs Spiel setzt, um sich ganz zu gewinnen oder zu verlieren".
Paul's central religious intuition, an intuition that moreover Protestantism did lay hold of, however dogmatic the grasp became. For unless phrases like "the Eternal that makes for righteousness" or "words thrown out at a vast object of consciousness" carry more charge than one thinks, he ignores the way in which Paul's central intuition about Christianity confounds the human perspective. And here we may neatly oppose Arnold's views to Barth's. "A numinous perception of any kind has an alarming and disturbing effect upon all other perceptions; a divinity of any kind tends to bring men into a condition which is more or less ambiguous; a cleavage of some form or other is made between their existence and a contrasted or threatening non-existence; a gulf appears between the concrete world and the real world; there emerges a scepticism as to whether we are competent to elongate possibility into impossibility, or to stretch our actual existence into non-existence." And if this goes for any numinous perception, in Christianity the confounding of the human perspective is far greater, for there, according to Barth, the encounter with God is such that religion as a human possibility, as a sanctification of the ends of human life, is abolished and the whole of human life comes under judgement. And certainly some comment such as this seems called for in the face of such annihilating statements of Paul's as "no human being can be justified in the sight of God for having kept the law; law brings only the consciousness of sin." (Rom. 3, 20). It is the weakness of Arnold's interpretation of Paul that he should suggest that statements of this sort are merely sacred hyperbole, and that the divine bouleversement of the human perspective is for Paul merely

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an enthusiastic way of speaking. On the other hand, it is the great strength of Arnold's interpretation that he should insist that Paul's overriding concern is with righteousness. Unlike Arnold, I am unable to reduce this concern with righteousness to a purely moral concern. But I mean to follow a moral approach, even though the material proves finally inaccessible to it. Only, the moral ideas I see in Paul are rather different from those Arnold sees. This is because Arnold makes Paul's concern with righteousness essentially a matter of prudence as a neoclassical humanist such as Salutati understood the term.

"Prudence" is unfortunately no longer an attractive word, yet Arnold's moral ideas are attractive. I do not mean to slight them by calling them "prudence". No better word comes to mind, and the word deserves to be attractive. Righteousness or conduct arises, according to a passage of inspired if speculative etymology in Literature and Dogma, with the most primitive inklings of humanity. "The very words mind, memory, remain, come, probably, all from the same root, from the notion of staying, attending. Possible even the word man comes from the same; so entirely does the idea of humanity, of intelligence, of looking before and after, of raising oneself out of the flux of things, rest upon the idea of steadying oneself, concentrating oneself, making order in the chaos of one's impressions, by attending to one impression rather than the other." Conduct is therefore an ordering of the primitive

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36 Literature and Dogma, p.179.
matter of experience, the marking out of a path through this silva, this
matter with its lithe and fleeting shapes. This ordering or marking out of
a direct path in things means a translating of experiences into experience,
the finding of the permanent contours of human experience in our impressions
of the world. And this is why the ethical ideas Arnold develops in his
religious works comes under prudence, though "science" is the word he uses.
Renaissance allegories picture a man with three faces; in a picture of
Titian's, an old face looks to the past, a mature face to the present and a
youthful face to the future. This is Prudence looking before and after to
master the present through seeing the enduring shapes of things.37

Prudence is not, however, simply a knowledge of the order of things,
a knowledge of the rules, but a conforming of oneself to the order of things
as the order of one's own true nature or the rule of one's being. This
conformity means not only the assent of one's reason but also the motion of
the will and the affections. And it is here that literature comes in through
its power to move the emotions as well as to inform the mind. The examples
it shows, whether historical or fictitious, are particularly important, for
they not only supply the mind with a likeness of experience but educate the
emotions as well. Such ideas of prudence and the role of literature in the
acquisition of prudence are the dry bones of Renaissance theory of studia
humanitatis, as I shall explain later.38 In Arnold's ethical interpretation
the value of the Bible lies in its peculiar literary or poetic power to
touch moral ideas with emotion, above all through the example of Jesus.

37 See Erwin Panofsky, Meaning and the Visual Arts (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1955), pp.146--68.
What is extraordinary about Arnold's works on the Bible and on Paul in particular, is, however, not so much that the dry bones are there, as that they live. This is because Arnold is a first rate literary critic or humanist student of the Bible, a critic with a far more intimate and considered understanding of his text than, for example, Erasmus, who is no doubt a far more orthodox critic and humanist than Arnold.  

Still Arnold's talk of the Christian concern with the will is different from Paul's. For Arnold, Christianity works upon the will as character or self-direction. The overcoming of the self or dying to the self, the method of necrosis, is a matter of acquiring a better self more in tune with the order of things than our worse self. Jesus is an example of that best self that we are to acquire. The moral notion here is of a becoming, an approximation to an ethical pattern, the shaping of an inner statue. The sense in which Paul and Luther are concerned with the will is surely not incompatible with this, though quite as surely different. They are concerned not with a process of becoming but with a critical all or nothing present. And this present in which the will is disposed is not the present that prudence masters by looking before and after. Paul and Luther in fact bring in an entirely different set of considerations, a set of considerations, however, that carries as great an ethical interest as those considerations that Arnold brings in.

39 For Arnold's requirements for a literary critic of the Bible, see Literature and Dogma, p.276.

3) Paul and Luther on the Freedom and Bondage of the Will

The key ethical consideration with Paul and Luther is the freedom of the will. This is where their concern or obsession with righteousness enters into the ethical sphere. It is in the nature of a good or truly moral act that it should be done freely. Indeed for Kant the philosophy of morals is "the practical legislation of reason by the concept of freedom".\footnote{41}

With the concept of freedom goes the concept of responsibility. If one's actions are morally accountable, then one is absolutely responsible for them because they are unconditioned. It is surely only superficially paradoxical to say as Kant does that the only moral response to the moral law is a free one. The concern of Paul and Luther with freedom in the face of divine law grasps the same point.

But both Paul and Luther bring to their reflections about freedom in the face of the divine law a consideration that did not occur to Kant, though it has a bearing on the most secular of ethics. They say that one is incapable of the free response called for by the divine law. The will is not free to do good. The will is bound and the law helps to bind us.

Except through the law I should never have become acquainted with sin. For example, I should never have known what it was to covet, if the law had not said, "Thou shalt not covet." Through that commandment sin found its opportunity, and produced in me all kinds of wrong desires. In the absence of the law, sin is a dead thing. There was a time when, in the absence of the law, I was fully alive; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. The commandment which should have led to life proved in my experience to lead to death, because sin found its opportunity in the commandment, seduced me, and through the commandment killed me .... We know that the law is spiritual but I am not: I am unspiritual, the purchased slave of sin. I do not even acknowledge my own actions as mine, for what I do is not what I want to do but what I detest. (Rom.7, 7-11, 14-16).

\footnote{41 Immanuel Kant, The Critique of Judgement, tr. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1928), pp.8-9.}
Although the commandments teach things that are good, the things taught are not done as they are taught, for the commandments show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it. They are intended to teach man to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good and may despair of his own ability .... For example, the commandment, "You shall not covet" is a command which proves us all to be sinners, for no one can avoid coveting no matter how much he may struggle against it. Therefore, in order not to covet and to fulfill the commandment, a man is compelled to despair of himself, to find the help which he does not find in himself elsewhere and from someone else .... As we fare with respect to one commandment, so we fare with all, for it is equally impossible to keep any one of them.42

It is easy, of course, to dismiss such talk as religious despair or enthusiasm. And yet if Kant's contention that the moral response to the moral law must be a free one seemed paradoxical for a moment, what Paul and Luther are talking about can hardly be strange to us. To act freely is simply immensely difficult, if not impossible, and to act freely in what is probably the only situation where acting freely makes sense, where what is to be freely done is objectively given, especially in the shape of a moral or divine command, is peculiarly difficult. The problem is to conform the will to the law, to want to do with all one's heart what one ought to do. To perform the law in any other spirit is to be bound by the law. This is what Paul means by the law's producing "all kinds of wrong desires" and what Luther calls the hypocrisy of good works.43 Here then is the obverse of the freedom of the will required to act rightly. One has fallen foul of the law and the absolute responsibility implied by the freedom of the will becomes guilt, and that is the bondage of the will. It does not matter how the transition from the freedom to the bondage of the will is to be explained, whether through the original sin of Adam, or through the effects of wrongdoing, or in some crookedness that deflects the will from wholehearted action,

43 Freedom of a Christian, Dillenberger, pp.54--56.
the point is that the scrupulous conscience conscious of its freedom has become conscious of its "error's ugly infinite impression" and so of its guilt.44 And guilt means the impotence of the will or an experience of freedom as an infinite regress into unfreedom such as Milton's Satan and Adam suffer.45

While it is indefinite, the guilty conscience is also a conscience that is shut in. Many myths have expressed this paradoxical coincidence of reiteration with absence of any result; the futile activity of Sisyphus and the Danaides is well known, and Plato already interpreted it as a symbol of condemnation that is both eternal and without any result. St Paul also speaks of existence "shut up under the guard of the law". The guilty conscience is shut in first of all because it is an isolated conscience that breaks the communion of sinners. It "separates" itself in the very act by which it takes upon itself, and upon itself alone, the whole weight of evil. The guilty conscience is shut in even more secretly by an obscure acquiescence in its evil, by which it makes itself its own tormentor. It is in this sense that the guilty conscience is a slave and not only consciousness of enslavement; it is the conscience without "promise."46

At this point common sense will break in with objections. The preoccupation with sin or guilt is a sterile preoccupation and an exaggerated self-preoccupation. This is in fact one of the charges Arnold makes against Puritanism (though not against Paul).47 And of course the charge is correct. Only, it is unhelpful. It is precisely the impotence of guilt that its efforts are sterile and that it is a state of self-torment.

45 See below, Ch.6, pp. 330--34, 365--79.
47 St. Paul and Protestantism, p.35.
The consciousness of being preoccupied with a self whose efforts are sterile is part of the torment of guilt. The world of guilt is unreal but it is a dreadful thing to fall into unreality and know it. This is the condition that Paul means when he talks of being dead. And this is why another objection has to be dismissed. Gilson contrasts the scholastic position on the will with the Reformers'. According to him, Christian philosophy draws a distinction between will in the sense of intention and will in the sense of the ability to perform what is intended, and this distinction the idea of the bondage of the will overlooks; so that when Paul says, "The good I want to do, I fail to do: but what I do is the wrong which is against my will" (Rom. 7, 19), he means his intention is good but his power to perform it is defective.48 Of course this is a predicament everyone recognizes. But it is not what Paul and Luther are talking about. They are talking about the predicament of guilt in which the intention itself is hypocritical or divided against itself and this crookedness is unhappily brought to light in what it performs. And this too is a predicament everyone should recognize, except that to reasonable reflection, which is after all free reflection, the predicament is unreal and has to be dismissed unless the reflection is itself to fall into unreality. A third objection is that Paul's and Luther's experience of guilt is fantastically over-scrupulous. Paul's trouble with the Pharisaic elaboration of the law, Luther's morbid monastic conscientiousness -- the cure for these difficulties, one might think, would be a certain humble mediocrity of conscience. And certainly if the only moral consideration were getting things done, Paul and Luther are wasting their time. But in fact it is hard to think of anything more important than doing what is required freely since acting freely is the spring of moral

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action. According to Kant, the freedom implied in right action includes spontaneity of the will: the will should intend the right wholeheartedly; and again Arnold, though his moral concerns are different from those we have in hand, writes memorably about the free spirit which Christ imparted to the doing of the law. Besides if right and wrong are matters of our relations to others, it is immediately clear that the freedom or enslavement of our actions is quite essential to the quality of the action -- and this whether the other is, as for Paul and Luther, God who looks into our inward parts, or just other people.

Now the difficulty that Paul and Luther were wrestling with comes into the open. Right action must be free action but we become incapable of free action. And it is here Paul and Luther speak of deliverance or salvation from the bondage of the will. So far we have been able to find a way of speaking about the concern for righteousness that works on an ethical level. But with deliverance or salvation we turn to a religious transaction involving terms such as faith and grace that fall beyond purely moral experience. Arnold's rendering of the transaction as the method of Jesus, a dying to one's lower self, and the secret of Jesus, the sweetness and light of his example, is inadequate, and his is the most vigorous attempt to explain the religious operation as a moral one. But though the operation remains locked up in religious ideas, at least for my powers of analysis, it still occupies an immensely interesting position in moral experience, like terra incognita in old maps except that it lies nearer home. For the operation lies between the freedom and the bondage of the will, a transition or motion of the will that has to be taken seriously by any moral thinking genuinely interested in

freedom. Though it goes beyond the limits of moral thought, as I understand them, it returns upon the moral problem with a solution. Moreover the solution includes the notion of forgiveness, a matter of as much interest to moral thought as freedom itself. What is looked up in the religious trans-action of deliverance is then of great interest to moral thought but only very imperfectly grasped by it.

There are, of course secular analogues for the Christian deliverance. Sartor Resartus, for example, traces a non-religious conversion from the Everlasting No, which is despair and paralysis of the will, to the Everlasting Yes, which is its regained freedom. The point of conversion lies in the will's dying to itself. It lowers its denominator to zero and since zero is not only the point of extinction but of origin, the will is reborn able to affirm its actions. This, perhaps, is something like what Gunn sees in Caravaggio's picture -- "the solitary man/ Resisting by embracing nothingness." This secular deliverance, however, seems to be almost as wrapped up in its symbols as its Christian model and so to make almost as great a demand on the reader's faith, or at least suspension of disbelief. Besides, unlike Paul's or Luther's, Carlyle's deliverance is concerned merely with action and not with right action, and that attenuates the idea of deliverance greatly.

The transition for Paul and Luther is not so much from an Everlasting No to an Everlasting Yes as from the old self, whose will is bound, to a new self, whose will is free to act rightly. The old self is figured in the fallen Adam and the new self in Christ, the new Adam, who has regained Paradise for man. The issue poses itself for Paul and Luther in terms of justification. For the old man, freedom has become the absolute responsibility that he has failed by, that he cannot fulfill and that turns upon him

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in the experience of guilt as God's wrath or the judgement that nothing he does is good. Since his will is bound so that it can do nothing to justify itself, God must justify it first for it to be able to act freely and rightly. Luther has two striking analogies to illustrate the point that in order to act freely we must first be free, in order to act rightly, we must first be delivered from condemnation and self-condemnation.

We should think of the works of a Christian who is justified and saved by faith because of the pure and free mercy of God, just as we would think of the works which Adam and Eve did in Paradise, and all their children would have done if they had not sinned. We read in Gen.2:15 that "the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." Now Adam was created righteous and upright and without sin by God so that he had no need of being justified and made upright by his tilling and keeping the garden; but, that he might not be idle, the Lord gave him a task to do, to cultivate and protect the garden. This task would truly have been the freest of works, done only to please God and not to obtain righteousness, which Adam already had in full measure and which would have been the birthright of us all.

The works of a believer are like this. Through his faith he has been restored to Paradise and created anew, has no need of works that he may become or be righteous; but that he may not be idle and may provide for his body, he must do such works freely only to please God ....

A second example: A bishop, when he consecrates a church, confirms children or performs some other duty belonging to his office, is not made a bishop by these works. Indeed if he had not first been made bishop, none of these works would be valid. They would be foolish, childish and farcical. So the Christian who is consecrated by his faith does good works, but the works do not make him holier or more Christian, for that is the work of faith alone.\footnote{Freedom of a Christian, Dillenberger, pp.68-69.}

But how do Paul and Luther think faith brings about the restoration of man? The reply that faith is trust in the promises of God and that it is through our faith in the good faith of God that he is able to bring about the restoration is accurate but general. And Paul and Luther are far more
specific. They are indeed copious on the subject. I do not pretend that
the interpretation I am offering takes in all they have to say or indeed
begins to lay hold of the extraordinary power of the language and symbols
they use. The one thing that I want to bring attention to is that the
divine operation that brings about a transition from the bondage of the will
to the freedom of the will is an act of forgiveness. This is the act of
grace that the unfree will is unable to do by itself and the means of de­
liverance that can only be grasped by faith. It is easy enough to see why
forgiveness is necessary. Freedom of the will, I have already said, means
absolute responsibility. The bondage of the will is the experience of that
responsibility as guilt, a living under the sentence of divine judgement that
Paul and Luther speak of. The only way out of this bondage is an act that
discharges the responsibility and cuts through the entanglement of the wrong
will in its past to make a new beginning possible. "Forgiving is the only
reaction which does not merely react but acts anew and unexpectedly un­
conditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its con­
sequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven."52

It might be thought that actions that are truly free cannot be truly
forgiven because of the absolute responsibility that freedom implies.53 But
this is surely a mistake about the nature of forgiveness. It is easy enough
to excuse or pardon acts not committed freely, where in fact we realize that
the doer is not entirely responsible. But this is not forgiveness in the
full sense. If it were, we could forgive ourselves. Forgiveness would apply
to actions that were not quite without merit. We would in a way deserve to
be forgiven. But Paul and Luther are not talking about such actions or such

52 Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1959),
p.216.

53 See John Silber, "The Ethical Significance of Kant's Religion", Kant,
Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone, p.cxxxi; Arendt, p.216.
a forgiveness. If they were, they could not honestly insist that the will they are talking about is bound and all its actions in consequence worthless and sinful. Clearly they are talking about actions for which we are absolutely responsible, and forgiveness is entirely incommensurate with them. According to Paul, "God's act of grace is out of all proportion to Adam's wrongdoing" (Rom. 5, 15), and both he and Luther insist that God's action is gratuitous and unmerited. Forgiveness is in fact as free and unconditioned an action as the one that is to be forgiven.

There is indeed something anomalous in the idea of forgiveness. It contradicts the strict moral logic of freedom, responsibility and guilt, or of fault and retribution. Even between people it is hard to follow the transaction. Clearly it involves repentance or a change of mind, but this motion of the will is not possible, or at least complete, until the other has forgiven the injury or offence. When that has taken place the injury vanishes and the will that is bound to its guilt is set free. This is a rough and unsatisfactory account of the process, but its elements are present in what Paul and Luther tell us of the religious transaction.

In the first place their account features the anomaly of forgiveness, of "God's way of righting wrong" (Rom. 3, 22), in the most striking way possible. "God's justice has been brought to light" but "quite independently of the law" (Rom. 3, 21). The anomaly comes out best perhaps in the contradiction between God's anger and mercy. If human actions matter and if humans are responsible for them, they must be subject to judgement and to God's anger. Mercy seems to be at odds with this justice. God resolves the contradiction through the sacrifice of Christ. There could be no more striking way of showing the anomalousness or even monstrosity of forgiveness.

I am by no means certain how the sacrifice is supposed to work. But clearly while it may be a miracle, it does not work like magic without the
cooperation of those whom it is done for. Forgiveness after all requires two parties and the forgiveness through sacrifice is "effective through faith" (Rom. 3, 25). Part of faith consists in the recognition of the guilt and bondage of the will and so of the need for deliverance through God's action where the will is helpless. This recognition or confession is the first motion of the change of mind called repentance. For the rest of the transaction, here is Luther's account of how faith lays hold of Christ's sacrifice and how in consequence the exchange of the old man for the new is effected.

The third incomparable benefit of faith is that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh (Eph. 5, 31—32). And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage -- indeed the most perfect of all marriages, since human marriages are but poor examples of this one true marriage -- it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. Accordingly the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own, and whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own. Let us compare these and we shall see the inestimable benefits. Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are the bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his. If he gives her his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? and if he takes the body of the bride, how shall he not take all that is hers?54

This illustration probably comes as close as is possible to explicating the religious concept of sacrifice at the same time suggesting the transaction of forgiveness. For the sacrifice instead of being explained in the rather puzzling terms of vicarious atonement and mediation, is explained as a marriage or mutual exchange of persons. Christ's death means his giving up his guiltless self to accept the guilty self of man; man's dying to his

54 Freedom of a Christian, Dillenberger, p.60.
dead or guilty self, his dying with Christ, means his giving up his
guilty self to accept the guiltless and therefore free self of Christ. The
exchange is possible through faith, that is trust and love. With this ex-
change the offence or injury vanishes. The guilt has been taken from the
guilty self and the injury is cancelled when it is accepted by the injured
or guiltless person. In this way both a change of mind, or repentance, and
forgiveness are possible. As for the freedom of action gained through for­
giveness, both Paul and Luther think of it as a freedom directed to doing
right. Although freedom of action was regained by a kind of evasion of the
logic of the law, the freed will is free in order to do what the law
commands, freely and therefore morally. I should add that for Luther, doing
freely is an expression of love. The Christian

ought to think, "Although I am an unworthy and condemned man, my
God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and
salvation without any merit on my part, out of pure, free, mercy,
so that from now on I need nothing except faith which believes
this is true. Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully, with
all my heart, and with an eager will do all things which I know
are acceptable to such a father who has overwhelmed me with his
inestimable riches? I will therefore give myself as a Christ to
my neighbor, as just as Christ offered himself to me."

The action of the free will is then for Luther and probably also for Paul
the offering of oneself as a Christ to one's neighbour, and with this the
religious transaction repeats itself in the human world as a moral action.

It must be said that if Luther's marriage figure for the transaction
of faith is the easiest to understand in terms of human forgiveness, it is
only one of the figures used by him and other Christian teachers. Clearly a
great deal more is at issue than I have been able to grasp. But one thing
is common to all the figures used: they involve a paradoxical transforma­tion,
one might say almost a trick. All these transformations bear on the transition from the bound will to the free. It seems to me that if they could be analysed, they would greatly extend our understanding of the motions of the will.

D Conclusion

"There is not one moral virtue that Jesus Inculcated but Plato and Cicero did Inculcate before him; what then did Christ Inculcate? Forgiveness of Sins. This alone is the Gospel, and this is the Life and Immortality brought to light by Jesus." This is perhaps an extravagant assertion. Still it epitomizes the kernel of the Christian study of the will as Paul and Luther have it. There is, however, a far greater wealth in their accounts of the transformation effected through faith than I have been able to cope with. Besides, they see the transformation working over a wider field than I have indicated. For Paul and Luther, "God's way of righting wrong" (Rom.3, 22), works not merely personally but on a scale of universal history. As in Michael's account of the plan of redemption in Paradise Lost, the life and death of Christ are a divine intervention in the course of the world, and the death and rebirth of the believer are to be taken up on a universal scale. And another Pauline and Lutheran doctrine springs from the transformation, the doctrine of predestination and election. But it is not necessary to go into these doctrines. They have some bearing on the theology of Paradise Lost but are not of great importance for our purposes.

What I hope has emerged from the foregoing account is why Luther's recovery of the Pauline intuitions about the will lay outside the neoclassical

humanist study of man. It should also have come out how the Christian study of the will might bear on a complete study of man and consequently how Milton's treatment of the fall and repentance of Adam and Eve might answer to a more complete notion of the study of man than neoclassical humanism otherwise realized.
CHAPTER 2. MONTAIGNE'S STUDY OF MAN

A. Introduction

The Pauline and Lutheran study of the will constitutes the first point of reference for our discussion of the bearing of neoclassical humanism on *Paradise Lost*. Montaigne's study of man will supply a second and complementary one.

The importance of Montaigne lies above all in the seriousness of his study of man. He is more interesting than most humanists who went before him. Not always — he is, as Pascal complains, "confused", that is desultory and unsystematic in his exposition, and so he often dissatisfies exactly where he arouses interest; and while the wayward processes of his thought are always evidence of an interesting mind, the thoughts themselves are not always worth having. Still when he writes to the point, the same pleasurable surprise strikes one as when one turns from the declamatory histories and treatises of humanists like Bruno to Machiavelli and Guiccardini. One reads the common run of humanists with the interest of a historian. One admires them perhaps and approves of what they were trying to do, but one does not learn from them. However great their mental powers, they do not enlarge one's intelligence or engage one's interest directly in what they are saying.

If then we are concerned to get at how neoclassical humanism realized a valuable study of man, Montaigne will be a figure of the first importance.

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But another reason why he is important for our inquiry is that with him a characteristic configuration of later neoclassical humanism emerges. He represents a stage of neoclassical humanism significantly different in many respects from earlier humanism. And there are marked and important likenesses between his study of man and the Augustan humanists. This is not an accident. The form he gave to humanist concerns limits the scope of earlier humanism, but it is also more critical. What the Augustan humanists share with Montaigne is a critically developed sort of neoclassical humanism. In this chapter and the next I shall treat some of the forms the critical development took in Montaigne and remark on their Augustan expressions. In the next chapter I shall deal with the form in which he made observations and the urbanity or idea of cultured discourse he speaks for. In this chapter I shall treat the humanist expression he gave to the notion of man's creaturely condition and the adjustment he made between the study of man and the Christian study of the will.

On human creatureliness and the relation between humanist and Christian concerns his position is surprisingly close to Luther's. About human creatureliness, they agree; about the study of the will, they agree on a division of religious and humanist concerns. For Montaigne then, as for Luther, a fusion of Ciceronian humanitas and religion is not possible. He makes an adjustment between these concerns that goes with a critical awareness of the limits of the study of man and indeed of neoclassical humanist concerns as a whole.
B. Montaigne on Human Rationality and Creatureliness

On Christian faith, Montaigne's position seems to have been fideist, a position later judged to be heretical. In 1676, for another reason, his Essays were placed on the Index. But his writing on Christianity seems to have been well meant and well taken at the time. And the judgments of a later, more rigorous Catholicism need not trouble us, for our business is not with his orthodoxy but with his exploration of the relations between humanism and Christianity.

Montaigne attacked human rationality and in doing so attacked the natural theology that most easily harmonized humanist and Christian concerns. Indeed he attacked human rationality with as much gusto as Luther did, if with more elegance and for other reasons. Here one turns to the "Apology for Raymond Sebond", his most sustained treatment of Christian belief. The essay sets out as a defence of Sebond's Natural Theology, which he had earlier translated. The defence is peculiar. Sebond's book had not only argued that Christian doctrine is reasonable but seemed to imply that reason properly exercised should have discovered the articles of Christian faith by itself. Sebond, in other words, represents no doubt exaggeratedly, that rational theology that made a fusion of humanist and religious concerns possible. The odd thing is that Montaigne's defence of Sebond is an attack on rational theology. He says that Sebond's book is at least "capable of serving as a start and first guide to an apprentice to set him

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3 Brush, p.95.
4 Theologia naturalis sive liber creatorum; see Brush, p.62.
on the road to this knowledge", a knowledge that can only be arrived at properly by faith and grace. This sets rather a low value on Sebond's rational Christianity but is, after all, not incompatible with it. But Montaigne goes on to attack the pretensions of human reason so thoroughly and indeed extravagantly, that it is hard to see what value Sebond's theology can retain. For even if man keeps, after all Montaigne's pruning, a certain limited faculty of reason, it seems quite useless for acquiring knowledge about God let alone linking God and man. There is no doubt inconsistency in the "Apology" and a vein of paradox, but Montaigne's denial of divinity to human reason seems to me consistent with his general outlook and his most penetrating observations. What links man and God in Montaigne's view is faith and grace.

"O what a vile and abject thing is man," [Seneca] says, "if he does not raise himself above humanity!"
That is a good statement and useful desire, but equally absurd. For to make the handful bigger than the hand, the armful bigger than the arm, and to hope to straddle more than the reach of our legs, is impossible and unnatural. Nor can man raise himself above himself and humanity; for he can see only with his own eyes, and seize only with his own grasp.
He will rise if God by exception lends him a hand; he will rise by abandoning and renouncing his own means, and letting himself be raised and uplifted by purely celestial means.
It is for our Christian faith, not for his Stoical virtue to aspire to that divine and miraculous metamorphosis.6

Oddly enough one is reminded of Calvin, here; there is the same disparagement of man in order to exalt God.7 Yet Montaigne is not a Calvinist but

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7 Cf, "The more we give, and owe, and render to God, the more like Christians we act," Complete Essays, p.415; Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia; Westminster Press, 1960), 1,255: "Nothing, however slight, can be credited to man without depriving God of his honour, and without man himself falling into ruin through brazen confidence."
a Catholic fideist, whose faith is founded on scepticism.

There is, as I have remarked, a vein of paradox running through the "Apology". To attack reason with rational arguments is to become involved in the paradox of the Cretan liar. To be thoroughly sceptical is to doubt even scepticism. Montaigne was fully conscious of this predicament. He observed of his argument for the vanity of reason that "this final fencer's trick must not be employed except as an extreme remedy. It is a desperate stroke, in which you must abandon your weapons to make your adversary lose his, and a secret trick that must be used rarely and reservedly"; or better still:

I can see why: the Pyrrhonian philosophers cannot express their general conception in any manner of speaking; for they would need a new language. Ours is wholly formed of affirmative propositions, which to them are utterly repugnant; so that when they say "I doubt", immediately you have them by the throat to make them admit that at least they know and are sure of this fact, that they doubt. Thus they have been constrained to take refuge in this comparison from medicine, without which their attitude would be inexplicable: when they declare "I do not know"or "I doubt", they say that this proposition carries itself away with the rest, no more nor less than rhubarb, which expels evil humors and carries itself off with them.

This idea is more firmly grasped in the form of interrogation: "What do I know?" - the words I bear as a motto, inscribed over a pair of scales.

The "Apology" ought to be read alongside those other paradoxical works of the humanist tradition, the Praise of Folly and the fourth book of Gulliver's Travels. Folly praises folly, and for much of the time we simply turn her values upside down to understand what is meant. But if Folly is really foolish, she may take real wisdom for folly; what she


10 Complete Essays, pp.392—93.
praises will be really praiseworthy. Folly taken far enough will contradict herself and come to wisdom. So we understand her praise of the folly of Christ. The same logic overtakes Gulliver. He comes to see humans as Yahoos. But Gulliver is a human and so sees himself as a Yahoo. He aspires therefore to be what he is not, a horse, and to withdraw from being human. But this is mad, and if Gulliver is mad, what he says about humans is undermined. When Montaigne takes to praising the religion of the elephant and the arts of the halcyon as above human achievement, we have to take his theriophilia rather in the same spirit that we take Gulliver's love of horses. Montaigne, like Swift, is not urging us to loathe our humanity but to put off its pretensions so that we can accommodate ourselves to being the human creatures we really are.

Presumption is our natural and original malady. The most vulnerable and frail of all creatures is man, and at the same time the most arrogant. He feels and sees himself lodged here, amid the mire and dung of the world, nailed and riveted to the worst, the deadest, and the most stagnant part of the universe, on the lowest story of the house and the farthest from the vault of heaven, with the animals of the worst condition of the three; and in his imagination he goes planting himself above the circle of the moon, and bringing the sky down beneath his feet. It is by vanity of this same imagination that he equals himself to God, attributes to himself divine characteristics, picks himself out and separates himself from the horde of other creatures, carves out their shares to his fellows and companions the animals, and distributes among them such portions of faculties and powers as he sees fit.

The paradoxes of Montaigne, Erasmus and Swift are all concerned with man as a rational animal. The rationality they undermine is of the kind that might be properly ascribed to God or an angel, but ascribed to man by man

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is pretentiousness. Divine rationality dissociates us from our human being so that we are left with the problem of getting back with it inside our human skin. Rationality or learning that is not proportionate with our humanity is vain learning. Hence Erasmus's attacks on Seraphic doctors, hence the third book of Gulliver's Travels and hence Raphael's discourse to Adam on astronomy. But this is to anticipate. The point here is that Montaigne, though he seems to attack all human learning is in fact attacking inhuman or vain learning. In doing so he touches on one of the central concerns of humanism—how are we fitted into things so that both ourselves and our knowledge belong to the world that we know? what sort of rationality fits us as human creatures and what sort of subject can it profitably study?

The subject of Montaigne's study is himself. Here his scepticism is checked: "no man ever treated a subject he knew and understood better than I do the subject I have undertaken; and that in this I am the most learned man alive ... no man ever penetrated more deeply into his material, or plucked its limbs and consequences cleaner, or reached more accurately and fully the goal he had set for his work." The claim is made with a certain irony, even archness. One remembers the idiosyncrasies that he records, his moustache, for instance, that retained to his fine nose the scent of his handkerchief all day or the kisses he enjoyed as a young man. There is a great deal of such self-portraiture in the Essays. The self-portrayed is a social self of a highly developed kind, despite its self-preoccupation always engaging and interesting, never offensive to our vanity, never affecting

13 See Erasmus, Enchiridion Militis Christiani (London: Methuen, 1905), p.6; On the humanist critique of vain learning, see below, Ch.4.
14 "Of Repentance", Complete Essays, p.611.
15 "Of Smells", Complete Essays, p.228.
singularity, presuming only on our sincerity and all this the more surprising considering Montaigne's withdrawal from the world. If this were all, it would be enough for a reputation, for manners of this order are rare. It was in fact enough to make Montaigne serve as a model for the 17th century honnête homme. But Montaigne invests the social ideal with a philosophical idea of becoming human. The knowledge of himself, for Montaigne as for Pope, goes with "The proper study of mankind."

Knowledge of oneself is knowledge that belongs to one as a human creature, and it goes with a rationality that fits inside one's human skin. Montaigne knows his own inconstancy and so, making allowance for it, is able to attain a certain constancy and judgement in his actions. "I who spy on myself more closely, who have my eyes unceasingly intent on myself, ... I would hardly dare tell of the vanity and weakness that I find in myself." "Now from the knowledge of this mobility of mine I have accidentally engendered in myself a certain constancy of opinions ...". For the efficacy of such self-knowledge towards acting rationally and ethically, Montaigne's claims are extremely modest— that, of course, would be part of the knowledge or judgement of things he has acquired. Still it is clear self-knowledge is the basis of a rationality that belongs to us as human beings and so does not, separating us from what we are, confront us with the ghost of ourselves. Moreover, it is not simply self-knowledge. "Each man bears the entire form of man's estate." To study oneself is to study man and to study man in such a way that it bears directly on the student. And here it matters that it is an essentially social man.

18 "Of Repentance," Complete Essays, p.611.
Montaigne studies. He may be preoccupied with himself but he is not solipsistic, nor is the self he is preoccupied with the same as that abyss of self Augustine is supposed to have discovered.\(^{19}\)

Montaigne's most important point about what being human is like, about the human condition, is its creatureliness. The idea "creatureliness" signifies goes back to man's creation by God as a creature above the animals and a little lower than the angels. Not that the theology of creation engages Montaigne's attention. What interests him is the integrity of the human creature in its middle state. He is interested in being a human not an angel or a Houyhnhnm—"my conscience is content with itself— not as the conscience of an angel or a horse, but as the conscience of a man." "[People] want to get out of themselves and escape from the man. That is madness: instead of changing into angels, they change into beasts.... These transcendental humors frighten."\(^{20}\) Along with this hostility to the religious enthusiast or platonist, goes his insistence on the life of the body, literally on keeping body and soul together. Milton, it will be remembered, takes pains in his *Christian Doctrine* to make it clear that the creature, man, is not an unnatural union of body and soul but that his living soul is the form of his complete humanity, and Milton speaks here for at least one strain of Jewish-Christian thought in the matter, the strain that is concerned with the creatureliness of man.\(^{21}\) It is really in the same spirit that Montaigne speaks of the

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19 I think Auerbach's suggestion (p.263) that Montaigne's introspection goes back to Augustine is misleading.


care for the body as a religious duty. He dwells on the functions of the body in order to dispel human pretensions to be more than creaturely.

"We imagine much more appropriately an artisan on the toilet seat or on his wife than a great president, venerable by his demeanor and his ability. It seems that they do not stoop from their lofty thrones even to live."  

This is a grand humanist theme— one thinks of the *Praise of Folly* of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, and of course of Swift. In Lilliput where Gulliver is an honest fellow he defecates manfully, in the open air. In Brobdingnag, on the other hand, where he has to compete with a superior stature of human he goes to great lengths to hide this evidence of his creatureliness. He tries to make the farmer's wife understand his need.

"The good Woman with much Difficulty at last perceived what I would be at; and taking me again in her Hand, walked into the Garden where she set me down. I went on one Side about two Hundred Yards; and beckoning to her not to look or to follow me, I hid myself between two Leaves of Sorrel, and there discharged the Necessities of Nature."  

Montaigne's way is the casual and incisive observation, Swift's a sort of pantomime of creaturely dignity and indignity, but both make the same point about human creatureliness.

C. Montaigne's Study of Man and the Christian Study of the Will

Montaigne's preoccupation with the middle state of the human creature brings him to a sense of the remoteness of God from human affairs. As his curious and dismissive dealings with Sebond's natural theology suggest, the study of man does not lead to a religious conclusion. If anything, it leads


to a religious gulf, with God the supreme object of ignorance on the other side. Montaigne's fideism, then, separates the study of man from the study of religion. Religion settled by unquestioning faith and the authority of the church leaves us free to go about the creaturely business of our human lives— a position elaborated by Charron and recognizable in Bacon. 24

This is clearly a position at variance with the "Christian humanism" that I described earlier as a fusion of Ciceronian humanitas with Christian belief. Montaigne was a Christian and a humanist rather than a Christian humanist in that sense. His adjustment to the claims of Christianity was not indifferentism, however; the separation he makes between divine and human spheres goes with a religious as well as humanist concern with man's middle state. And without too much strain we may compare his position with Luther's. On human creatureliness Montaigne's humanism and Luther's theology, pursuing their different concerns, agree. "The Spiritual man is the man who relies on faith." The implication of this remark of Luther's, which I have already quoted, is that man is related to God not through the divine rationality in him nor through "transcendental humours", but through his creatureliness. It is the entire man that stands before God, not just a divine and incorporeal faculty fastened to a dying animal. The human creature is, however, sinful and offensive to God. Luther has, therefore, recourse to the paradox that man is at once accepted by God and sinful, Simul justus et peccator. 25 It is the distance between man and God that is


man's link with God. Spiritual man is man confessing his sins, but for that reason his religion does not transport him from his human condition. The point here is the resemblance between Luther's picture of man and Montaigne's, between the Reformation and one sort of humanism. Both stress man's creatureliness and the gulf separating him from the divine. The differences between Luther and Montaigne are too enormous to enumerate. I might sum them up by saying that where Luther is concerned with the religious destiny of the human creature, Montaigne is concerned even in his writing on religion with the human creature's secular condition, with his living à propos ("Nostre grand et glorieux chef-d'oeuvre, c'est vivre à propos"). In this difference, however, they are in agreement that the study of man is divided from religion.

It was with the study of the will that we said a radical separation of Christian and neoclassical humanist concerns appeared. And here again Montaigne is in some sense in agreement with what we saw as the implications of Luther's insights. He recognizes that the Christian study of the will deals with motions of the will that lay outside the scope of his study of man.

Here we turn to Montaigne's essay "On Repentance," an account, and a very penetrating one, of the religious motions of human nature. His idea of repentance is an ethically severe and just one. It is that repentance means that one's character is changed. It is not merely that one alters one particular course of action for the better but that one's disposition towards a bad course of action is changed so that one can truthfully say looking back that where one acted badly in the past one would now in the same situation choose the better course. This view is in line with the

idea implicit in the Greek word for repentance, métanoia, "a change of mind." So it may claim to render the Christian idea of repentance as faithfully as the notion of punishment and remorse implicit in the Latin root of "repentance." On the other hand, it is as rational as the idea Kant works out for the place of repentance in the ethical life in his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. For Montaigne, repentance must go with sound judgement, the strengthening of reason, and "a steady movement of the soul." Montaigne has, then, a clear idea of what repentance ought to be so he is in a good position to diagnose false repentance, whether its origin is in enthusiasm, or hypocrisy, or self-deception, whether in himself or others. Though the 17th century gave a great deal of attention to false devotion, I know nothing that improves on Montaigne's analysis: "The real condemnation, which applies to the common run of men of today, is that even their retirement [i.e. retraction] is full of corruption and filth; their idea of reformation, blurred; their penitence, diseased and guilty, almost as much as their sin." He gives as examples remorse for sins that fear or old age have made unattractive or for sins whose advantages one continues to enjoy. Of himself, he concludes that though he does not approve of his life or character, he cannot say that he repents since he cannot honestly say that he would do other than he had done

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30 *Complete Essays*, pp.615—16.
if had to relive his life. "God must touch our hearts." "I know of no superficial, halfway, and perfunctory repentance. It must affect me in every part before I will call it so, and must grip me by the vitals and afflict them as deeply and as completely as God sees into me." In other words, the natural man cannot repent, though God may make him do so.

Here one comes up against a moral crux. If repentance is, as Montaigne conceives it, to examine our conduct and principles and change them for the better, then a moral life without repentance is hard to imagine. But Montaigne's study of man and knowledge of himself force him to conclude that such a change is on the whole not possible. Only where God operates on men, beyond, that is, the sphere of the human will, can such a change take place. But this is to thrust something central to the moral life to its verge and to involve it in a religious operation. The odd thing is that the Reformation also conceived of the problem of overcoming oneself as a religious rather than an ethical matter. It is odd because nothing could be further from Montaigne's dispassionate and resigned self-examination than Luther's or Calvin's insistence on the bondage of the will. Nevertheless, if the tone of Donne's Holy Sonnet, "At the round earths imagin'd corners, blow / Your trumpets, Angells ..." sets it with the fear of judgement and spiritual clamour of the Reformers, its prayer "Teach me how to repent" connects their religious solution to the problem of the will with Montaigne's "God must touch our hearts." Like most people, I find the Reformers' theology of double predestination horrifying. This, however, may be said for them—that at least they were concerned with what, as

31 Complete Essays, pp. 620, 617.
Montaigne's essay bears out, is a real issue from a humanist as well as theological point of view.

Of all Montaigne's attempts at knowing himself "On Repentance" seems to me the most interesting. It is a serious work of humanism because it really does tell us what humans are like and not merely what convention supposes them to be like. It is a vastly more penetrating account of repentance than what can be found in any earlier humanist treatment that I know of, in Erasmus's *Enchiridion* for example. And yet the result of Montaigne's attempt to grasp the nature of repentance is to place it in the sphere of devotion and religious operations. Repentance is the point where Christianity perhaps most intimately has seized on the moral life. So to cut off this part of moral life and give it over to devotion is quite in keeping with Montaigne's separation of human and religious spheres. Yet repentance is not a matter of merely religious concern, for as I have already remarked, if it means to examine our principles and conduct and change them for the better, it is a concern of the moral life, and a central one. Yet Montaigne hands over this area of moral interest to devotion and leaves the study of the most intimate motions of the will to religion. And in this, the trend of neoclassical humanism follows him.33

Neoclassical humanism is, therefore, increasingly limited in its scope. The limitation could be turned to advantage. Montaigne makes his most penetrating remarks on what humans are like in the course of showing that repentance lies beyond human power. Many of the best insights of neoclassical

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humanism are like that; they turn on the recognition of the limits of the human faculties. And still with Montaigne one feels the limitation as a moral limitation and not simply as a just evaluation of things. Montaigne's great strength is the aristocratic virtue of accepting himself. With this goes the admirable social tone that in confessing faults gives pleasing evidence of sincerity and fairness. "On ne se blâme que d'être louer" — at least of Montaigne's confessions this might be said. But this comes close to an apathy of temper even more strongly marked in his successor La Rochefoucauld. La Rochefoucauld generally saw worse things in human nature than Montaigne did: "Dans l'adversité de nos meilleurs amis, nous trouvons quelque chose qui nous ne déplait pas." This is not the sort of fault Montaigne usually reproaches himself or others with. Envy, malice, cruelty and so forth do not on the whole appear on Montaigne's reckoning of human nature. The evils he sees are faults of presumption and hypocrisy, and the worst offenders appear to be philosophers and religious enthusiasts — offenders who imagine themselves to be free from human frailty or who try to free themselves from it. Those who try to make themselves angels turn themselves into beasts. Montaigne's remedy for these evils, or rather the course of life he recommends, is to accommodate oneself to one's human limitations, that is to live according to one's nature and to Nature and not to try to overcome them. "It is an absolute perfection and virtually divine to know how to enjoy our being rightfully. We seek other conditions because we do not understand the use of our own, and go outside of ourselves because we do not know what it is like inside. Yet there is no use our

mounting on stilts, for on stilts we must still walk on our legs. And on
the loftiest throne in the world we are still sitting only on our own
rump." To live according to our natures is also to live according to
reason. The reason that Montaigne's scepticism attacks is intellectual
pretension. But the practical and moral reason that counsels us to live
according to our creaturely being, to be "lowly wise," is quite in keeping
with his scepticism. It is reason to realize that our reason is limited
and foolish, and reason to live according to this foolishness and to what
we are like; above all it is reason to live the life of the body with its
instincts and natural temperance. Montaigne's ethic is very much what
Swift's Brobdingnag implies. It is also in principle close to the
philosophy of Pope's Essay on Man. And as with Pope's philosophy one is
disturbed by the implications of "All partial Evil, universal Good," that
even our vices help to make the world go round, so with Montaigne one is
disturbed by a resignation, even cynicism, concerning the nature one is
supposed to embrace. A case of a monster child makes him reflect that
nothing is monstrous to God who comprehends all forms, however things may
appear to our limited view. "From his infinite wisdom there proceeds nothing
but that is good and ordinary and regular; but we do not see its arrange-
ment and relationship." Perhaps this is well said of a monster child but
with the deformities of ordinary human nature one is less comfortable:
"Our being is cemented with sickly qualities: ambition, jealousy, envy,
vengeance, superstition, despair, dwell in us with a possession so natural

38 "Of a Monstrous Child," Complete Essays, p.539.
that we recognize their image also in the beasts—indeed even cruelty, so unnatural a vice. For in the midst of compassion we feel within us I know not what bittersweet pricking of malicious pleasure in seeing others suffer; even children feel it."\[^{39}\] This account of human vices contradicts my remark that Montaigne's picture of human nature leaves out the worse things one can think of. The observation that even in our compassion there is a touch of cruelty is worthy of La Rochefoucauld. This is, however, an exceptional passage. All the same it brings to a head the difficulty with Montaigne's sort of humanism. We learn the life that is fitting for us to live as human beings by knowing ourselves. But the humanity we know in ourselves is a mixed thing and its badness is something that neoclassical humanism increasingly treats of. At some point the knowledge of what humans are like must change from a cultivated enjoyment of the rather corrupt taste of humanity to something unbearable to live with. Yet, though in Montaigne neoclassical humanism is capable of every other sort of return upon itself, repentance lies beyond it. So that in admonishing us to know ourselves and accommodate ourselves to that knowledge Montaigne is urging upon us a low view of human possibility and a painfully cramped nature whose limitations are inescapable without divine intervention, except by absurdity. It is not surprising that those who did not have Montaigne's gift of equanimity should have accommodated themselves to what is human by a kind of violence; one thinks of Swift's ironic misanthropy and Pope's flair for the deformed and topsy-turvy.

The sort of humanism represented by Montaigne gives an incomplete account of man's moral nature. But because it is incomplete it is able to

\[^{39}\] "Of the Useful and the Honourable," *Complete Essays*, p.599.
coexist with Christianity. Montaigne leaves repentance and the power to change one's life to the sphere of religion. This is at once to separate the spheres of humanism and Christianity and to allow that the whole life of man will have place for both, not in a "Christian humanist" fusion, but in separation.

Montaigne is in many ways an extreme figure. As we saw, his opinions on human rationality run to paradox. And his account of repentance expresses some opinions that few would share. But Montaigne's Essays do not aim at final statements. The importance of their probings is that they bring out, as more superficial and cautiously consistent examinations do not, the sharp edges of things. Erasmus's treatment of the will and repentance in his Enchiridion or his Freedom of the Will makes no such separation of Christian and humanist concerns. And Erasmus's attempt to maintain a sort of compromise has something heroic in it. Yet Erasmus on the motions of the will is simply not as penetrating as either Luther or Montaigne; Luther and Montaigne are the really critical figures, and it is to them we should go if we want to see how matters really lay between the Christian study of the will and the humanist study of man. It seems to me that the tendency of neoclassical humanism increasingly to adjust itself to Christianity along the lines discernible in Montaigne is evidence that he took a critical measure of what neoclassical humanism could truly realize. It is here that Paradise Lost is an exception, for in his working out of the human action Milton was able to interpret the Christian study of the will as a study of man.
CHAPTER 3 ELOQUENCE AND THE STUDY OF MAN

A. The Idea of Orator and the Man of Letters

I confess that I can scarcely restrain myself from loftier and bolder flights than are permissible in this exordium, and from the search for a more exalted manner of expression. Indeed, in the degree that the distinguished orators of ancient times undoubtedly surpass me, both in their eloquence and in their style (especially in a foreign tongue, which I must of necessity use, and often to my own dissatisfaction), in that same degree shall I outstrip the orators of every age in the grandeur of my subject and my theme. The circumstance has aroused so much anticipation and notoriety that I do not now feel that I am surrounded, in the Forum or on the Rostra, by one people alone, whether Roman or Athenian, but that, with virtually all of Europe attentive, in session, and passing judgment, I have in the First Defence spoken out and shall in the Second speak again to the entire assembly and council of all the most influential men, cities, and nations everywhere. 

In his Second Defence, Milton is writing a pamphlet that is to go through the press. Not a word of what he writes is uttered or heard. Yet the situation cries out for an orator. The English libertarians are to be defended and learned Europe is to pass judgment. So Milton imagines himself in the passage I have quoted as an orator addressing an assembly miraculously extended through the press to encompass the whole learned world.

The passage witnesses to how far the idea of eloquence, indeed the idea of the orator, informed Milton's notions of the vocation of the man of letters. And there are other passages of the same import. Milton's idea of "a compleat and generous Education ... which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously all the offices both private and publike of peace and war" agrees with the education called for by the

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ancient proponents of the orator as complete man, the sophists and Cicero. 2

Again his assertion in An Apology for Smectymnuus that "how he could be truly eloquent who is not with all a good man, I see not" harks back to the insistence of the ancient rhetoricians on the integrity of the true orator. 3

And as we shall see in later chapters, his criticism of vain learning and his idea of the function of poetry are founded in eloquence as a humane discipline. There is a certain ambivalence, admittedly, in Milton's attitude to eloquence. In Paradise Lost it is an art that the fallen angels engage in (Bk. 2, 11. 553-69). Satan in his temptation of Eve is compared to the orators of Greece or Republican Rome. And there are various places where Milton disparages rhetoric. But these animadversions imply a demand for a reformed eloquence applied to the right ends rather than a wholesale rejection of eloquence as the basis of letters. 4


The eloquence that is important for Milton's idea of letters is not a matter of public speaking. The public assembly Milton addresses in his *Second Defence* is imaginary. In *Areopagitica*, he addressed "A Speech ... To the Parliament of England", but only in print. It was as a man of letters that he put his humanist eloquence to political use when he held the post of Latin Secretary to the Commonwealth.

The place of eloquence in Milton's idea of letters is not singular. Eloquence was the informing principle of neoclassical humanism. But it was the man of letters not the orator who was the eloquent man. Eloquence was writing rather than speaking. The idea of the orator haunted such a literary eloquence. Like the epic bard the orator stood as an ideal figure representing the power of the word. And the gestures and forms of the orator were taken over by a literary eloquence when it sought to lend particular dignity to its matter.

Yet by no means all the forms of literary eloquence that neoclassical humanists put their hands to suggest oratory at first sight. It is hard to imagine anything further from oratory with its massive and overt design upon its hearers than for instance, Montaigne's intimate and tentative way of writing to his reader. The man of letters is a more versatile creature than the orator. And still the ancient idea of eloquence is the foundation of the Renaissance institution of letters, indeed of neoclassical humanism as a whole. Surprisingly Montaigne's *Essays* confirm this assertion. The

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study of oneself and of mankind, the distrust of speculative or angelic reason, that I described in an earlier chapter, these are the guiding ideas of the discipline of eloquence. As a moralist Montaigne speaks for a culture or *humanitas* that is derived from the ancient discipline of oratory, though by him apprehended more deeply and vividly. The ideals of eloquence, even though they had passed to the man of letters, persist or rather assert themselves again in the growth of the mind. This is the fullest sense in which we may talk of a Renaissance of antiquity or of a neoclassical humanism.

In the rest of this chapter I shall discuss how a humanism based on eloquence could arrive at a study of man of the order represented by Montaigne's *Essays*. But it must be said there are difficulties in the way of such a discussion. I shall attempt to place and deal with those difficulties first and then pass on to two ways in which eloquence lay behind what we can recognize as an adequate study of man. These ways I shall treat under the heads of observation and urbanity.

**B. The Remoteness of Eloquence**

First the difficulties. These arise from the remoteness of eloquence from our notions of letters. It is hard to resist thinking of a humanism whose informing principle is eloquence reductively or mechanically, as the operation and development of ideas rather than of intelligence.

The end of eloquence, of good eloquence, is implied in Arnold's phrase, to make "reason and the will of God prevail." Eloquence addresses public reason in a public voice about public matters. But since Arnold whom would one take as models of such writing? For myself, it seems to be

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7 Or rather, Bishop Wilson's phrase, *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 45.
"fineness of truth" that commends what I read to my judgement, the intelligence or sensibility of an individual voice addressing my intelligence or sensibility about matters that may be either public or private. For this sort of reading, making "reason and the will of God prevail" is a distant concern. And surely this attitude is not singular but representative. For the best that has been written in this century about humanist studies has dealt with how to "render an intelligent being yet more intelligent." But the public ends of these studies are indefinite; at best the well trained and truly humanized may leaven the lump; at worst they will be a saving remnant. It is obvious that such a humanism is open to the charge of preciosity. It will no doubt be held against it that the phrase, "fineness of truth," is Pater's. And one can see how responsible the old humanism may appear by comparison. For behind it, sometimes obscurely so, is the idea of the orator, and in him the public vocation of humanism is clear. The function of eloquence is to persuade, and the orator is in consequence a man of power. Through the power of his language, humanist learning becomes active in managing the world. This is why humanist studies have traditionally been the training for people involved in government. But humanism has no longer any such definite practical and social function. It is easy to deplore the state of affairs in which studies that are supposed to make us human abdicate or lose the power of the word. And still no one can seriously propose a revival of eloquence,


9 Culture and Anarchy, p.44.

10 On leavening the lump, see F.R. Leavis, Education and the University (London: Chatto, 1948), esp. pp.15—32, 143—71; on the saving remnant, see Yvor Winters, Forms of Discovery (Chicago: Swallow, 1967), pp. XI—XXII.
for eloquence has little to do with the best that has been written in this century.

The classic statement of the connection between letters and the public calling of orator is in Cicero's *Pro Archia*. In the course of extolling the merits of the poet Archias, Cicero asks to be allowed to speak freely concerning the studies of humanity and literature. And indeed, after a lengthy account of Archias' career as poet and citizen, he does come round to expatiating upon those subjects. Speaking of how literature shaped his own conduct and ambition as a public man, he says that unless he had learnt from the teaching of many and from much literature how nothing was worth seeking with great effort except the glory due to virtue and how, in addition, pain of body or danger of death or exile should count for little as against one's duty to see things through, he would never have exposed himself for the public safety during his consulship to the attacks of Catiline and his fellow conspirators. Books, the voices of the wise and long experience, he continues, are full of examples, which without the light of literature would lie in darkness; but Greek and Roman writers have left many portraits of heroic men clearly depicted, not only for contemplation, but for imitation. And these, he adds, he has always before him when he is involved in public business so that he may shape his heart and mind by

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reflecting on eminent men. Later he lets fall that Archias is writing a poem on his consulship. So though he does not say as much, he, who was himself inspired by literary examples, will become in turn an inspiring literary example to others. Though Archias' poem has unfortunately not come down to us, it was not necessary that it should for Cicero to survive as a literary example, since clearly he took care to supply posterity with a pretty glorious self-portrait. But that is by the way. The point of Cicero's immensely influential discourse is that humanitas, and the didactic tradition in poetry, particularly epic poetry, elevates the mind of those engaged in public life.

Cicero's idea of literature is clearly founded on eloquence. The important thing for him is the moral effect of literature, its power to inspire conduct and shape a virtuous character. Fiction becomes the making of images of moral ideas, at bottom the rhetorical application of ideas to life by means of examples. The neoclassical humanist study of literature follows Cicero here. Take, for example, Coluccio Salutati's idea of the studia humanitatis. This turns on the exemplum or literary

12 "Nam nisi multorum praecptis multisque litteris mihi ab adulescentia suassisse nihil esse in vita magno operae expetendum nisi laudem atque honestatem, in ea autem consequenda omnes cruciatus corporis, omnia pericula mortis atque exili parvi esse ducenda, numquam me pro salutate vestra in tot ac tantas dimicationes atque in hos profligatorum hominum cotidiano impetus objecissiem. Sed pleni omnes sunt libri, plenae sapientium voces, plena exemplorum vetustas; quae iacerent in tenebris omnia, nisi litterarum lumen accederet. Quam multas nobis imagines non solum ad intuendum, verum etiam ad imitandum fortissimorum virorum expressas scriptores et Graeci et Latinii reliquerunt! quas ego mihi semper in administranda re publica proponens, animum et mentem meam ipsa cogitatione hominum excellentium conformabam," Pro Archia, vi, 14, p.26. The English rendering is mine.

image of virtue or vice. His position is that in distinction from other forms of learning the study of literature bears on our human being: *studia litterarum* are *studia humanitatis*. He supposes that virtue is the completion of our becoming human. We move towards this completion only through experience and learning. Most learning is, however, general: it does not deal with the particular. It is, besides, theoretical rather than practical: it engages our minds rather than our wills. In other words most learning has little to do with our becoming human or the life we live in the world. Even with moral philosophy this is so, for according to Salutati, moral philosophy supplies the precepts but neither the application of the precepts to life nor the will to apply them. And this is where literature is superior to philosophy, where it supplies prudence, a knowledge that bears on human experience, looking backward and forward. For in the first place the example or image combines the general rule and the particular, even if imaginary, case. The image applies a moral idea to life and consequently we acquire from literature a knowledge that fits

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14 See Kessler, pp.72 ff, for Salutati's criticism of the sciences of his day. See also p.207: *'Nicht als Literatur und nicht als Kunstwerk haben die 'litterae' Bedeutung, sondern als Offenbarung der menschlichen Wirklichkeit, des Menschlichen in seiner umfassendsten Bedeutung, der 'humanitas'. Darum sind die 'studia litterarum' gleichzusetzen mit den 'studia humanitatis', und beschränken sich nicht ein theorethisches Fachwissen, sondern gipfeln in der praktischen, dem Menschen als Menschen aufgetragenen Verwirklichung."

15 See Kessler, pp.148 f.

16 See Kessler, p.117.

17 See Kessler, pp.72 ff.

18 See Kessler, pp.84, 167.

19 See Kessler, pp.186 ff.
inside the condition of becoming human. In the second place, the example engages both the mind and the will, for it depicts virtues in heroic or splendid shapes and so moves the will to imitation. And consequently we acquire from literature a knowledge that is effective in our becoming human. Such, baldly put, are the ideas that lie behind Salutati's calling the study of literature the study of humanity.

When in a later chapter we take up neoclassical poetics in connection with the epic, it will emerge that the same basically rhetorical idea of literature is at work. And I shall try to show that works informed by such a theory of literature can achieve a serious criticism of life. But it must be said that as a theory of literature, Cicero's rhetorical idea revived in the Renaissance does seem mechanical and critically unhelpful, if not obtuse.

The difficulty, then, in writing about eloquence is that the humanism that is current now is out of sympathy with it. This means that what I have to say about the place of eloquence in neoclassical humanism will probably be rather out of touch with what eloquence actually meant. What I write will have something of archaeological reconstruction about it. The history of ideas such as eloquence deals with thoughts that are no longer thought. It is in consequence easy to speak as if the ideas of the past developed mechanically and did people's thinking for them. But if we are really to grasp what eloquence meant for neoclassical humanism, we have to make the effort to see how its forms could be the forms through which people thought and expressed the finer intelligence of their time.

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20 See Kessler, p.143
21 See Kessler, pp.160 ff.
C. The Mechanical Study of Rhetoric

It must be said, however, that much in eloquence, especially in Renaissance eloquence is neither alive nor humanizing. And what comes between it and the modern student is not merely that humanist concerns have shifted but that Renaissance eloquence is in some ways mechanical and bizarre, as indeed was the classical rhetoric it derived from. Cicero himself distinguishes in his dialogue, De Oratore, between an ideal of eloquence, on the one hand, and rhetoric, on the other. Although he had himself been trained in rhetoric and written a rhetorical textbook as a young man, now with mastery and success he takes a grand view of such matters. Speaking through his character Crassus, he says that rhetoric is a science professed by "exceedingly foolish persons, as they only write about the classification of cases and the elementary rules and the methods of stating facts; whereas eloquence is so potent a force that it embraces the origin and operation and developments of all things, all the virtues and duties, all the natural principles governing the morals and minds and life of mankind, and also determines their customs and laws and rights, and controls the government of the state, and expresses everything that concerns whatever topic in a graceful and flowing style" (De Oratore, III,xx). The truth is that rhetoric developed into something humane and natural, something of the order of Cicero's ideal of eloquence, only by a critical effort. What was received from antiquity in the rhetorical treatises of Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian and in the Ad Herennium was a highly codified art, perhaps of all classical arts the most thoroughly systematized. In the 15th and 16th centuries there were attempts to add to or alter the classical system,

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and of these the Ramist attempt has probably received the most scholarly attention. The result of the Ramist attempt, however, was more of a rearrangement than a new kind of eloquence. Since it is in the nature of a rearrangement to insist on the thoroughness of its method, Ramist logic amounted to an even more thoroughgoing methodizing of eloquence than classical rhetoric. So that whether Ramist or non-Ramist, Renaissance eloquence was based on an elaborate discipline. It will be easily imagined how mechanically writing strictly according to such a discipline would turn out, except in the hands of the ablest practitioners. And indeed there is a vast amount of 16th century writing, verse and prose, that all too clearly illustrates the schemes of the rhetorical or logical handbooks.

The mechanical nature of the art of rhetoric comes out in the method of commonplaces and invention of arguments. These were the topics that rhetorical treatises set out for discovering something to say. The absurdity that such a method might lead to was very soundly ridiculed by Adam Smith in his Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres Delivered in the University of Glasgow:

In [Cicero's] defence of Milo he has arguments drawn from all three topics with regard to the cause; that is, that he had no motive to kill Clodius; that it was unsuitable to his character; and that he had no opportunity. These, one would have thought, could not take place in this case, and yet he goes through them all. He endeavours to show that he had no motive, though they had been squabbling and fighting every day — he had even declared his intention to kill him; that it

was unsuitable to his character, although he had killed twenty men before; and that he had no opportunity, although we know he did kill him.  

If the topics of invention could lead an orator of Cicero's abilities into such foolishness, they could be of real service only to a writer of unusually meagre talent. And whatever the Renaissance added to the method of invention (this is where Ramist logic distinguished itself) must be considered as working against the intelligent consideration of things.  

D. **Commonplace and Observation**

On the other hand, Cicero and Quintilian recognized that the best source of arguments was a well stocked mind and that a well stocked mind was supplied by a liberal education with "the best that is known and thought in the world". One way of acquiring stock from a liberal education was through drawing commonplaces from reading. Now commonplaces of this kind are different from those Adam Smith ridicules. Instead of offering general questions that may be applied to any material, they are specific maxims, ideas, or expressions that may be applied only where they are to the point. And instead of being laid out in a conventional method, they have themselves to be discovered. And the rule according to which these discoveries are made can only be the direction that a mind takes in its attempt to get to "the centre by [its] ideas", as Arnold put it. 

Arnold's *Notebooks* are

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themselves an example of such an attempt, as are Milton's Commonplace Book and Jonson's Timber or Discoveries.

Where rhetoric taught the use of reading in acquiring ideas it was clearly a more adequate humanist discipline than where it offered a system for thinking up arguments. Yet as the ordinary sense of "commonplace" shows, commonplaces drawn from reading — particularly the kind that found their way into compilations — were often trite. As far as the rhetoric books were concerned, commonplaces drawn from reading were assigned to copiousness of style or the topic of amplification, and both copiousness and amplification are responsible for some of the tiresome habits of Renaissance writers. Renaissance rhetoric in fact made of such commonplaces more a method of ornamentation than of discovery. 28

Nevertheless the study of authors, particularly ancient authors, informed by the rhetorical discipline of drawing commonplace from such reading could be used critically and intelligently. We have in the commonplace books, Erasmus's Adagia and Jonson's Timber, evidence of how observations drawn from reading might be starting points for thought, how commonplaces might be drawn out into what one might call a method of observation. And of this, Montaigne's Essays are one of the great achievements. I shall discuss the method at length because it is one of the ways in which eloquence most clearly lay behind the development of neoclassical humanism into a valuable study of man.

28 Ong, p.121, thinks that Ramism drove out the commonplaces drawn from reading because it decided that all commonplaces belonged to dialectic and that the items in them were dialectical or logical "arguments." Commonplaces drawn from reading, adages, maxims, examples and so forth, the matter of amplification and copiousness, had no place in such a scheme. But Ramist logic certainly did not put an end to the commonplace book.
I shall begin with an example from *Paradise Lost*. Satan's remorse in Book 4 that he

understood not that a grateful mind
By owing owes not, but still pays, at once
Indebted and discharg'd. (ll. 55—57)

adapts Cicero's thought in *Pro Plancio*, xxviii, 68: "In a moral debt, when a man pays, he keeps, and when he keeps, he pays by the very act of keeping." Here Milton not only borrows Cicero's thought but expands on it remarkably by putting it into the mouth of a creature who cannot feel gratitude, who sees the whole relation of giving and making return from the outside yet understands it perfectly. And of such resonant adaptations of thoughts and observations drawn from Milton's reading, *Paradise Lost* affords innumerable examples. Here we can see how a method of reading and writing that might be merely ornamental or mechanical is applied intelligently. We can see how with an eloquence conceived in such a way the mind is bent upon the experience of a relationship and sets up a train of reflection between life and letters that enlarges and deepens the conventional *humanitas* that might be easily acquired from a literary education.

Yet the example from *Paradise Lost* is bold and odd, for it projects a moral observation about the relations between men into the relation of creatures to God. For the rest of this section I shall focus on how the basically rhetorical discipline of drawing on commonplaces could develop into a study of man. The point of reference is Montaigne's *Essays*, for there it is immediately apparent how the method of reading has become fully intelligent. At the same time we can see how the sort of study of man that emerges

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there looks forward to the sort of Augustan moral observation at work in Pope's *Essays*. And in both those ways we can see how a humanism founded on eloquence was capable of realizing an adequate criticism of life.

At this point let me adduce my commonplaces, my starting places for thought. The first is a comparison Arnold draws in "The Literary Influence of Academies" between two observations:

Addison, writing as a moralist on the fixedness of religious faith, says:— "Those who delight in reading books of controversy do very seldom arrive at a fixed and settled habit of faith. The doubt which was laid revives again, and shows itself in new difficulties; and that generally for this reason,— because the mind, which is perpetually tossed in controversies and disputes, is apt to forget the reasons which had once set it at rest, and to be disquieted with any former perplexity when it appears in a new shape, or is started by a different hand."

It may be said, that is classical English, perfect in lucidity, measure, and propriety. I make no objection; but, in my turn, I say that the idea expressed is perfectly trite and barren, and that it is a note of provinciality in Addison, in a man whom a nation puts forward as one of its great moralists, to have no profounder and more striking idea to produce on this great subject. Compare, on the same subject, these words of a moralist really of the first order, really at the centre by his ideas,— Joubert:— "L'expérience de beaucoup d'opinions donne à l'esprit beaucoup de flexibilité et l'affermit dans celles qu'il croit les meilleures." 30

Here Arnold brings together two observations from his reading, but he brings them together critically to make a third observation of his own. His observation is not only about critical reading but actually shows how reading may be used critically. And here he expresses an ideal that we may discern emerging in neoclassical humanism.

My second commonplace is from Eugenio Garin on the Renaissance discovery of antiquity:

30 *Lectures and Essays on Criticism*, p. 248.
One should never seek to distinguish between the humanistic discovery of antiquity and the humanistic discovery of man — for they amount to exactly the same thing. For the discovery of antiquity implied that one had learnt to make a comparison between antiquity and oneself, to take a detached view of antiquity and to determine one's relation to it. And all this implied, further, the concept of time and memory and a sense of human creation, of human work in this world, and of human responsibility.

The authors that neoclassical humanists studied were chiefly ancient classics. What Garin is calling attention to is the critical or reflective relation that at its best neoclassical humanism set up between its study of antiquity and its study of man. And clearly some such relationship between the classical and contemporary world was necessary if the sort of reading that could give rise to fresh observations was to be possible. What is required is a certain freedom with respect to the classics so that they can be drawn on creatively rather than servilely.

This is a freedom Vives claims in his work On Education:

Nature is not yet so effete and exhausted as to be unable to bring forth, in our times, results comparable to those of earlier ages. She always remains equal to herself, and not rarely she comes forward more strong and powerful than in the past, as if mustering together all her forces. So we must regard her in this present age, as re-enforced by the confirmed strength which has developed, by degrees, through so many centuries. For how greatly do the discoveries of earlier ages and experiences spread over long stretches of time, open up the comprehension of the different branches of knowledge?

Johnson copied the passage along with other observations from Vives into his commonplace book, later published as Timber or Discoveries:

I cannot think Nature is so spent, and decay'd, that she can bring forth nothing worth her former yeares. She is always the same, like her selfe: And when she collects her strength, is abler still.... I know Nothing can conduce more to letters, then to examine the writings of the Ancients, and not to rest in their sole Authority, or take all upon trust from them.... For to all the observations of the Ancients, we have our own experience: which if we will use, and apply, we have better means to pronounce.33

What Jonson and Vives are saying in effect is that if the study of the classics is the study of humanity and not merely a servile imitation of the past, if in other words the classics are a living tradition, then a humanist advancement of learning is possible.

Jonson's own method shows the freedom he claimed at work in his reading and writing. His commonplace book, Timber: or Discoveries, (the title is significant), is his working notebook. In this he placed observations fetched from his reading, striking either through expression or accuracy, preferably both, which he could return to, reflect upon, rework and draw out, using them as touchstones of style or reality in his own work. Carew in his excellent critical letter to Jonson describes the method, touched of course with Jonson's idiosyncrasies and Carew's vivacities:

Let them [carpers] the deareexpence of oyleupbraid,  
Suckt by thy watchfull Lampe,that hath betray'd  
To thee the blood of martyr'd Authors, spilt  
Into thy inke,whilst thou growest pale with guilt.  
Repine not at the Taper's thriftiawaste,  
That sleekest thy terser Poems, nor is haste  
Praye but excuse; and if thou overcome  
A knottie writer, bring the bootie home;  
Nor thinkest thou, if the rich spoyleso tome  
From conquerd Authors,be as Trophies worne.

In the evolution of such a method of drawing on commonplaces to advance further observations, Erasmus is a key figure. His Adagia was the most celebrated of Renaissance commonplace books and there we can see the rhetorical device emerging towards a more fully realized study of man. Like other commonplace books it is a treasury of quotations for ornamenting discourse. Erasmus, however, gathered from the classics, not weighty sentences, but proverbs, and in that one recognizes his flair. A proverb, even if it is classical, is a homely and pithy saying. So to publish the wisdom of the antique world in its popular form is to bring an ideal, classical civilization into touch with life and to free humanist studies from stiff and ornamental notions of classicism. Moreover, to recognize a proverb requires sharp observation, not just of what one is reading, but of the odd shapes of experience. "For proverbs are like little gems, so small that they often escape the searcher's eye unless you look very carefully. They are not ready to hand but well hidden, and it is a matter of digging them out rather than collecting them."\[35\] The various editions are, however, not merely


collections of proverbs but collections that grew in importance with successive editions and in some cases grew to essay length. Here is the germ perhaps of Montaigne's *Essays*. For Erasmus takes as his point of departure something won from his reading and draws it out into his own observations of life and other observations drawn from his reading. At least this is true of some of his commentaries, like the one, for example, on "Spartam nactus es, hanc orna", in which he urges princes to cultivate their country's prosperity in peace rather than aggrandize themselves through war. As a warning to princes he recounts the case of Flodden where the King of Scots died for an ambitious foreign policy, and along with him Erasmus's pupil Alexander, who was the King's bastard and Archbishop of St. Andrews. Erasmus describes Alexander as a pattern of Renaissance humanist and ruler in the making, a Gargantua or young Henry VIII rather than a church dignitary. He ends with the bitterness of one who was one of the makers:

So many endowments of nature, so many good qualities, so many high hopes were swallowed up in one battle charge. Something of mine was lost there too. Namely, the pains I took in teaching you, for whatever in you came from my workmanship was mine.

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36 Cf. Phillips, *Adages*, p.3; Augustin Renaudet, "Humanisme et Renaissance," *Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 30(1958), p.35: "Aux essais aboutit la tradition savante d'Erasme, puisqu'il s'agit pour Montaigne de rechercher une sagesse moderne, héritière de la sagesse antique, éclairée par la sagesse antique, instruite encore de ce que la sagesse antique ne soupçonnait pas. En même temps, Montaigne, avec une nouvelle maîtrise, plus de vigueur et devant une audience encore plus large, cultivé l'art de la confidence érasmienne."


Others of Erasmus's adages are more antiquarian, but the urge is still there to make the classical world of humanist studies available to the general current of thinking and feeling.

I have spoken of the use of commonplaces as a method of arriving at observations. "Method" may suggest too mechanical or systematic a procedure. But if "method" suggests a deliberate way of making explorations then I think the word is justified. And indeed we may link the sort of exploration that evolved with Bacon. Like Vives and Jonson, he claimed freedom from the absolute authority of antiquity: "These times are the ancient times, when the world is ancient, and not those which we account ancient ordine retrograde, by a computation backward from ourselves." And like them he could apply such a freedom to his reading: studies "perfect Nature, and are perfected by experience," thinking no doubt of his own practice in his Essays. Moreover, his fine observation in The Advancement of Learning on the advantage of aphorisms over systems justifies by implication, not only the gathering of commonplaces as starting points for thought, but the essay form itself with its tentative insights: "But as young men, when they knit and shape perfectly, do seldom grow to a further stature; so knowledge, while it is in aphorisms and observations, it is in growth; but when it is once comprehended in exact methods [i.e. systems], it may perchance be further polished and illustrate, and accommodated for use and practice; but it increaseth no more in bulk and substance." Here Bacon is talking about learning in general, not the

41 Bacon, Philosophical Works, p.59.
study of man in particular. Yet his observation applies well to the sort of study of man we are discussing. Real knowledge about man is possible, only it is rarer than is imagined and harder to come by. Completeness is an illusion, but the provisional method may advance real knowledge. This sort of method of gathering and making observations lies behind Montaigne's *Essays*. In his work the originally rhetorical exercise of drawing on commonplaces that we have seen at work in Jonson and Erasmus achieves an ease and grasp that show: the maturity of neoclassical humanism as a *magister vitae*.

Montaigne describes his method of culling from his reading.

I pile up only the headings of subjects. Were I to add on their consequences, I would multiply this volume many times over. And how many stories have I spread around which say nothing of themselves, but from which anyone who troubles to pluck them with a little ingenuity will produce numberless essays. Neither these stories nor my quotations serve always simply for example, authority, or ornament. I do not esteem them solely for the use I derive from them. They often bear, outside my subject, the seeds of a richer and bolder material, and sound obliquely a subtler note, both for myself, who do not wish to express anything more, and for those who get my drift.

The essay in his hands is a play of the mind expatiating freely about commonplaces and combining them. The form remains tentative. The reader does not imagine the topic has been exhausted but gathers observations for further reflection and testing against experience. And here the reader has been beguiled to do what Montaigne is doing in his essays constantly passing from his reading to his experience and judgement and so criticizing

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and extending his knowledge of things.

With his method the humanist translation and imitation of the classics have become fully intelligent. He has mastered his classical reading to the point where he can hold up and apply its ideas to his own experience of things and add to them. In his essay, "Of the Useful and the Honourable", he observes that "in the midst of compassion we feel within us I know not what bittersweet pricking of malicious pleasure in seeing others suffer." This he caps with a quotation from Lucretius: "'Tis sweet, when the sea is high and winds are driving/To watch from shore another's anguished striving". Which observation was the point of departure and which the point arrived at with the surprise of recognition, one cannot say, Montaigne moves so easily between books and the world. Admittedly there are passages in his Essays where one could do with fewer illustrations drawn from ancient history, where indeed Montaigne resembles too many other Renaissance humanists in the mere unburdening of classical learning. Still he is in sufficient command of classical wisdom to add to it. In him the humanist attitude to the classics has advanced to the point where he can draw on them as a tradition of humanity without being confined by their authority.

Montaigne's use of commonplaces drawn from his reading presupposes that the discovery of man is difficult, that his nature is not fully known and that if we want to come at his nature, we can do so only by bringing together and reflecting on those striking glances and apprehensions we have of him in his various and fluctuating state. On the difficulty

44 Complete Essays, pp.599—600.
of getting such knowledge and on the problematic nature of man Montaigne has some wonderful passages.

We have no communication with being, because every human nature is always midway between birth and death, offering only a dim shadow and semblance of itself, and an uncertain and feeble opinion. And if by chance you try to fix your thought on trying to grasp its essence, it will be neither more nor less than if someone tried to grasp water.

Others form man; I tell of him, and portray a particular one, very ill-formed, whom I should really make very different from what he is if I had to fashion him over again. But now it is done.

Now the lines of my painting do not go astray, though they change and vary. The world is but a perennial movement. All things in it are in constant motion — the earth, the rocks of the Caucasus, the pyramids of Egypt — both with the common motion and with their own. Stability itself is nothing but a more languid motion.

I cannot keep my subject still. It goes along befuddled and staggering, with a natural drunkenness. I take it in this condition, just as it is at the moment I give my attention to it. I do not portray beings: I portray passing. Not the passing from one age to another, or, as the people say, from seven years to seven years, but from day to day, from minute to minute. My history needs to be adapted to the moment. I may presently change, not only by chance, but also by intention. This is a record of various and changeable occurrences, and of irresolute and, when it so befalls, contradictory ideas: whether I am different myself, or whether I take hold of my subjects in different circumstances and aspects. So, all in all, I may indeed contradict myself now and then; but truth, as Demades said, I do not contradict. If my mind could gain a firm footing, I would not make essays, I would make decisions; but it is always in apprenticeship and on trial.

A century and a half later Pope returns to the same theme, the extraordinary difficulty of catching what man, "Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confused," is really like.

Know, God and Nature only are the same:  
In Man, the judgement shoots at flying game:  
A bird of passage! gone as soon as found,  
Now in the Moon perhaps, now underground.  
("Epistle to Cobham", ll. 154—57)  

And he contracts Newton's sovereignty in the realm of nature with his helplessness as a student of himself:  

Could he, whose rules the rapid Comet bind,  
Describe or fix one movement of his Mind?  
Who saw its fires here rise, and there descend,  
Explain his own beginning, or his end?  
(Essay on Man, 2, ll. 35-38)  

And as with Montaigne, so with Pope, though he invests the topic with peculiar grandeur and pathos, it is knowledge of the ignorance belonging to our being in a middle state, knowledge too of the fitfulness of the human creature, that is our surest knowledge. Yet the recognition of final ignorance does not deter Montaigne or Pope from attempting a limited and partial study of man. It is easy to object in theory to Pope's key to human nature, the ruling passion. But in practice his application of the idea is informed and qualified with a sense of the difficulty of hitting the springs of human actions. The idea of the ruling passion is not in fact a key to human nature but a hypothesis that prompts explorations and observations. And here one might speak of a moral Baconism, only Montaigne is its Bacon and Bacon himself, at least as a student of human nature, a disciple of Montaigne.  

Montaigne's contribution to the method of discovery originating in the commonplace was the essay, or trial, or experiment. He made a virtue  

49 For Pope's theory of the ruling passion, see Epistle to Cobham and Essay on Man, 2, ll. 132—202.
of incompleteness. For not only was man, the subject of his study, an inconstant thing, but the man who studied man, "Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurl'd," was also this inconstant thing, a man.  

Montaigne's study of man, provisional as it is, answers therefore to the stipulation I set down in my introduction concerning a humanist study of man: it does not dissociate the student from his humanity but fits inside the condition of his being or becoming human.

It must be said that the neoclassical humanist art of passing observations, even in Montaigne, is foreign to modern ideas of the study of literature. I am thinking here not so much of its association with eloquence as of its use of the sententious declarative statement, against which there is a prejudice, a prejudice that leads to the underrating of the work of neoclassical humanism. The prejudice is that maxims, reflections and so forth express possessed wisdom rather than fresh apprehensions and that didactic and expository literature is in consequence inferior to literature whose approach is what Leavis calls "exploratory-creative." Leavis's classic of the "exploratory-creative" approach is the work of T. S. Eliot from Ash Wednesday onwards, where we have a poetry in which the mind rids itself of received ideas to create new concepts out of immediate apprehensions of experience.  

This is not the place to enter into a discussion of Eliot's work, and I shall simply state my judgement that in it the "exploratory-creative" method frequently arrives with finesse at the intimation of concepts that are not very new.

50 Pope, Essay on Man, 2, 1.17.

I should say the same of Pound's notion of a *periplous* as it is realized in the *Cantos* — the notion that instead of going directly to the point one should rather come at it by rendering associated trains of ideas. I am not denying the occasional success of Pound's and Eliot's neosymbolist method. But often the method works against a clear sense of oneself and of the world. It works against critical thinking about experience, for it pays more attention to the way things are said than what is said and to the way by which conclusions are reached than the conclusions themselves. The neoclassical humanist method of observation, by contrast, is, or ought to be, a method of critical thinking. If the results are often boring and commonplace, it is not the method but the practice of it that is at fault. Whatever its limitations, there is nothing in the nature of declarative statement that prevents new apprehensions of things. At best it qualifies by Johnson's definition as that true wit "which is at once natural and new,... which, though not obvious, is, upon its first production, acknowledged to be just."52

The framing of accurate and pregnant observations requires critical and exploratory thinking and feeling, and I can see no reason why that should not be a creative activity. And what is won by such exploration is possessed, not in the security of a final assertion, but only as a prompting to further exploration and critical thinking.

We began this chapter by noticing that eloquence as a governing principle for the study of letters is strange to us, and that, moreover, much in the literary culture of neoclassical humanism is mechanical. The method of observation we have been discussing originated indeed in the mechanical rhetorical discipline of the commonplace. Yet as it

developed the method, neoclassical humanism arrived at what is, even to our alien notions of the study of letters, recognizable as a valuable way of talking about human nature and human experience.

E. Urbanity

I come now to the second way in which a humanism founded on eloquence emerged as a humane pursuit, namely urbanity. The connection between urbanity and eloquence is a matter of decorum and style as far as rhetoric is concerned. And the extravagant and mechanical nature of Renaissance textbooks on these subjects is all too obvious. An adequate urbanity emerged in spite of them. Here I shall be concerned with the ideal of eloquence as civilized and civilizing discourse.

Urbanity went with observation, for urbanity is really a civilized and developed sense of what it is like to be human. It is hard to see how, without such a sense, one can have a capacity for central human experience or for making anything but jejune or imitative observations about it. Unfortunately urbanity has come to mean a polite way of being arrogant or brutal. This is a debased sense of the word. The true sense may be gathered best, I think, from Arnold's critical writings whose guiding principle is the idea of a properly human temper capable of seeing things as they really are and capable of expressing what it sees justly and happily. The same notion of urbanity is at work in Leavis's writing on his line of wit. The urbanity he praises is a sense of oneself and of the world expressed with a certain fineness of touch. As will become clear enough, I disagree with some of Leavis's evaluations and with his

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picture of the historical development, but I think his notion of urbanity is essential for the understanding of what the humanists were trying to do. And here Montaigne comes in as a standard by which we can measure the efforts of other humanists. I have already remarked how Montaigne studies himself as he would another man and how such a sense of himself and others is urbanity of a high order. In him self-knowledge has become a developed knowledge of what humans are like, and this is urbanity in the full sense, not merely a matter of style and tone external to the man. But before him, at least among the transalpine humanists, urbanity is imperfectly mastered. The ideal is there for them in the classics, an ideal of amenity and of human intercourse at once natural and civilized. And it is a good ideal. But in this early period, it is still being acquired; it has not yet informed life and passed into the real current of thought and feeling of the time. The effort of acquisition absorbs the energies of the humanists, and their efforts in consequence are not fully interesting.

Sir Thomas More will illustrate what I mean by defective urbanity. For his time his manners were exceptional. He was celebrated among his friends for amenity and sweetness. But to anyone who has been won by this character as it has been passed down or as it in truth emerges from the Utopia his epigrams will be disheartening reading. They are not very well turned, their topics are banal, and yet they evidently aimed at classical polish and attained a high reputation. Nor is it only his

Latin verse that shows imperfect urbanity. His letters show what pains he took on behalf of his friends, but their tone is neither easy nor intimate. Sometimes his letters strike one as clumsy. He wrote for example, shortly after he had been made one of Henry's councillors an unofficial warning to Oxford University to quieten the Trojans, the faction that had taken it into their heads to oppose Greek studies. More declares the greatest respect for the university suggesting that they are far too learned not to share his own high estimate of the value of Greek and not to condemn the contumeliousness of a certain Trojan theologian. At the same time he hints at the displeasure of Wolsey and the King if they should learn that the new studies that they took such interest in were being harassed. More's intention clearly is at once to cajole and to warn in a civil way. But his tone is uncertain, for it wavers between ingratiating professions of respect and barely concealed threats, and the effect is awkward to say the least. Still the letter is a triumph of adroitness compared to the letter to a monk who had written against the *Praise of Folly* and the new studies, and that again, confused and indignant as it is, a triumph of fair mindedness and self-possession compared to his invectives on the Reformation. These last bring to mind that other side of humanism, a side hard to reconcile with its pursuit of urbanity -- its intemperance in controversy. Besides More, one thinks of Poggio, Dolet and Scaliger in the Ciceronian controversies, and Milton and Salmusius. Perhaps along with eloquence, the cultivation of the power of language to recreate the human spirit, an anti-eloquence developed, the cultivation of the power


of language to uncreate and destroy. But in English, it seems, abuse hardly became an art before the Restoration.

More is significant because his manners were prodigious for his time. But his time was rude. We feel the discrepancy between what we glimpse of the fine spirit and the imperfectly acquired temper. His Utopia is perhaps an exception, to this judgement, but an exception that in some ways proves the rule. For there an ideal of human community at once natural and civilized is held up ironically against what things are actually like. And what comes out is the gap between the civilized ideal and reality and the consequent perplexity for those who must deal in both. But generally when humanist works of this period engage our interest it is when they are humanist in a farcical and backhanded way. So the Praise of Folly, Gargantua and Pantagruel, or the Letters of Obscure Men seem more in touch with real things than those works where an elegant if: simple latinity or a classical parallel is more sought after than thought, or observation, or invention.

But surely, it will be said, Erasmus is truly urbane. It seems indeed grudging to deny it of one who did so much to naturalize classical notions of civilisation and humanity. One honours him as a culture hero.

At length, Erasmus, that great, injur'd Name,
(The Glory of the Priesthood, and the Shame!)
Stemm'd the wild Torrent of a barbarous Age,
And drove those Holy Vandals off the Stage. 57

His task was to make current to a public, vastly enlarged through the invention of printing, the materials of culture, and those for his time

were the writings of classical and Christian antiquity. He was not alone in his labour; nevertheless he stands out as editor, translator, anthologizer and popularizer, a Herculean figure and like Hercules with something archaic and rudimentary about his achievements.\textsuperscript{58} His urbanity strikes one now as stiff, his epistolary friendships as a trifle elaborate. Yet where Erasmus came short of urbanity, we may speak of a general shortcoming of the earlier humanists. The problem is to do justice to what he did for the intelligent assimilation of the classics, while at the same time recognizing that the assimilation fell short of a fully acquired humanity such as one finds in Montaigne.

Erasmus's dialogue, the \textit{Ciceronian}, is a good example of the critical intelligence at work in his study of the classics. Dialogue was one of the discoveries, or rather rediscoveries of the Renaissance. For it was a form that rescued discussion from scholastic debate and brought it back to human conversation. "Conversation," according to Guazzo, and he spoke for the Renaissance humanists as a whole, "is the beginning and end of all knowledge."\textsuperscript{59} The \textit{Ciceronian} is one of the best examples of a treatise cast in conversational form, but other dialogues over Cicero come to mind, Poggio's, for example, and of course in other fields there are the \textit{Utopia} and the \textit{Courtier} and \textit{Toxophilus}.\textsuperscript{60} The \textit{Ciceronian} deals with the imitation of Cicero. To ridicule the Ciceronian fad, the

\textsuperscript{58} In his adage, "Herculei Labores," Phillips, pp.195—209, Erasmus digresses on his own labours.


\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Ciceronianus}, trans. in Izora Scott, \textit{Controversies over the Imitation of Cicero as a Model for Styles and some Phases of their Influence} (New York: Teachers' College, Columbia University, 1910).
affectation of a pure Ciceronian vocabulary, the specialized sensibility for Ciceronian cadences, the ambition to commit only Ciceronian solecisms was not difficult, and Erasmus's lively malice had plenty of scope. But what is far more evidence of Erasmus's critical grasp is that he saw that Cicero was at once a classic worthy of imitation and at the same time not a complete pattern of urbanity. He saw that Cicero was self-important, that his style was sometimes slipshod and that it was absurd to patch together a discourse about contemporary things with nothing but his language. In other words he saw critically what Cicero is like and in what real ways he might serve as a model. All this seems fairly basic. But Erasmus was answered with indignation and scurrility and with a capacity for missing the point sufficient to start at least J. C. Scaliger on a scholarly reputation. But however ill-received it was, Erasmus had introduced into the study of the classics a distinction between the pedantic imitation of classical "humanitas" and the critical and intelligent one.

And still compared with Montaigne, Erasmus's humanity is rather superficial. His Colloquies will illustrate that. They are dialogues, but, unlike the Ciceronian, modelled not on Plato's or Cicero's but on Lucian's: they are not treatises but satirical sketches, which Erasmus threw off in the course of his life and meant to amuse people with themselves and others. "The Seraphick Funeral", for example, satirizes the Franciscan order in much the same way that Lucian had satirized the plague of wandering philosophical mountebanks and their various sects and
doctrines. The scandal that Erasmus is attacking is the custom of putting on the habit of the order at death to escape, or at least to mitigate, punishment in the next world and the corrupt and mysterious doctrines that justified the practice. Milton (I am digressing for a moment) perhaps recalled this colloquy when he placed among the future inhabitants of the Paradise of Fools those

who to be sure of Paradise
Dying put on the weeds of Dominic,
Or in Franciscan think to pass disguis'd.

(Bk. 3, 11.478—80).

They came, Milton continues, where the stairs lead up from the pole of the universe to where St. Peter keeps the gate of heaven,

when loe
A violent cross wind from either Coast
Blows them transverse ten thousand Leagues awry
Into the devious Air; then might ye see
Cowles, Hoods and Habits and thir wearers tost
And fluttered into Raggs, then Reliques, Beads,
Indulgences, Dispenses, Pardons, Bulls,
The sport of Winds: all these upwhirld aloft
Fly ore the backside of the World farr off
Into a Limbo large and broad, since calld
The Paradise of Fools.

(Bk. 3, 11.486—96)

This is a passage that used to be censured as beneath the dignity of epic. Bentley put it down to Milton's editor, others to Milton's Protestantism. Actually even if the language is more boisterous, its mixture of knockabout comedy and satire is exactly what one finds in Erasmus's livelier colloquies. And it is surely fun. But no one would

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say that it was a penetrating account of religious corruption. This is true also of Erasmus's satire. His death bed friar is a lively portrait of false repentance and the exposure of Franciscan trickery is amusing in a way. But one need only think of Chaucer's Pardoner or the Jesuit father Tellier of Saint Simon's Memoirs to see that Erasmus does not go very deep into religious corruption; one need only read Montaigne's "On Repentance" to see that Erasmus's admonishments to sincere repentance touch only the surface of the problem. The idea of Lucianizing upon the religious orders is witty and apposite. But to be content with Lucian is to be content with a fantastic and scandalous picture of roguery. With the Lucianic spirit goes a certain superficiality of observation, a classicism very much at one with the stereotypes of late medieval satire.

The inadequacy of the classical vessel comes out again in his colloquy the "Religious Treat". It represents an ideal of Christian conviviality — a banquet where the talk includes a bout of explicating biblical texts and ends with the host setting off on a good work. As the banquet represents an ideal, the inadequacy lies not so much in a failure to show what things are like as to realize strongly what they ought to be like. At the beginning a classical idea of conversation is invoked when Eusebius answers Timotheus's remark that Socrates "was for a Town-Life where a Man might learn what he had a mind to know" with the case of Socrates himself at the plane tree by the spring of the Ilissus outside Athens where he taught Phaedrus. There the ideal of a country

62 See Auerbach, pp. 375—78.
63 L'Estrange, p. 71.
retirement and conversation among friends takes a Horatian turn when
Eusebius invites his friends promising them that his place will furnish
them with a banquet and that they need only bring a good appetite as
sauce to the meal. To call this an urbane ideal would be confusing
since it combines rusticity with urbanity, but it is at least a civilized
ideal. Here I cannot do better than quote from H. A. Mason's *Humanism
and Poetry in the Early Tudor Period*, a book I have drawn on heavily in
the present discussion:

> The Renaissance ideal of the good life finds ... its truest expression
> in the *alfresco* meal at the point where town and country touch.
> Here Man and Nature meet on the most advantageous ground, for man
> was thought to be most civilized where he had thrown over the
> artificial extravagance of the City and the Court. The ideal had
to fight for its existence against its two enemies: unmeaning
expense on outward display, and unmeaning elaboration of ceremonial,
the bugbears of life at court. The ideal meal is always a simple
meal and ceremony is reduced to a minimum ... the mealtime provides
the framework in which philosophy is brought down to the human
scale; for while the meal exists to produce
> The Feast of Reason and the flow of Soul,
the simple necessities surrounding it command the tone of the
discourse. There is room for wit and mirth, for the display of
real ease in human intercourse, neither too familiar nor too stiff.
There is no room for logic-chopping or for rhetorical display.65

This is clearly the ideal of conviviality at which Erasmus aims. But the
ideal is, I think, imperfectly realised. Much of the colloquy is
delightful — the description of the square-walled garden for instance
planted with herbs bearing mottoes, its fountain, from which Eusebius
draws a moral, the pictured plants and animals on the wall, which supplement
the garden's image of the works of God. But the conversation is
disappointing. The talk before the painted animals and plants is all

64 Horace, *Satires*, 11, 6, cited Mason, p.117.
65 Mason, p.280.
unnatural history out of Pliny, a subject whose charms do not last as long as the conversation. And the various explications of texts over the meal are more disappointing. Indeed they are boring, as if Erasmus had trouble in turning his biblical scholarship to matters of real interest in the mouths of his characters. The result is that the conviviality is rather hollow. It falls short of the ideal consorting together of pagan and Christian conversation expressed in the exclamation of one of the guests, "Sancte Socrates, ora pro nobis". The Horatian setting is a decoration for an ideal that is not properly grasped. Yet clearly the ideal was important. For to find a place for Christian conversation in a Horatian ideal of civilized conviviality would be to achieve two very Erasmian, and indeed humanist, ends. It would be to naturalize the fully Christian life outside the monastery in the secular world and to bring Christianity to bear on daily life, the essence of Erasmus's *Philosophia Christi*. But I am not sure where one would find the ideal realised in literature, if indeed it is realisable.

If it had been realised, then it would be possible to talk about a true fusion of Christianity and humanism. As it is, I think such a "Christian humanism" was something imperfectly realised. It will not do to argue that the religious urbanity represented at its best in Herbert's devotional verse refutes my views. There we have urbanity of a courtly sort adapted to conversation with God rather than the conversation of men permeated with religious concern. This a crucial difference, and Herbert at Bemerton inevitably felt himself cut off from the world. In the same way, the urbanity of the meal Raphael, "the sociable Spirit"

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66 L'Estrange, p.58
shares with Adam and Eve is the ideal image of religious rather than human relations.

The likenesses between Erasmus's and Milton's meals bring out the humanist ideal of conversation, and the superiority of Milton's treatment makes it clear how Erasmus's realization of religious urbanity is defective. But more important, that the urbanity of Milton's meal, successful as it is, moves in a sphere of religious rather than human concerns enforces my point that for neoclassical humanism, Christianity and the study of man do not perfectly fuse, though they may be boldly yoked together. Milton's meal is the apotheosis of the humanist notion of urbanity, and in transporting the notion beyond itself, the meal reminds us of the limits of the normal sphere of urbanity and the study of man.

In Milton's Eden, as in "the happy rural seat of various view" (Bk.4, 1.247) of Eusebius, Erasmus's host, the husband leads an ideal retired life, occupied with gardening and religious and philosophical conversation. Like Eusebius's garden, only more completely, Eden affords "in narrow room Natures: whole wealth," (Bk. 4, 1.207) an epitome of God's creation for its owner to enjoy and reflect upon. Moreover, like the meal Eusebius offers his guests, the one Adam offers to Raphael comes entirely from his own land, and Raphael, like Eusebius's guests, brings a good appetite, "real hunger," not to mention "concoctive heat" (Bk.5, 1.437).

In one important respect, however, Milton's religious treat is different from Erasmus's — the conversation is interesting. Much of the talk at Erasmus's table is taken up with discussing biblical texts on clean and unclean foods and spiritual uses. As far as I can see the points made do not hang together and the effect is scrappy. But when Raphael talks of the conversion of food to spirit, his talk not only
unfolds an astonishing picture of the universe as a great chain of digestion, but deals with the appropriate topic of enjoying God's bounty. The rest of the conversation develops without apparent premeditation, though Raphael has been sent to warn Adam. It is easy and at the same time to the point. It is, perhaps, unfair to compare Milton's meal with Erasmus's. Milton, after all, was making an epic effort, and besides it is more difficult to realize an ideal of religious urbanity in the world of experience, where ordinary manners have to be reckoned with, than in a paradisaic existence. What is of immediate interest to Adam's experience of the world is religious — that is given in his situation. In Erasmus's world, religious topics are not in such immediate touch with life and so they are not so easily made conversational topics. Only the drift of Raphael's discourse on astronomy would pass there for table-talk that had an immediate bearing on everyone's concerns. Erasmus's meal, I said, does not realize successfully the idea of religious conviviality for his own time and manners. Neither does Milton's, but then he was not really trying for that sort of success. He is taking over one of the chief institutions of Culture as neoclassical humanism conceived it and using it as a figure for the friendship and easy intercourse of heaven with unfallen man. This is a bold and witty thing to do. At the same time, there could be no more natural way of showing the dignity of unfallen man than to make his intercourse with spiritual

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67 Johnson, "Milton," Lives of the Poets, I, 139, remarks that "Raphael's reproof of Adam's curiosity after planetary motions, with the answer returned by Adam, may be confidently opposed to any rule of life which any poet has delivered." Given its universal bearing, it belongs with those topics Horace mentions as suitable for conversation at table, Satires II, 6, ll.70-76.
beings a matter of

\[ \text{talk where God or Angel Guest} \]
\[ \text{With Man, as with his Friend, familiar us'\text{'d}} \]
\[ \text{To sit indulgent.} \quad (\text{Bk. 9, II. 1—3}) \]

The indulgence, of course, marks the difference between the conviviality of man with superior beings and the conviviality of men with men. Nevertheless, there is real urbanity in the conversation of Adam and Raphael. Adam even manages to answer with dignity and adroitness the angel's rebuke, which his confession of too much love for Eve brings upon him. So that while Milton has not attempted to show how a Christian humanism might be realized in social intercourse, he has succeeded in showing how the intercourse between heaven and man, conventionally stiff with mystification, ceremony and ascetic discipline, might be a conversation of rational beings. In this conversation man is not strained out of his creaturely nature but indulged and enjoyed (clearly Raphael enjoyed talking to Adam) in the complete and harmonious perfection of human nature. This is to entertain a less cramped view of human nature than Montaigne, though entirely at one with him in the stress on human creatureliness. Of course, Milton is dealing with unfallen man. It is in this special case that Milton succeeds where Erasmus failed in adapting the classical forms of urbanity for religious conviviality.

On the other hand, there is one civilized relationship that is imperfectly realized at Milton's meal, the relation between man and wife. Here Milton is certainly in the Horatian and humanist tradition; in it, yet uneasily so, for it seems to me that Milton is struggling with notions

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of hierarchy and the manners of his time for a larger and freer urbanity.

Eve's silence at the meal is simply conventional good manners. At Erasmus's meal Eusebius's wife is absent. She is commended among the company as a good housekeeper might be, and in this Erasmus follows Horace's picture of an ideal country wife. With Eve, it must be said, the tradition is softened. At least she is present for most of the conversation and capable of understanding it, though she says nothing. And when she does leave, the charm of her departure belongs to a level of comedy above the reference to Xanthippe in Erasmus's meal or what usually went on when 17th century gentlemen were left at table.\(^6^9\) All this is an advance, if a small one, towards a more complete notion of human conversation.

The advance is more marked when Adam and Eve are alone together. Then it is clear that Adam's retired life is completed in his conversation with Eve. It was, after all the first test of Adam's rational nature and his knowledge of himself that he should recognize that he was not God, complete in solitude, nor on the other hand a dumb animal, but a man in need of conversation and fellowship "fit to participate / All rational delight."

(Bk. 8, 11. 389-91). Here Milton has filled out the Genesis account to bring in the humanist notion of conversation.\(^7^0\) "If any might by God's permission ascend to heaven and there beholde the nature of the worlde, and the beautie of the starres, that sight would be of no great delight to him, if he had not some or other to whom he might impart it and tell


\(^7^0\) J. de Bruyn, "Between Sea and Land: An Essay on Paradise Lost" (draught), pp.133—34, makes the point that Adam's "one Flesh, one Heart, one Soul" (Bk. 8, 1.499) significantly adds to the Genesis account, which speaks only of "one flesh."
what he sawe." So Annibal delivers his opinion in Gnazzo's dialogue on Civile Conversation and his hypothetical man wrapt to heaven is more or less in Adam's position in Eden. God gives Eve to Adam so that his humanity may be complete in rational conversation. In this, Eden represents the ideal Milton contends for in the divorce tracts. That the ideal is awkwardly realized, that Adam is heavy in conversation with Eve, as he is not at all with Raphael, is evidence of the power of convention to distort the free intuition of what things ought to be like. If Milton had been content with the Horatian convention he would probably not have put himself in a position where he could be ridiculed for having a "Turkish contempt of females." But though the idea of marriage as the conversation of rational beings is imperfectly realized in Paradise Lost, what there is of it is something of a breakthrough. Montaigne's view is the norm.

As for marriage, for one thing it is a bargain to which only the entrance is free — its continuance being constrained and forced, depending otherwise than on our will—and a bargain ordinarily made for other ends. For another, there supervene a thousand foreign tangles to unravel, enough to break the thread and trouble the course of a lively affection; whereas in friendship there are no dealings or business except with itself. Besides, to tell the truth, the ordinary capacity of women is inadequate for that communion and fellowship which is the nurse of that sacred bond; nor does their soul seem firm enough to endure the strain of so tight and durable a knot. And indeed, but for that, if such a relationship, free & voluntary, could be built up, in which not only would the souls have full enjoyment, but the bodies would also share in the alliance, so that the entire man would be engaged, it is certain that the resulting friendship would be fuller and more complete. But this sex in no instance has yet succeeded in attaining it, and by the common agreement of the ancient schools is excluded from it.

71 Guazzo, p.36.
73 "Of Friendship", Complete Essays, pp.137—38. Montaigne found later in Mlle. de Gournay what he had missed in women. But this relation was as to a gifted daughter and to an admirer, not an equal and certainly not a wife. See "Of Presumption," Complete Essays, p.502.
In fact I cannot think of any properly rational conversation or truly civilized relation between married people, or even between men and women, in the literature of the period, at least until the Restoration. I cannot see that the urbanity of the courtly societies presided over by women such as the Duchess of Urbino in the *Courtier* or Henrietta Maria among the Cavalier poets succeeded in civilizing and humanizing this relationship. The women are cynosures and inspirers of wit in men. But they are not part of rational conversation that makes us human. If Caroline love poetry is representative of the urbanity governing relations between men and women, then urbanity on men's part was banter at best and generally an art of snubbing.

Know Celia (since thou art so proud),
'Twas I that gave thee thy renown:
Thou hadst, in the forgotten crowd
Of common beauties, liv'd unknown,
Had not my verse exhali'd thy name,
And with it, ympt the wings of fame.

That killing power is none of thine,
I gave it to thy voyce, and eyes:
Thy sweets, thy graces, all are mine;
Thou art my starreshin' st in my skies;
Then dart not from thy borrowed sphere
Lightning on him that fixt thee there.

Tempt me with such affrights no more,
Lest what I made, I uncreate;
Let fools thy mystique formes adore,
The know thee in thy mortall state;
Wise Poets that wrap't Truth in tales,
Knew her themselves, through all her vailes.

This in its representative quality, is a more distinguished achievement than is perhaps commonly recognized. It is not a mere charming trifle; it has in its light grace a remarkable strength. How fine and delicate is the poise it maintains may be brought out by looking through Carew's Restoration successors for a poem to compare with it.74

74 Leavis, *Revaluation*, p.16.
The poem in Leavis's view represents a high level of urbanity. It is certainly representative. How many other 17th century love lyrics say the same thing: if you disdain me, I'll disdain you; and how many manage to say it with almost as much elegance and contrivance. But one becomes bored with a poise secured by such means against fondness, let alone any reality, worth or brains the woman might have. The poise that Leavis so admires is, in fact, remarkably unurbane and uncivilized, content with highly stereotyped and artificial notions of what human relations are like. Possibly such jejune conventions of urbanity account for the badness of Donne's poems to Lady Magdalen Herbert and the Countess of Bedford, the strained expressions of their worth and his friendship. Jonson (and Leavis later quotes an excellent but not unique example of the sort of urbane compliment to women he is capable of) is quite exceptional in conveying the sense that the woman he is talking to is worth talking to. It is not surprising that he was not thought much of as a love poet. Aubrey thinks, "'Twas an ingeniose remarque of my lady Hoskins, that B. J. never writes of love, or if he does does it not naturally" — naturally, like Carew, I suppose. With the Restoration things improved. At least a woman might be a liberal education. Rochester sounds as if he liked the women he wrote to, and it sounds as if they could give as good as they got. In his "Letter from Artemisia in the Town to Cloe in the Country" he has

75 Jonson, "Fair friend, 'tis true your beauties move," Underwood, 82; Leavis Revaluation, pp. 22—24; Donne, Elegy IX, "The Automnal" also treats of "affection" and "reverence" corresponding to Jonson's "love" and "respect"; see also "To Mrs M. H." Letters to Several Personages; I think any of the poems to the Countess of Bedford will do as examples of ill-directed effort.

managed to draw a woman of intelligence and wit, an ideal that became increasingly current in the 18th century. And there is Milton, keeping very different company, of course, praising marriage and attempting to show how it might be "an apt and cheerfull conversation of man with woman," unlike

Court Amours,
Mixt Dance, or wanton Mask, or Midnight Ball,
Or Serenate, which the starv'd Lover sings
To his proud fair, best quitted with disdain.
(Bk. 4, ll. 767—70)

The point about Milton’s picture of the relation between men and women is much the same as the point I made about urbanity in Erasmus and More. In each the intuition of a complete humanity is tentative and awkward. I feel that Milton’s awkwardness goes with a certain greatness. He had the freedom or clarity of spirit to conceive, however imperfectly, what humans might be like beyond the conventions of what humans are like. He was, in short, critical of a bad tradition, or rather a bad side of the tradition Leavis judges so fine. If Milton is unable to make it whole by bodying forth an entirely successful image of a more complete humanity, at least his awkwardness shows that he had finer apprehensions than the "sophisticated gallantry" of the Cavalier poets. If Culture is the study of perfection, then Milton’s clumsiness does more to further it than Carew’s grace. It is perhaps not unreasonable to see in Milton’s embarrassment the struggle of culture with a particular society and to find in that a reminder of how neoclassical humanism is itself an incomplete attempt at realizing culture.

I do not mean to pursue the development of urbanity into Augustan

notions at this point. When we take up Absalom and Achitophel in a later chapter, it will be found that urbanity is a shaping force in Dryden's poetic eloquence. But here the general tendency should be clear and its significance for culture. The place of Montaigne should also be clear. I said that in him humanism became interesting. The sketch that I have attempted should have justified that assertion. In Montaigne urbanity, outside the relation of men to women, is mastered; humanity, that is, has become mature, and so his study of man is interesting. It is no longer a set of rather stiff, unliving conventions and ideals gathered from the classics and bound together without any vital principle of coherence. The awkwardness and superficiality that remains even in Erasmus have gone, and now we have the whole man and what he is really like — "subject merveilleusement vain, divers et ondoyant" — before us. How far his being able to get at what things are like is to be put down to Montaigne's writing in the language he spoke instead of in Latin I cannot say. The vernacular may have been necessary but it was certainly not sufficient for his success. There are many Renaissance books in the vernacular aimed at shaping the complete man — Castiglione's Courtier, The Governor, Euphues, even very largely the Faerie Queene, — where the man and manners shown are still fantastic and Gothic. Whatever the merits of these works, it is enough to place them alongside Montaigne's Essays to see the difference between an artificial and a truly humanizing urbanity.

F. Conclusion

Although eloquence is foreign to our notions of literary studies, seemingly mechanical, and indeed in some of its expressions truly so, it was nevertheless capable of informing a method of observation and an urbanity that we can recognize as truly humanizing. It informed the use the neoclassical humanists made of the commonplace to start thought, their way of ransacking authors for passages that catch the elusive contours of experience or lineaments of man in vivid or pregnant phrasing to enlarge their study of man. And it informed their idea of a truly human and humanizing discourse. In both cases what is important is the development from a narrow and conventional notion of literary culture to one that was responsive to experience and enlarged the intelligence. Of the maturing of this humanism as a magister vitae Montaigne is an important representative, anticipating in many respects those developments in the study of letters that in English are associated with the Augustans.

Paradise Lost lies rather aside from the development we have traced. Certainly the idea of the orator lay behind Milton's idea of the vocation of letters whether as pamphleteer or, as we shall see, epic poet. But the use he puts his reading to and the notion of urbane conversation conceived of in Paradise Lost are different from the sort of observation and urbanity Montaigne's Essays represent. In Paradise Lost Milton is not writing of the experience of man in civilization. And the relations between creatures and God or man and wife lie outside the sphere neoclassical humanism generally realized itself in.
A. Introduction

I shall rehearse the argument that has emerged in the preceding chapters. We took up Luther and Montaigne to show how their penetrating judgments separated the Christian study of the will from the sphere of neoclassical humanism. Whatever the overlap of interest between the two, in the final analysis there could be no fusion between the Christian study of the will as Luther and indeed Montaigne saw it and the neoclassical humanist study of man. In the last chapter, we took eloquence as the informing principle of neoclassical humanism and traced the ways in which it developed into a mature and intelligent study of man. Here again Montaigne was the point de repère, for in him a developed study of man was recognizable. It seems to me, therefore, that the sort of humanism represented by Montaigne is not a peculiar development. He represents the maturity of neoclassical humanism in its attempt to achieve a criticism of life, and to the contention that he is a central, not peripheral figure, the affinities between him and the Augustan humanists lend some support. The picture is then of neoclassical humanism in its maturity drawing a line between the Christian study of the will and the humanist study of man. The significance of this picture, as far as Paradise Lost is concerned is that its treatment of the motions of the will lies outside the scope of the neoclassical humanist study of man, even if in other respects it takes on the configuration of its contemporary humanism.

In this chapter I shall advance what is in fact a further argument for thinking Montaigne's sort of humanism a central development, and again I shall take eloquence as the governing principle behind the neoclassical humanist study of man. It will emerge that Montaigne's critique of human
rationality, which I discussed in Chapter 2, is, however extreme in expression, in line with the critical development of neoclassical humanism. In Chapter 2 my argument was that Montaigne's picture of the creaturely condition of man in his middle state was at odds with the picture of man who through his rationality had an affinity with God and that in consequence we must distinguish Montaigne's humanism from the "Christian humanism" that reconciled the study of man with religion through human rationality. It seems to me that the earlier humanists, particularly the humanists of the Italian Renaissance were able to harmonize Christian and religious interests in some such way. But the thrust of a humanism to which eloquence gave the measure was away from such a harmonizing; and this, not only because, as I argued when treating Arnold and the Pauline crisis, eloquence went with ethical and didactic conceptions other than those of the Christian study of the will, but also because the concerns of eloquence and of the humanism that evolved out of it into a mature study of man were other than those of speculative philosophy and philosophical theology. The difference comes out familiarly in the humanist attack on the scholastics. But a far more radical distinction between the concerns of eloquence and the concerns of philosophy is made by Valla, who anticipates both the Reformers' attack on philosophical theology and Montaigne's attack on the amalgam of philosophical theism taken over from the humanism of Cicero and assimilated to Christian eloquence.

Behind the humanist attack on scholasticism or Valla's on philosophy lies eloquence, the notion of human and humanizing discourse. Humane learning, the studies that really fit our human being and the discourse that is adequately proportioned to human nature, is ranged against vain learning, the studies and discourse that dissociate us from our humanity and would
transport us into other conditions of being. The study of eloquence is then the study of the human proportion, and it naturally expresses itself in the conception of the human condition as a creaturely middle state.

Yet apart from Valla, the humanism of the Italian Renaissance favours another conception of the standing of man in the world. In his monumental study, Trinkaus finds it characteristic of Italian humanism that it was preoccupied, not with human creatureliness and finitude, but with the divinization of man. And he argues that in this, Italian humanists are at one with Florentine platonists.¹ I would follow Trinkaus here. It seems to me that in its early stages neoclassical humanism worked with an amalgam of eloquence, speculative philosophy and Christian theism, which tended to express itself in the imaginative conception of human infinitude, man's capacity for God. The growth of neoclassical humanism is its criticism of such an amalgam, its development of the sort of study of human creatureliness to be found not only in Valla and Montaigne but, as I shall show later, in Milton and Dryden. Moreover, of this critical movement towards distinguishing those studies that fit inside the finite human condition, Milton's treatment of forbidden knowledge is a significant expression.

The two sorts of vain learning we shall be concerned with are scholasticism and Renaissance platonism. In the case of scholasticism the humanist critique was explicit. But in the case of Renaissance platonism there is no explicit critique to point to, and the distinction between humanist and

platonist interests is confused. I shall take up the humanist contention with scholasticism first.

B. Eloquence against Scholasticism

It is easy to reduce the contention between humanism and scholasticism to an academic dispute. The humanist movement of the Renaissance was an assertion of the importance of eloquence against the encroachments of late medieval scholasticism. The basis of medieval studies was the Trivium, the three ways to learning, grammar, logic and rhetoric. The principle behind this curriculum was a balance of these three arts, and this balance was, at least as medieval humanism understood it, eloquence, the cultivation of these arts of language each with its place in a liberal education. The scholastic movement disturbed the balance. It cultivated the logical or, dialectical arts at the expense of rhetoric. And such was its ascendancy in the Universities of Northern Europe that the study of classical authors other than Aristotle fell into neglect. The humanist movement of the Renaissance was the mind returning to the study of rhetoric and the classical authors and reasserting the principle of eloquence as a measure of human learning.


Further evidence that the conflict between scholasticism and humanism involved a curricular dispute lies in derivation of the word "humanist" from the Italian "umanista", a piece of university slang. The suffix, "ist", as in " Scotist", "Occeanist", "Ramist", shows its academic provenance. Yet "umanista" is in turn derived from "studia humanitas", studies that cultivate and humanize, that are a discipline in humanity. That implies a large claim.

It is, of course, important to be reminded of the precise historical framework, the scholastic curriculum, that the early Renaissance humanists had to contend with. It is important also to realize that the humanists were humanists not because they were spokesmen for a new philosophy or picture of the world and of man. They were humanists because they were spokesmen for what were in some respects a new, in some respects a rejuvenated studia humanitatis, that is the classical languages and literatures, history, moral philosophy and what bound those studies, those humanities, together,— not theology subsuming all other sciences, but eloquence, the application of ideas to life. But such an academic discipline is fraught with more than academic importance. Even an academic dispute can be about something. Behind the dispute about the curriculum lay the larger issues of eloquence and the study of man.

Before we turn to those matters, however, we should remark that it is an error to think scholasticism represents medieval learning, and humanism, Renaissance learning. Since scholasticism and humanism were rivals they might co-exist. Even in the 13th century when scholasticism had squeezed

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4 See A. Campana, "The Origin of the Word Humanism", JWCI, 9 (1946), 60-73.
out humanist studies from the university of Paris, humanist studies con-
tinued at such centres as Chartres and Orleans. In 14th century Italy at
the moment when Renaissance humanism was getting under way scholastic
studies were entering the universities. They were, as much as humanism,
the new movement.\(^5\) Even in 16th century Northern Europe where the
academic establishment was scholastic and humanism was the new movement,
scholasticism was not dislodged for all the humanist outcry. In the English
universities, side by side with the new chairs in classical languages, the
study of scholastic logic and theology continued. Ramist logic made some
headway for a time, and the Reformation had some effect on the teaching of
theology. But the scholastic curriculum persisted along with scholastic
logic and disputation, nor were they driven out even when Bacon's ideas
began to take effect at the end of the 17th century.\(^6\)

also "Philosophy & Humanism in Renaissance Perspective", The Renaissance
Press, 1966), pp. 29--51, and John Herman Randall, jr., "The Development of
Scientific Method in the School of Padua", in Renaissance Essays, ed.

\(^6\) See William T. Costello, S.J., The Scholastic Curriculum at Early Seven-
teenth Century Cambridge (Cam., Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1955); Mark
Roberto Weiss "Learning and Education in Western Europe from 1470-1520", in
(Cam.: Cam. Univ. Press, 1964), 126; Lisa Jardine, "The Place of Dialectic
Each of these authorities argues that the scholastic curriculum was in-
filt rated rather than overturned by humanism. See also John Aubrey's
description of the young Chillingworth at Oxford as disputing machine in
Brief Lives and Selected Writings, ed. Anthony Powell (London: Cresset,
1949), p. 304. For the history of rhetoric and logic in the period see
Wilbur Samuel Howell, Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700 (Princeton:
Princeton Univ. Press, 1956) and Eighteenth Century British Logic and
To the persistence of the scholastic curriculum at Cambridge, Milton's complaints bear witness. His Third Prolusion, "An Attack on the Scholastic Philosophy", contrasts philosophy united with eloquence with what he saw as a disputatious, barbarous and trivial discipline. In his treatise Of Education he again attacks the scholastic curriculum:

And for the usuall method of teaching Arts, I deem it to be an old errour of universities not yet well recover'd from the Scholastick grossnesse of barbarous ages, that instead of beginning with Arts most easie, and those be such as are most obvious to the sence, they present their young unmatriculated novices at first coming with the most intellecctual abstractions of Logick and metaphysicks; So that they having but newly left those Grammatick flats and shallows where they stuck unreasonably to learn a few words with lamentable construction, and now on a sudden transported under another climat to be tost and turmoild with their unballasted wits in fathomles and unquiet deeps of controversie, do for the most part grow into hatred and contempt of learning, mockt and deluded all this while with ragged notions and babblemants, while they expected worthy and delightfull knowledge.

The contention of humanism and scholasticism is still in evidence in the 18th Century. In 1728 Pope is still able to ridicule the scholastic establishment in the universities:

Prompt at the call, around the Goddess roll
Broad hats, and hoods, and caps, a sable shoal:
Thick and more thick the black blockade extends,
A hundred head of Aristotle's friends.
Nor wert thou, Isis! wanting to the day,
[Tho' Christchurch long kept prudishly away,]
Each staunch Polemic, stubborn as a rock,
Each fierce Logician, still expelling Locke,
Came whip and spur, and dashed thro' thin and thick
On German Crouzaz, and Dutch Burgersdyck.

8 Of Education, ed. Donald C. Dorian, Complete Prose, 2, 374-75. Cf. "How charming is divine Philosophy/Not harsh, and crabbed as dull fools suppose,/But musical as is Apollo's lute", A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle, 11.476-78.
Here are the doctors of Erasmus and More and Milton, the whole formidable scholastic guild of them, out demonstrating for Aristotelian logic, their liberties and the divine right of kings. And scholastic theology also persisted, for the reformed Church found eventually that it could not dispense with Aquinas or the new scholastic Suarez. In the early 18th century the sallies of the Scriblerus Club upon scholastic learning were certainly safer than Erasmus's had been. But they were by no means flogging a dead horse. It cannot be said that the scholastic tradition had spent its real energy by the 15th century. The theology of Suarez carries on the medieval tradition of philosophy, but at the same time it has as much right as Descartes' philosophy to be considered in the mainstream of 17th century philosophy. Moreover, scholastic logic was simply a better organum for thinking than anything that tried to replace it at least in the 17th century. Bacon's schemes became influential, but the 17th Century brought forth vigorous Aristotelian treatises on the art of reasoning. Given this persistence, we cannot draw out the opposition between scholastic and humanist learning into a time scheme that represents the middle-ages by scholasticism and the Renaissance and after by humanism. The opposition is not between two periods but between two notions of the proper study of mankind.

Let us now attempt to characterize that opposition. In the first place we can oppose scholastic and humanist views of the ends of learning. Here is Aquinas on the pursuit of truth: "Man's ultimate happiness consists in the contemplation of truth. For this operation alone is proper to man, and none of the other animals communicates with him therein. Again, this is not directed to anything further as its end: since the contemplation of the

truth is sought for its own sake."\footnote{11} This is clearly the statement of a man for whom philosophy is a way of life, and it represents fairly and nobly the scholastic idea of the proper study of mankind. With this statement we may contrast what is implied in Milton's notion of human studies. The studies he conceives of are to furnish a "compleate and generous Education ... which fits a man to perform, justly, skilfully and magnanimously all the offices both private and publike of peace and war."\footnote{12} The end of such studies is the acquiring of a learning that will be active in individual conduct and the government of the world. And here the ends of human learning are characteristic of a humanism based on eloquence, which is the application of ideas to life.

The way in which eloquence applies ideas to life is by bringing a liberally stocked mind to bear on the situations of life. It cultivates a reason which is also choice, a reason which is concerned with the issues of action and the distinguishing of the better from the worse.\footnote{13} But it


\footnote{13} See Kessler, p.97.
is engaged with human affairs also because it aims to make reason and the will of God prevail. It is not merely rational discourse but persuasive discourse. And it seeks not merely to persuade the mind but to move the affections and the will. It addresses the whole man and not merely a rational faculty such as scholastic dialectic addressed. Good eloquence, the good orator, and by extension the good poet and man of letters, move those whom they address to good actions, to the completion of their human being in virtue. The humanists complained that scholastic learning had no effect on the conduct of life. As Milton put it addressing the schools, "it is amply clear to you how little these trivialities contribute to morality or purity of life, which is the most important consideration of all."\(^\text{14}\) And as humanists saw it, studies whose end was only the contemplation of truth by the faculty of reason went with monasticism, hence Milton's reference to the "disputations of sour old men which reek ... of the monkish cells in which they were written."\(^\text{15}\)

14 Prolusion, 111, Complete Prose, 1, 245--46.

15 Prolusion, 111, Complete Prose, 1, 241.

Scholastic philosophy, on the other hand, was engaged in the dialectical refinement of ideas. The humanist view of such pursuits was that their outcome was interminable disputation and a splitting of the community of the mind into warring academic sects. Hence Petrarch's writings are full of complaints about the plague of insular logicians, British and Sicilian, Averroists and Aristotelian pedants. And the charge recurs throughout the period of neoclassical humanism. For 16th Century humanists, the *Summulae Parvules* of Peter of Spain is a by-word for all that was absurd and dehumanizing in scholastic learning. Milton echoes the charge of "petty subtleties." And even in the 18th Century the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* ridicule the questions of Aquinas and Suarez: "If temptation be *proprium quarto modo* of the Devil? deny'd Aquinas." "Whether besides the real being of actual being, there be any other being necessary to cause a thing to be?"

With the complaint concerning pedantic, oversubtle and jejune matter went the humanist attack on scholastic language. Much of the attack may strike

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19 *Prolusion, 111, Complete Prose, 1, 241.*  
20 *Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus*, ed. Charles Kerby-Miller (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), p.123--24. The line of humanist and Baconian criticism is still heard from the Scottish philosopher of rhetoric, George Cambell, who in many ways sums up the tradition: "Shall we then pronounce it [syllogistic logic] the science of logomachy, or in plain English, the art of fighting with words about words.... I shall therefore only title it the scholastic art of disputation" (Philosophy of Rhetoric [London: William Tegg, 1850], pp.69--70).  
us as affected, the attitude, for example, that scholastic Latin was a second
invasion of barbarism and sack of civilization, or the preciosity of some
humanist fashions. But if the decking out of commonplace and ill thought out
material is often how the humanist ideal realized itself, the ideal as an
ideal was better than a concern with style at the expense of content. The
ideal of style was essentially the study of urbanity we traced in the pre­
ceding chapter, the study of a truly human and humanizing discourse accommo­
dated to a developed and generous notion of human manners. The aim of elo­
quence was to civilize. The complaint of the humanists about the language of
scholasticism was that it suited pursuits that withdrew from the concerns of
civilization. Here eloquence stood as a measure of what was appropriate to
the human mind, and so as a measure of human learning. The inquiries of the
scholastics neglected the proper use of language and so drew apart from the
common sense of mankind, which it was the business of eloquence to cultivate
in order to express what is truly human. 22

The following passage from Milton's Third Prolusion gathers together the
various humanist charges against scholasticism of barren subtlety, vain
altercation, uncivilizing style and defective humanity:

But these useless and barren controversies and bickerings lack
all power to affect the emotions in any way whatever; they merely
dull and stupefy the intellect. Further they bring delight to
none but those of a rude and boorish disposition, inclined by
some innate tendency to quarrels and dissension, prating fellows
moreover, and such as detest and ever turn away from sound and
wholesome wisdom. Let us then banish such an one with all his
quibbles to the Caucasus or wheresoever blind Barbarity holds sway....

22 In his Dialectical Disputations, Lorenzo Valla takes up such a position.
See Jerold B. Seigel, Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism
1, 146.
These studies are as fruitless as they are joyless, and can add nothing whatever to true knowledge. If we set before our eyes those hordes of old men in monkish garb, the chief authors of these quibbles, how many among them have ever contributed anything to the enrichment of literature? Beyond a doubt, by their harsh and uncouth treatment they have nearly rendered hideous that philosophy which was once cultured and well-ordered and urbane, and like evil genii they have implanted thorns and briars in men's hearts and introduced discord into the schools.\(^23\)

I have already remarked how the notion of human creatureliness emerged with the development of neoclassical humanism as the study of man. The notion seems implied in eloquence as humanizing discourse, though by no means always educed from it by humanist thought. The notion of creatureliness implicit in eloquence comes out most frequently in the humanist charge that scholasticism engaged in a form of discourse and studied subjects above human capacities. So in his *Christian Doctrine* Milton is careful not to go beyond the forms in which God had accommodated himself to human finitude and to distinguish his theology from scholastic disputes and philosophical speculations about matters on which there could be no human certainty.\(^24\) This is a humanist as well as Protestant direction to take. A sense of the absurdity of the human creature aspiring beyond its humanity to angelhood and tumbling into absurdity surely lies behind Erasmus's invective on scholastic doctors, when, for example, he suggests the scholastic sects be sent to undo the Turk, "When they shall see the black friars fight and scold for Thomas, and then the grey friars matched with them, defending one the other party their subtle and fervent hot doctors, which they call Seraphicos, some speaking as Reals, some as Nominals."\(^25\) The humanist critique of scholasticism characterized an ambitious attempt to link man with God through his rationality as vain

\(^{23}\) Prolusion, 111, Complete Prose, 1, 244--45.

\(^{24}\) *Christian Doctrine*, Bk.1, Ch.5, tr. John Carey, ed. Maurice Kelley, Complete Prose, 5, 218.

learning. With this critique we may align Montaigne's attack on rational theology together with his insistence on the creaturely middle state of human rationality, even if he took the attack to extremes. We may also align it with the Reformers' critique of a Christian learning that substituted a philosophical theology for the language in which God had chosen to make himself known to the human creature.

It must not be thought, though, that all scholastic philosophy could be charged with aspiring to a more than human rationality. The Occamists in particular pointed to the gulf between human reason and God. On the Trinity the Occamists' opinion is much the same as Erasmus's that the subject lay outside the competence of human discourse. But the grounds for Erasmus's opinion were to be found, not in dialectic, but in philology and eloquence: the text was inconclusive, the doctrine had no application to Christian life, grounds radically different from scholastic ones. Erasmus's notion of the true theologian is in line with such an approach to the study of Christian doctrines: "To me he is truly a theologian who teaches not by skill with intricate syllogisms but by a disposition of mind, by the very expression of the eyes, by his very life that riches should be disclaimed; that the Christian should not put his trust in the supports of this world, but must rely entirely on heaven." Similarly the "philosophy of Christ" he speaks of in the Enchiridion is a philosophy of an ethical and active cast. It is with a certain slyness that Erasmus calls his application of Christian ideas to life the philosophy of Christ. For the term suggests that the speculative and metaphysical bent of scholastic theology was a misunderstanding of the sort of active wisdom Christianity was concerned with. The strategy behind


the appropriation of the word "philosophy" to the concerns of Christian eloquence is much the same as Arnold's later appropriation of the word "science" for the ethical Christianity he sets against the dogmatic structures of his day.

The joining of eloquence to the edifying and civilizing impulse of Christianity is an important aspect of neoclassical humanism. Indeed such a notion of Christian eloquence was apparent in patristic times. It received medieval expression in John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon*. It lies behind Milton's idea of the power of poetry to edify a whole nation. And, a final instance, Pope has a passage in the *Dunciad*, the greatest of humanist attacks on vain learning, that finely sums up the humanist criticism of scholastic theology and contrasts it with the civilizing effort of Christian eloquence.

Aristarchus in Book 4 extols to the goddess Dullness her reign in divinity: neither Barrow nor Atterbury, "both great Geniuses and eloquent Preachers," according to Pope's note, "... who equally made it their care to advance the polite Arts in their several Societies", have succeeded in disturbing her reign. Both are types (like Erasmus) of a Christian eloquence directed to humane and civilizing ends, but, as Aristarchus triumphantly exclaims, their work is overwhelmed by speculative theology.


See! still thy own, the heavy Canon roll
And metaphysic smokes involve the Pole.
For thee we dim the eyes, and stuff the head
With all such reading as was never read;
For thee explain a thing till all men doubt it,
And write about it, Goddess, and about it:
So spins the silk worm small its slender store,
And labours till it clouds itself all o'er.  

No one I suppose who has tried to write more than ten pages to the point
can feel at ease with these lines. But their all too universal bearing is by the way. Their specific mark is theological refinement. The pole in the first couplet is, of course, the pole of the universe where, as in Paradise Lost, it gains on to heaven. There is a pun on "cannon", and the smoke of gunfire becomes a metaphor for the smoke of theological warfare. The effect of speculative theology and the metaphysical elaboration of dogma is to obscure the way to heaven. But which theologians has Pope in mind? It is almost certain that he drew the astonishing image of the silk-worm from Bacon's account of the schoolmen and their "vermiculate questions". In that case the scholastics are for him, as for Erasmus, types of theologians who draw the mind from the ethical substance of Christianity to matters that are of no real human concern.

The union of eloquence with the moral and civilizing purposes of Christianity does not conflict with our earlier discovery of a separation between the Christian study of the will at its most penetrating and the neo-classical humanist study of man. The philosophy of Christ as Erasmus interpreted it, for all its virtues, is inadequate, when measured against the

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30 Advancement of Learning, Robertson, p. 55: "Surely, like as many substances in nature, which are solid do putrefy and corrupt into worms, so it is the property of good and sound knowledge to putrefy and dissolve into a number of subtile, idle, unwholesome and (as I may term them) vermiculate questions, which have indeed a kind of quickness and life of spirit, but no soundness of matter or goodness of quality. This kind of degenerate learning did chiefly reign among the schoolmen." For Barrow and Atterbury, see Dunciad, 4, 11.245--46 and note.
insights of Luther and Montaigne, to grasp the Christian study of the will and the later course of neoclassical humanism withdrew from the attempt. But the interpretation and advancement of the moral and civilizing influence of Christianity lay entirely within the competence of neoclassical humanists. Indeed they chose to take up these matters as part of their humanizing enterprise in the course of distinguishing them from scholastic pursuits.

C. The Union of Philosophy and Eloquence in Renaissance Humanism

The difference between humanism and scholasticism on the basis of eloquence is easily maintained because neoclassical humanists were vociferous about it. But the second area in which neoclassical humanism differed from speculative philosophy is less easily entered upon, for humanists had, generally speaking, no quarrel with Renaissance platonism. Frequently they platonized. The distinction to be made is between speculative philosophy and a humanism informed by the idea of eloquence, essentially the same distinction as the one between scholasticism and neoclassical humanism, and we might accordingly have expected a similar contention of humane learning with platonism. Indeed if the thesis is to hold that humanist studies matured with the sort of study of man in his creaturely condition to be found in Montaigne, there must be some fairly radical distinction between neoclassical humanism and platonism. Such a distinction, however, cannot be rigorously enforced between the humanism of the Italian Renaissance and Florentine platonism. There humanist and platonist concerns seem not only to have co-existed but to have shared a similar impulse. And it is only with Valla that Italian humanism distinguishes itself sharply from speculative philosophy and looks forward to the study of man in his middle state that is characteristic of the maturity of neoclassical humanism.

What lies behind the confusion of humanist and platonist studies in the Renaissance is the union of philosophy and eloquence. This is an ideal
Milton holds up in his Third Prolusion against the practice of scholastic philosophy. He contrasts "their harsh and uncouth treatment" of philosophy with a "cultured and well-ordered and urbane" one. And the union of philosophy and eloquence is so well established for him that when he speaks of the fallen angels in Book 2 of *Paradise Lost*, the topics of their discourse are "Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate, Fixed Fate, free Will, Foreknowledge absolute" (ll.559--60), topics of philosophy. It is not clear what Milton means by lodging the union of philosophy and eloquence in hell. As I remarked in the preceding chapter, the views of the older Milton on eloquence are ambivalent. Possibly he is generally damning the union of eloquence with an amalgam of ancient speculative philosophy as "Vain wisdom all, and false Philosophie" (I.565), possibly only a misapplication of it. But either way, the passage bears witness to an ideal that persisted into the 17th Century, though vigorous efforts of neoclassical humanism were critical of it.

In order to understand the union of philosophy and eloquence in the early stage of neoclassical humanism, it is useful to glance at the form Cicero gave to classical humanism. Renaissance humanism in its original impetus was a revival of those ideas of eloquence and liberal studies that go back through medieval humanism to the educational provisions of the Empire. Here the inspirational figure was Cicero, who gave the most memorable and influential formulation of an idea of universal culture based on eloquence, an idea that included a knowledge of philosophy. He made it his business, in fact, to reconcile classical philosophy with eloquence, for the contention between philosophy and eloquence had already arisen in the ancient world.

31 Prolusion, 111, Complete Prose, I, 245.

We know it from the philosophers' side in Plato's disparagement of the sophists, the humanists of antiquity. Cicero's position, however, was that true eloquence and true wisdom have no existence apart from each other. "Socrates, however ... separated the science of wise thinking from that of elegant speaking, though in reality they are closely linked together .... This is the source from which has sprung the undoubtedly absurd and unprofitable and reprehensible severance between the tongue and the brain, leading to our having one set of professors to teach us to think and another to teach us to speak".  

It is the purpose of much of Cicero's De Oratore and perhaps of his whole philosophical output to heal the division Socrates made between eloquence and philosophy. One reason why Cicero entertained such a purpose is that he was not, strictly, a philosopher; another is that by his time serious work in philosophy had stopped. He wrote at a time when an intelligent amateur might have confidence that he had not missed anything of importance. The differences between the schools had diminished to pedantic disputes, and he felt, no doubt, that the time had come to take general stock of the wisdom that might be got from philosophy as a whole.  

Not that Cicero attempted to reconcile all the various philosophical doctrines into a universal philosophy. He may have been eclectic but he was not a syncretist. His philosophical works do in fact subject the various current theories to a critical sifting. But if he was not properly a philosopher, it must be asked what his standards of criticism and selection were. In the first place the standard is what fits the requirements of the ideal orator. Crassus in De Oratore criticizes the philosophical tradition stemming from Socrates, a tradition of thinkers who had retired from public

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affairs and public speaking to apply themselves to refining speculation.

What he wants from philosophy is ideas on universal and particularly moral issues and a training in how to think. And this he believes he has acquired and others might acquire from philosophy as long as it is taken as part of the general culture of men engaged in life and particularly public life. Clearly such a study of philosophy will not be very rigorous. Indeed Cicero's reconciliation of philosophy and eloquence is not really a solution of the issues between them but a gentlemanly compromise in which tact was more important than inquiry.

A second standard guiding Cicero's sifting and criticizing philosophical ideas is supplied by his concern with law. A philosophy that finds reason in nature corresponding to the human reason of the individual or of the government of society underwrites the law. The law, which is an institution of human reason, will be also the expression of a reason that is in the nature of things. Most Greek philosophies contended for a rational ordering of the universe, and it was this, their general sense, that appealed to Cicero's Roman piety about the law. At any rate, a famous passage in his *De Legibus* puts exactly this continuity between reason in man and universal law with even more than his usual copiousness.

He who knows himself will realize, in the first place, that he has a divine element within him, and will think of his own inner nature as a kind of consecrated image of God; and so he will always act and think in a way worthy of so great a gift of the gods, and when he has examined and thoroughly tested himself, he will understand how nobly equipped by Nature he entered life and what manifold means he possesses for the attainment and acquisition of wisdom. For from the very first he began to form in his mind and shadowy spirit concepts, as it were, of all sorts, and when these have been illuminated under the guidance of wisdom, he perceives that he will be a good man, and, for that very reason, happy.

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35 *De Oratore*, 111, xiv, 52—xxiv, 95; xxvi, 122 — xxxv, 143.
For when the mind having attained to a knowledge and perception of the virtues, has abandoned its subservience to the body and its indulgence of it, and has put down pleasures as if it were a taint of dishonour, has escaped from all fear of death or pain, has entered into a partnership of love with its own, recognizing as its own all who are joined to it by Nature; when it has taken up the worship of the gods and pure religion, has sharpened the vision both of the eye and of the mind so that they can choose the good and reject the opposite--a virtue which is called prudence because it foresees--then what greater degree of happiness can be described or imagined? And further, when it has examined the heavens, the earth, the seas, the nature of the universe, and understands whence all these things come and whither they must return, when and how they are destined to perish, what part of them is mortal and transient and what is divine and eternal; when it most lays hold of the governor of the universe, and when it realizes that it is not shut in by [narrow] walls as a resident of some fixed spot, but is a citizen of the universe, as it were of a single city--then in the midst of this universal grandeur, and with such a view and comprehension of nature, ye immortal gods, how well it will know itself, according to the precept of the Pythian Apollo.

If it were my purpose to do justice to Cicero as a philosopher, this passage, at once grand and trite, would be insufficient. But since it is my purpose to characterize Cicero's assimilation of philosophy to humanitas, this passage will usefully epitomize his views, and not only his views but the views of humanists in the empire, the middle ages, and the early Renaissance. But besides its assertion of a belief in universal reason, the passage is interesting because of what it has to say about self-knowledge. What Cicero has in mind is something quite different from Montaigne's study of himself or Pope's study of mankind. For him, self-knowledge means knowledge of the rationality of the human soul, and that implies the divinity of man. It proved an immensely attractive interpretation of the Delphic injunction, though, as will emerge, one that was at odds with the real interests of humanism.

The belief in universal reason imported into humanism the philosophical theism common to most ancient philosophies. What we have earlier called "Christian humanism" was the Christianizing of this amalgam of eloquence and philosophical theism. And in this form it passed into medieval and Renaissance humanism. It should be remarked, however, that the Ciceronian union of philosophy and eloquence, of ratio and oratio, was essentially a compromise. As soon as philosophy reasserted itself vigorously as a discipline, the union would fall apart. So at the outset of the great effort of medieval philosophy, John of Salisbury protests in the name of eloquence against the unbalanced study of dialectic, the cultivation of ratio without oratio.37 And similarly the humanism of the Renaissance repeats and elaborates John's charges in its contention with scholasticism.

Yet like John, the Renaissance humanists are hostile to philosophy only in its vigorous contemporary form. Neither Petrarch nor his followers wished to dismiss philosophy. They wished, rather, to restore the Ciceronian compromise, in which eloquence was the master discipline.38 Characteristically they turned to the ancient in order to turn their backs upon the contemporary philosophy. They took up Aristotle, the political and moral philosopher, as against the physical and metaphysical philosopher of scholasticism. And various turns of fashion exalted Plato or stoicism. The study of ancient philosophy gave scope to the humanists' linguistic skills as interpreters or translators.39 But more important, the whole field of ancient philosophy had been charted by Cicero and adapted to the ends of humanist culture.

37 Metalogicon, pp.10, 94.


In this form the study of philosophy was harmless and indeed encouraged an easy scepticism about the certainty the human mind might attain in speculative matters.\(^{40}\) In other words humanist interest in ancient philosophy was not a proper discipline of philosophical inquiry. To such inquiry as it was practised in contemporary form Italian and early Northern humanists were vociferously hostile. The true relation between eloquence and philosophy was in fact uneasy and unresolved.

Perhaps only Valla worked out a thoroughly consistent line. He was prepared to write off even ancient speculative philosophy and seems to have thought eloquence the only proper access to wisdom. Much might perhaps be made of the fact that he was one of the first professors of eloquence.\(^{41}\) But of all Italian humanists he alone seems to have been able to see clearly beyond the Ciceronian compromise and to state the implications of a wholehearted commitment to eloquence. His position in his *Dialectical Disputations* is that thought is discourse; it cannot be detached from language; scholastic philosophers do not speak like humans and their terms of art such as *entitas, quidditas, haecceitas* violate the laws of grammar, common sense and clear communication -- a position rather like a 20th century logical positivist's.\(^{42}\) It is such humanist criticism of scholastic philosophy rather than Occam's razor, surely, that lies behind Bacon's animadversions upon the Idols of the Marketplace and Hobbes's upon essences in the *Leviathan*\(^{43}\)


That we can align Valla with those great 17th century critics of vain learning means that, with him, the humanist criticism of philosophy is not merely the elegant complaint of the literary mind or even the protest of culture against a one-sided intellectual development. Humanist criticism has made the art of discourse or eloquence the cutting edge of the mind.

And in other respects Valla is equally thorough in his criticisms of speculative philosophy. His De vero falsoque bono is a dialogue written against stoic idealism and in praise of epicureanism. His epicureanism has little to do with the philosophy of Epicurus, and in fact Valla is really praising the sensual and creaturely nature of man as we know him at the expense of the moral illusions of idealistic philosophy. It is probable that the praise of the sensual life is conducted ironically to deflate stoic pretensions -- a sort of praise of folly -- rather than to advance the cause of hedonism. Indeed Valla's purpose seems to be to recommend Christianity because it addresses itself with its promise of the heavenly fruition of human nature, not to a stoic paragon, but to sensual and creaturely mankind. 44

Here the humanist criticism of philosophical rationalism is moral rather than linguistic. Stoical virtues falsify human nature. Criticism of the stoic's pride had, of course, been heard before. 45 What is significant about Valla's dialogue is the contrast he draws between stoical man and the actual human creature, and his preference for the latter. This is a moral judgement that Erasmus, Montaigne and Swift will concur in. Indeed it seems inevitable that a serious study of human nature should pass this judgement. Eloquence is humanizing discourse. Ideally a complete human culture should inform it.

44 Seigel, Rhetoric and Philosophy, pp.147 ff; Trinkaus, In Our Image and Likeness, 1, 105--46; Kristeller, Eight Philosophers of the Renaissance, p.33.

45 Both Boccaccio and Salutati, for example, were critical of stoicism. See Toffanin, p.142. See also Don Cameron Allen, "The Rehabilitation of Epicurus and his Theory of Pleasure in the Early Renaissance," SP, 41 (1944), 1--15. Cf. Erasmus, Praise of Folly, pp.15, 26, 39 and Calvin's Institutes, Bk.III, Ch.vii, 9--11, MacNeill, 1, 708--12.
Cicero had attempted to add a knowledge of philosophic speculation to the traditional constituents of culture, to the study of literature and history. But the intrusion of philosophic speculation helped to substitute a rational creature for a creature at best *rationis capax*, passionate, appetitive and volitional, and to conceal the fluctuating and diverse being from himself. Unlike other Italian humanists, Valla was prepared to break the Ciceronian compromise with the idealistic philosophy that invited man to know himself by looking rather into his spirit or divine spark than at himself in his complete human nature. He was prepared to break with ancient as well as scholastic philosophy. This was to give over to eloquence entirely the job of interpreting experience and refining the common sense of mankind. But more than that, Valla's attack on ancient philosophic idealism leads naturally to a truly humanist view of the dignity of man. Instead of a creature fleeing from himself in speculative mirrors or strained and sublimated through stoical virtues, Valla praises in epicureanism man living according to his nature. A line of humanism that founds the understanding of man on his creatureliness runs, I have suggested, between Montaigne and the Augustans. The dignity such a humanism accords to man is featured in the giants of Rabelais or Swift, giants because they are gigantically human and not because they are humans attempting to be more than humans. Brobdingnagian man, "a being darkly wise, and rudely great," is a humanist picture of the potential greatness of man within creaturely limits. But to arrive at such a picture it was necessary first to reject the picture of the dignity of man according to the speculative tradition of both ancient and scholastic philosophy. It is here that Valla's importance lies. He advanced the notion that eloquence was a sufficient criticism of life and that human speech was the measure of human nature. This was to unfasten from the creature speculative dignities stitched out of philosophic distortions of language and to turn to the study of man.
Valla's writings on Christianity pursue the same line. He abused philosophic theology and asked for the study of scripture in its place. Just as human thought could not be detached from discourse, so the thoughts that God wanted to communicate to men about divine matters could not be detached from the text of the bible. This supported, if necessary, by philological criticism was the proper evidence for Christian beliefs. And on this evidence he came to conclusions concerning free will and the Eucharist remarkably close to the Reformers. In substituting a scriptural for a theological Christian learning, Valla did away with the amalgam of Christian-ity and philosophical theism that is the substance of medieval and most Italian Renaissance humanism.

With Valla's work then three things that had huddled together, eloquence, philosophy and Christian faith, disentangle themselves. Eloquence and philosophy fall apart and philosophy and Christian faith. Yet eloquence and Christian faith might coexist without fusing. I have already discussed the relation between humanism and Protestant Christianity, agreed on the creatureliness of man and on the application of humanist learning to the text yet curiously separated from each other on the value of the study of man. And I have also dealt with Montaigne's separation of religion and human culture, a separation which, however, comes together in his picture of the creatureliness of man. Valla, however, was not deeply involved in such difficult adjustments between eloquence and Christianity. He was employed by the Pope, in spite of his exposure of the Donation of Constantine, because as Pound remarks "the Papacy needed a latinist and was still sufficiently intelligent to KNOW that the Papacy needed a latinist", for its power over

men depended on the sort of eloquence that Valla could command.\textsuperscript{47} If we are to believe Toffanin, it was entirely characteristic of Italian humanism that it should conceive itself bound in the service of the \textit{imperium Christi}.\textsuperscript{48} But Valla, so it seems to me, was the most original and incisive of the Italian humanists and went beyond what was merely characteristic. While he probably exerted little influence upon the course of thought (the Reformers, it is true, cite him occasionally as a rather unedifying witness), he had the acumen to penetrate to the real issues of humanism and so to anticipate positions that humanism would take up as it became increasingly critical.

Valla's criticism of the union of eloquence, philosophy and Christianity is untypical. For the most part Italian humanists were content to stress the importance of eloquence and the barbarousness of scholastic philosophy, but with ancient philosophy maintained some sort of compromise. There is no consensus nor even much consistency throughout the works of individual humanists, merely continual debate on the issues. Yet even if a humanist argued as Landino did for the primacy of philosophic wisdom and the contemplative life, he nevertheless entered upon the question as a matter of applying ideas to life, indeed as a choice of the good life upon which the resources of eloquence and the examples of literature were to be brought to bear.\textsuperscript{49} The issues were debated in a humanist fashion. From their debate emerged the possibility of a criticism of life.

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Guide to Kulchur} (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, n.d.), p.160.

\textsuperscript{48} Toffanin, p.64.

\textsuperscript{49} Landino was admittedly a platonizing humanist. See the comments in his \textit{Camaldulensian Disputations} quoted in Eugene F. Rice, jr., \textit{The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom} (Cam., Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), p.69. For humanist "emphasis on man" in philosophical discussions see Kristeller, \textit{Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance}, p.16.
And just as for Italian humanists in general the ideal union of philosophy and eloquence held, so in their treatment of Christian faith, there is no evidence of the critical adjustment between humanist and religious concerns together with the stress on human creatureliness that we found in Montaigne and saw anticipated in Valla. There is indeed evidence that Italian humanists felt competent to bring Christianity as a whole within the discourse of culture. And among the religious topics they addressed themselves to there is a pronounced interest in the Christian glorification of man. According to Trinkaus, the central doctrine for them was the Incarnation, the joining of manhood to godhead. The divinization of man, then, which has always been recognized as a Renaissance theme, is really a humanist interpretation of the Christian theology of glory, man triumphant in the Christian faith. Nor is this a matter only of the destiny of the individual man. Italian humanists appear to have written from a consciousness of the role of the Church in the divinization of man. The mass of writings on the sacraments shows that they took the historical role of the Church in joining the human race to God seriously. Toffanin has, moreover, argued that the humanists' attempt to revive Roman antiquity


51 See Toffanin, p.194; Trinkaus, In Our Image, 1, 320--21.

52 See Trinkaus, In Our Image, 2, 615--50.
and their association of humanitas and Romanitas gave a new resonance to Roman Catholicism. Valla has a splendid passage on the Empire of Romanitas:

The peoples and nations long ago threw off Roman rule as an unpleasant burden. But they thought the Roman language sweeter than any honey, more splendid than any silk, more precious than any gold or jewels and they kept it among themselves as if it were a god sent down from heaven. Accordingly the sacred power of the Latin language is great and truly its indwelling spirit is great, since it has been kept by strangers, barbarians and enemies reverentially and religiously for so many centuries, so that it should be a matter not so much for grieving as for rejoicing to us Romans and to the whole listening earth for glorying. We have lost Rome, power and authority, not so much through our fault as the times. And yet truly through this more splendid authority we yet still reign in the great part of the world. Italy is ours, Gaul is ours, Spain is ours and Germany, Pannonia, Illyricum and many other nations. For the Roman empire is wherever the Roman language reigns.53

It seems only natural to connect this Romanitas with the sway of Roman Catholicism. And indeed, according to Toffanin, the reviving civilization was a spiritualizing of the Empire that the Church naturally presided over; man was triumphant in the Church, and the true successors of the Italian humanists were the Jesuits.54


54 See Toffanin, pp.64, 80.
The divinization of man is at odds with those concerns of a later stage of neoclassical humanism with the creaturely standing of man. It is certainly true that the infinitude of man, his capacity for God, is as much a concern of the Christian tradition as his finitude and the study of the will we have discussed earlier. But while I found it possible to reflect, however partially, upon the bearing on human experience of Paul's and Luther's doctrines, I am incapable of such a reflection upon the Christian divinization of man. The Italian humanists write on the subject in the capacity of lay theologians and as far as I can see do not make of the Christian doctrines an adequate interpretation of moral experience. And whereas the idea of human creatureliness provides a frame for the study of man, the idea of human infinitude distracts from such a study. In the next chapter I shall try to provide some support for that judgement. *Jerusalem Delivered*, I shall argue, gives epic expression to the Italian humanist concern with the divinization of man, and its inadequacies as a criticism of life are related to that concern, whereas the strengths of *Paradise Lost* and *Absalom and Achitophel* as criticisms of life go with their concern with human creatureliness, a concern characteristic of the maturity of neoclassical humanism.

D. Renaissance Platonism

The Christian divinization of man goes better with speculative philosophy than with eloquence. The Incarnation of the Word in man, the mediation between man and God, the immortality of the soul lend themselves more easily to treatment in the language of Plato and his followers than to the study of man. But before Valla vigorously distinguished the concerns of eloquence and the concerns of speculative philosophy, humanists may have thought it their business to treat Christian doctrines of the infinitude of man because classical philosophical wisdom was still part of how they conceived humanitas. I have given my reasons for thinking Valla's position the
critical one and he seems to have picked up the sound lines of Italian humanism. But it must be allowed that the medieval combination of eloquence, speculative philosophy and Christianity is more prevalent than critical thinking. The most remarkable instance of such a confusion, or, if one prefers, fusion, is Renaissance platonism. This has nothing to do with humanism as I understand it. It studies ancient traditions of speculative philosophy and magic, platonic, neoplatonic, hermetic or Cabalistic, rather than classical letters, and its relation to eloquence is peculiar. Yet Florentine platonism together with the ideas of other platonizing schools such as the Academies in France and, in a comparatively sober way the Cambridge platonists, is often taken as typical of Renaissance humanism, and it seems important to clear up what is more than a terminological confusion.

But although I mean to draw a sharp distinction between humanism and Renaissance platonism, I must make it clear that there is little evidence that the distinction was observed by neoclassical humanists. Many, at any rate, whom I should wish to call humanists took at least a glancing interest in some of the most esoteric studies associated with platonism. Reuchlin, for example, the uncle of Melanchthon, learnt Hebrew in order to study the Cabala. Lefevre d’Étampes edited hermetic texts. Others were less seriously involved, taking a literary rather than philosophic interest in such matters. It would be astonishing, for instance, to find a Renaissance magus in Sir Thomas More. Nevertheless he had felt the charm of the Florentine circle and translated Pico’s *Heptaplu*. and his nephew’s biography of him. Although Erasmus seems to ridicule hermetic studies in one place, yet in others he took a literary interest in hieroglyphs, and Rabelais similarly amuses
himself with Pythagorean mysteries. Platonizing or hermetic notions turn up everywhere in English 17th century literature. They turn up not only where one would expect them in the works of those such as Vaughan, Traherne, Aubrey or the Cambridge Platonists, with avowed platonizing and hermetic interests, but even in the works of Ben Jonson, or indeed of Milton. Renaissance platonism, it must be said, is so figurative and poetic that it is hard to distinguish a literary use of its ideas from a philosophical or scientific commitment to them. We should in any case beware of thinking that a distinction between humanist and platonizing interests was apparent at the time.

Moreover, not only did humanists entertain platonist ideas, but there are real affinities between platonism and the humanism of the Italian Renaissance. The justest way of distinguishing the two will be to look at those affinities, affinities which explain why Renaissance platonism has been taken, wrongly to my mind, as an expression of Renaissance humanism.

In the first place Renaissance platonism was a thoroughgoing attempt to fuse the philosophical culture of antiquity with Christianity. Humanism before Valla was engaged in a similar attempt. If the Italian humanists were content to treat the Christian doctrines of the divinization of man in mainly theological language, the platonists were able to supply a translation into the language of ancient speculative philosophy.


Renaissance platonism was an ambitious synthesis of ancient speculative traditions with Christian belief. And the Christianity was no mere nominally baptized theism. If in some places Ficino, for example, writes as if man had a natural capacity for God, in others he makes it clear that the soul's love of God that impelled the soul towards him is the work of grace.\footnote{59 Anders Nygren, \textit{Eros and Agape}, tr. Philip Watson (New York: Harper, 1968), pp.667-77, argues that the mystical platonism of Ficino is something radically contrary to Christianity. Trinkaus, \textit{In Our Image}, 2, 751--2, shows that Ficino took Christian doctrines, especially those of grace, seriously.} And Pico's \textit{Heptapla}, a Cabalistic and platonizing commentary on Genesis, asserts the central importance of the Incarnation: "Man cannot be joined to God except through Him who, since he joined man to God himself, was made the true mediator."\footnote{60 Trinkaus, \textit{In Our Image}, 2, 523.} When the Pope had the Egyptian obelisk raised in Rome, he was
proclaiming that Christianity had triumphantly taken over the wisdom of the ancient theological traditions. Appropriately a cross stands on top of this monument of Egyptian religion.  

Earlier I quoted a passage from Cicero's *De Legibus*, which expressed a belief in universal order. It was with such beliefs that Cicero's philosophic culture was most easily Christianized and developed into that union of eloquence, philosophy, and Christianity that seemed to deserve the name of "Christian humanism". Renaissance platonism is the hypertrophy of the belief in a correspondence between reason in man and in the mind of God. "The human understanding," Bacon wrote, "is of its own nature prone to suppose the existence of more order and regularity in the world than it finds. And though there be many things in nature which are singular and unmatched, yet it devises for them parallels and conjugates and relatives which do not exist." To no school does this stricture better apply than to Renaissance platonism. The informing principle behind the symmetries and proportions Renaissance platonism imagined seems to have been a belief in a universe built of correspondences, world within world, each the copy of the other, man himself a microcosm within the macrocosm, and all these orders of things copies of an order in the mind of God. Through the system of correspondences

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63 Bacon, *Novum Organum*, Philosophical Works, p.265. See also p.272, for his strictures on the master philosopher of Renaissance platonism, Pythagoras.
one order of things influenced another and through knowledge of the system
men might hope to direct the sympathies and affinities of nature magically
or, reflecting upon them, enter into the mind of God. Such beliefs pro-
duced bizarre discoveries. Sir Thomas Browne's *Garden of Cyrus* gives a
good idea of what the Italian Renaissance platonists had been doing earlier
and of the fanciful correspondences they detected in things. He develops
the idea that the quincunx was the building block of the universe and having
shown its ubiquity in architecture, botany, geometry, optics, and other
sciences, turned to the Cabalistic interpretation of the alphabet, where the
efficacy of the number five was still apparent. Even if *The Garden of
Cyrus* was more of a poetical than a scientific undertaking, it had no doubt
a use in Browne's eyes as a meditation on the divine ordering of the world.
"All things began in order, so shall they end and so shall they begin again;
according to the ordainer of order and mystical Mathematics of the City of
Heaven."  

So far I have tried to indicate how Renaissance platonism united philo-
sophy and Christian belief and how in an exaggerated form that answered to
the earlier humanists' reconciliation of Christianity and pagan philosophic
culture. Now I shall turn to a second affinity between Renaissance platonism
and Renaissance humanism. In a peculiar way Renaissance platonism was a
union of philosophy and eloquence and a union of philosophy, and eloquence
was at least one preoccupation of Renaissance humanism.

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64 See Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, tr. Virginia Conant
(Gloucs., Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), p. 99, and passim on doctrine of
correspondences.

65 The *Garden of Cyrus* in *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*,

66 *Garden of Cyrus*, p. 229.

Renaissance platonism avoided the intense forms of dialectical analysis characteristic of scholastic philosophy. It is true that both Ficino and Pico wrote upon topics such as being, characteristic of the schoolmen's metaphysics, and some of their arguments are conducted, if not with dialectical rigour, still rather judiciously than fancifully. At the same time, their philosophy, with its intense interest in the affinity between the minds of man and of God and in the intellectual structure of nature, fastened on the sympathies uniting things and their motions towards God. Speculation on the platonic Eros meant that contemplation became a kind of active life, an intense motion of the will and affections as well as of the mind. In the introduction to his *Theologia Platonica*, Ficino remarks that Plato "rightly thought it justice and piety that the mind receiving all things from God should refer all things back to God. So if we philosophize on morals, the spirit is to be purified, in order that, become more clear, it may perceive the divine light and honour God; if we look into the causes of things, the causes are to be sought after in order that we should discover the cause of these causes and adore it when it is found."68 This is perhaps to call for a rhetorical philosophy, a philosophy that urges the soul to return to God and brings eloquence to its aid. And certainly among Renaissance Platonists, rhetorical philosophizing was common, the best known example being no doubt Pico's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. And not merely rhetorical, but also poetic philosophizing. Renaissance platonists were in nothing more like Plato than in their penchant for fables and allegories.

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Pico's *Oration*, for example, explains the dignity of man by a fable about his creation: God had used up all the possible attributes in the making of other creatures, so man was left with an indeterminate nature; but that is his glory, his infinitude, for he has the capacity for all things, even to become united with God. Here is an example of a more extravagant kind of allegoresis also from Pico's *Oration*:

Let us also consult the wise Pythagoras, especially wise in that he never deemed himself worthy the name of a wise man. He will first enjoin us not to sit on a bushel, that is, not by unoccupied sloth to lose our rational faculty, by which the soul measures, judges, and considers all things; but we must direct and stimulate it unremittingly by the discipline and rule of dialectic. Then he will point out to us two things particularly to beware of: that we should not make water facing the sun or cut our nails while offering sacrifice. But after we have, through the agency of moral philosophy, both voided the lax desires of our too abundant pleasures and pared away like nail-cuttings sharp corners of anger and stings of wrath, only then may we begin to take part in the holy rites, that is, the mysteries of Bacchus we have mentioned, and to be free for our contemplation, whose father and leader the Sun is rightly named. Finally, Pythagoras will enjoin us to feed the cock, that is to feast the divine part of our soul on the knowledge of things divine as if on substantial food and heavenly ambrosia.

The belief in a universe of correspondences was after all a belief that everything was an allegory of something else, and minds practised in such ideas were adept in veiling or unveiling meanings in poetic and mythological fictions, as Pico's banal rigmarole shows. Accordingly imagination or intuition were called for by a philosophy that set such store in divining the mysteries of things and the enthusiastic communication of them.

In two ways then Renaissance platonism resembled the humanism of the Italian Renaissance: it was a synthesis of classical philosophy and Christian

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beliefs and it was a union of philosophy and eloquence. Yet in spite of
these correspondences, the concerns of platonism and humanism were essentially
different. This is borne out by the development of Renaissance platonism
into the hermetic philosophy of Bruno or Dee and Fludd and the development
of neoclassical humanism into Montaigne's study of man. After the Italian
Renaissance the divergence is patent. Yet even with the platonism and
humanism of the Italian Renaissance we may insist on essential differences.

In place of the orator or man of letters, the complete man of Re­
naisance platonism is the mystagogue or magus. He does not address the
common experience of mankind but divulges secrets. He receives his secrets,
not from the criticism of life or the study of humane letters, but from
inspiration and esoteric traditions. He does not address humanity at large
but academies of initiates; or if he does address humanity, it is the
human race, cosmic man, the individual in the cosmos rather than human
beings among other human beings. He is an unworldly figure and speaks to
associations of the unworldly or other-worldly. The end of platonist
studies is not human culture, nor does it arrive at a study of man in which
notions of urbanity or the criticism of life have any place.

Besides, there is a distinction to be drawn between the humanist pursuit
of knowledge that accords with our humanity and the platonist pursuit of
knowledge that would transport us beyond our humanity. If this distinction
was not evident in the Italian Renaissance, it became increasingly so with
the development of neoclassical humanism. It is true that Renaissance
platonism made as much of the Delphic injunction "Know thyself", as neo­
classical humanism. But instead of taking it as an injunction to study human

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72 Trinkaus, In Our Image, 2, 526, makes it clear that Bruno lies beyond
his general characterizing of Renaissance platonism.
nature in order to become more human, Renaissance platonists took it as an injunction to turn their gaze inwards upon the inhuman abyss of the self to admire its infiniteness. And while they have some beautiful passages treating how a harmonious spirit may inform the whole being of man, they addressed themselves to a part of the whole being, to the spirit, rather than to the whole being itself and its experience of creatureliness.

While Ficino talks about the body as a becoming dress for the spirit, the whole drive of his philosophy is to sublimate the spirit from its material elements, to put off the bodily dress. "Know thyself, O divine race in mortal dress" are the opening words of his letter to mankind; in other words, the body is a disguise, self-knowledge is the knowledge of the divinity within breeding wings. Accordingly he approves of Plato's opinion: "Because [Plato] thought of the mind as a mirror in which the image of God reflects itself easily, when he would seek for God through each of his imprints he turned continually to the beauty of the soul understanding the oracle 'know thyself' to mean above all that whoever chose to know God should first know himself." And when Pico says that the study of eloquence makes us human but the study of philosophy makes us man, it is of man in this mystical sense that he was thinking. But indeed it was not merely self-

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73 "Cognoscere te ipsum, divinum genus mortali veste indutum" (Epist., lib. 1, tom. 1, 42a Opera [Parisiiis, 1641], quoted and tr. Nygren, p. 672.

74 Théologie Platonicienne, 1, 35–36: "Quoniam vero animum esse tamquam speculum arbitratrur, in quo facile divini vultus imago reluceat, idcirco dum per vestigia singula Deum ipsum diligenter indagat, in animi speciem ubique divertit, intelligens oraculum illud 'nosce te ipsum' id potissimum admonere, ut quicquumque Deum optat agnoscer, se ipsum ante cognoscat."

75 See Pico's "Letter to Ermolao Barbaro", in Quirinus Breen, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola on the Conflict of Philosophy and Rhetoric," JHR, 13 (1952), 389: "As to the doctrine of man he seems to hold that it is proper to be humanus, that is to be a humanist, not a barbarian; but one must also be homo, that is a complete human being. If the former is attained by polite letters, the latter is attained through philosophy."
knowledge that was knowledge of God for Renaissance platonists. They could make any science a branch of divinity and find the signatures of God in anything. Instead therefore of looking, as humanism does, for knowledge that fits inside our human being, knowledge that makes us human, in fact, and that we can test against the experience of our humanity, the knowledge they were after was knowledge that would transport them from their humanity and make them see as gods, or rather as God.

For such a transport beyond the human condition, soaring to the empyreal sphere is a recurrent image in Renaissance platonism. Here, for example are Pico's exhortations to mount the sky:

Who would not wish to be so inflamed with those Socratic frenzies sung by Plato in the Phaedrus, that, by the oarage of feet and wings escaping speedily from hence, that is, from a world set on evil, he might be borne on the fastest of courses to the heavenly Jerusalem? Let us be driven, Fathers, let us be driven by the frenzies of Socrates, that they may so throw us into an ecstasy as to put our mind and ourselves in God. Let us be driven by them, if we have first done what is in our power. For if through moral philosophy the forces of our passions have by a fitting agreement become so intent on harmony that they can sing in undisturbed concord, and if through dialectic our reason has moved progressively in a rhythmical measure, then we shall be stirred by the frenzy of the Muses and drink the heavenly harmony with our inmost hearing. Thereupon Bacchus, the leader of the Muses, by showing in his mysteries, that is, in the visible signs of nature, the invisible things of God to us who study philosophy, will intoxicate us with the fulness of God's house, in which, if we prove faithful, like Moses, hallowed theology shall come and inspire us with a doubled frenzy. For, exalted to her lofty height, we shall measure therefrom all things that are and shall be and have been in indivisible eternity; and, admiring their original beauty, like the seers of Phoebus, we shall become her own winged lovers. And at last, roused by ineffable love as by a sting, like burning Seraphim rapt from ourselves, full of divine power we shall no longer be ourselves but become He Himself Who made us.

Neoclassical humanism in its maturity took such images of cosmic flight to represent the pursuit of vain learning, vain because beyond the
creaturely limits of the human mind, Pope, for example, satirizes the presumptuous and vain effort of platonic speculation.

Go, soar with Plato to th'empyreal sphere,
To the first good, first perfect, and first fair;
Or tread the mazy round his followers trod,
And quitting sense call imitating God;
As Eastern priests in giddy circles run,
And turn their heads to imitate the Sun. (Essay on Man, 2, 23–28)

This passage follows on the lines picturing the creaturely standing of man in his middle state.

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of Mankind is Man.
Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state,
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the Skeptic side,
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest,
In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast;
In doubt his Mind or Body to prefer,
Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confus'd;
Still by himself abus'd, or disabus'd;
Created half to rise, and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurl'd:
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world! (2, 1–18)

For Pope, as for Montaigne and Swift, and indeed Milton, the infinitude of man that Renaissance platonism celebrates, the appetite for God, is the infinity of error, the abyss into which humanity falls out of its creaturely standing. Man occupies, in their picture of things, a middle state between two abysses, whether these are Pascal's abysses of the infinitely great and the infinitely small or Pope's more traditional one of the degrees of being
above and below man. Either abyss is bad for man, though to fall into them is easy. Human finitude is precarious. To maintain, or rather to attain, it is the truly human aspiration. For Milton the infinitude of error is suffering, passion, guilt, for Montaigne and the Augustans, human defect and absurdity. So Montaigne: "People want to get out of themselves and escape from the man. That is madness: instead of changing into angels, they change into beasts.... These transcendental humours frighten me" (Of Experience). And A Tale of a Tub is at once a parody of the enthusiastic temper as a whole and a treatise upon it elaborating the theme that "the Corruption of the senses is the Generation of the Spirit."78

At the same time the greatest reflections on human creatureliness do not make out that occupying a middle state is happy or secure. Brobdingnagian man may be a vision of the grandeur man is capable of; it is also a vision of the discomfort or misery of man. Pope's lines on the middle state make that clear. And Pascal makes a similar point about the misery of the creaturely condition: "Conaissons donc notre portée: nous sommes quelque chose, et ne sommes pas tout; ce que nous avons d'être nous cache la connaissance de premiers principes, qui naissent du néant; et le peu que nous avons d'être nous cache la vue de l'infini.... C'est l'état qui nous est naturel, et toutes fois le plus contraire à notre inclination."79 If the


79 Pensées, 84, pp.1108--09.
vision of human creatureliness implied that to be content with human nature was easy, it would not be an interesting criticism of life. If all that Milton had to say was summed up in Raphael's injunction, "be lowliewise:/ Think only what concerns thee and thy being" (Bk.8, ll.173–74), Paradise Lost would have little to say to us. What makes the best humanist work on the finitude of man truly critical and therefore interesting is its realization that to become human within creaturely limits is hard. Human finitude is not so much something imposed on man as the chef d'oeuvre de l'homme, to be determined by and acceded to by an effort of the mind and will. 80

The distinction between humanism and Renaissance platonism is finally, then, the distinction between learning that fits inside the human condition, that is indeed a means of realizing that condition fully and learning that is not fitted to the human condition and would transport, outside it. Such a distinction, mutatis mutandis, was made between humanism and scholastic learning. But at least for the early stages of neoclassical humanism, platonist speculation was more seductive, and I have suggested that the historical amalgam of Christianity, philosophy and eloquence helped to confuse matters. As I see it that amalgam had little to do with the true interests of humanism. The preoccupation of the Italian Renaissance with the divinization of man was unable to come up with an adequate study of man. And the speculative concerns of Renaissance platonism were a distraction from any serious intelligence about human experience. They seem, moreover, a distraction from the true pursuits of eloquence, on which neoclassical humanism was based. For if eloquence is humanizing discourse, discourse bent on the central concerns of humanity, it could not properly go along with the esoteric and

80 Montaigne, Essais, ed. Rat, 2, 568.
speculative discourse of Renaissance platonism any more than with the
dialectical pursuits of scholasticism. The frame in which eloquence could
realize itself most adequately was the idea of creaturely finitude, not
the part philosophical, part poetical, part Christian divinization of man.
The critical development of neoclassical humanism is therefore away from
its earlier Renaissance preoccupation with the divinization of man towards
a study of man in his creaturely middle state. Both the shift of concern
and the concommitant maturing of neoclassical humanism as a criticism of
life will emerge in the comparison I shall undertake in the next chapter
between two early and two late neoclassical epics.
A. Introduction

In this chapter, I shall discuss how *Paradise Lost* stands in the development of the neoclassical epic as a criticism of life. As with other forms of neoclassical humanism, epic was the expression of an idea of letters based on eloquence. Its development goes with those developments of the idea of eloquence into the study of man that we have already marked. The earlier epics that I shall discuss, *The Lusiad* (1572) and *Jerusalem Delivered* (1575), are concerned with the divinization of human ends; the later, *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681) are concerned with human creatureliness. The superiority of the two later epics as criticisms of life is connected to that shift of concern. Yet *Paradise Lost* at the same time falls outside the development of neoclassical humanism. Its human action cannot adequately be accounted for in terms of a poetry based on eloquence and this, though Milton's own early pronouncements on poetry are at one with the standard theories of his day. I shall accordingly try to show how *Paradise Lost* is at once representative of the development of the neoclassical epic towards a serious criticism of life and anomalous.

B. The Improbability of Neoclassical Epic

At first sight neither neoclassical epic practice nor theory offers much promise of a serious criticism of life. In *Orlando Furioso* Astolpho flies to the moon. There in the company of St. John, he sees a man casting into a river from his mantle a load of names inscribed on metal plates. Most of these sink immediately. Some, however, are held (only for a moment, though) above the turbid water by a crow or vulture or chough, while a few are
rescued by swans, who take them in their bills to a nymph tending a temple of fame. St. John explains how these things in the moon correspond to things on earth, how the river is the river of oblivion, the old man, time, how most names like most plates disappear, how some, nevertheless, like those the carrion birds hold up, remain in view for a short time while courtiers praise them, and how, finally, a few, like those the swans rescue, reach immortality through the praise of poets. And just how valuable the services of the poet, particularly the epic poet, are St. John goes on to illustrate.

Blind Homer writes how Agamemnon fought
And won at last great Troy that long resisted
And how Penelope though greatly sought
By many suitors yet in faith persisted,
Yet sure (for aught you know) he might have taught
The contrary to this if he had listed,
That Troy prevaild, that Greeks were conquerd cleane
And that Penelope was but a quesane.

St. John speaks with authority. He is a saint, his fervour is sacred, and he is himself an author. It is mock authority of course. And what makes the joke more piquant is that he has just been speaking in exalted terms of the destiny in store for Hippolyto d'Este, Ariosto's patron. This serious compliment is amusingly undercut by the suggestion that the use of poets is that, like Homer, they can distort the truth for the glory of those whom they wish to celebrate. Yet even if Ariosto means only to recommend himself in his sly and graceful way, he is touching on what is one of the most striking difficulties of neoclassical epic, the

2 Ariosto, Bk.35, st.27.
discrepancy between heroic fiction and what things are like.

Sometimes, as in the example from Ariosto, the discrepancy lies between heroic fiction and what things are like. The real Gloriana was losing her teeth and eyebrows. And in Book 5 of *The Faerie Queene* Spenser uses the heroic fiction to represent Elizabethan foreign policy in a favourable light, too favourable one feels, to be true. In *The Lusiad* Camoens suppresses the near mutiny of Da Cama's fleet rounding the Cape so that he can show not merely a heroic Portuguese commander but heroic Portuguese sailors and, by implication, a nation of Portuguese heroes. But it is not so much the distortion of the fact that matters as the falsifying tenor of the whole narrative. In *The Lusiad* one feels that epic has become the vehicle of a glorious sort of propaganda, too glorious to have much relation to what history is like.

It is true that epic theory distinguished between epic and history. Aristotle distinguished epic from historical narrative on the grounds that while history chronicles events within a given period, epic represents a single human action and shapes it accordingly.

As for the poetry which merely narrates, or imitates by means of versified language (without action), it is evident that it has several points in common with Tragedy. The construction of its stories should clearly be like that in drama; they should be based on a single action, one that is a complete whole in itself, with a beginning, a middle, and end, so as to enable the work to produce its own proper pleasure with all the organic unity of a living creature. Nor should one suppose that there is anything like

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3 *The Lusiad, or the Discovery of India*, tr. William Julius Mickle (Oxf.: Cadell, 1776), pp.XXXVIII — XL, 221, n.

4 Italian epic theorists distinguished history from epic by the embellishments of epic. The epic poet chose a story sufficiently remote in time to allow epic working up. See e.g. Torquato Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*, tr. Mariella Cavalchini and Irene Samuel (Oxf.: Clarendon, 1973), pp. 39—40.
them in our usual histories. A history has to deal not with one action, but with one period and all that happened in that to one or more persons, however disconnected the several events may have been.

Elsewhere Aristotle remarks,

From what we have said it will be seen that the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e. what is possible as being probable or necessary .... Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. By a universal statement I mean one as to what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do — which is the aim of poetry, though it affixes proper names to the characters; by a singular statement, one as to what, say, Alcibiades did or had done to him. 6

What he says here of poetry in general will naturally apply to epic.

And so for him epic differs from history in two ways: first in that its plot deals with a single action and second in that it attempts to show how human beings behave in general. These remarks of Aristotle's are important and puzzling and so ask for further discussion. But for the moment it is enough to point out that his distinction between history and epic does not let The Lusiad out of the real difficulty. For the real difficulty is not that The Lusiad is inaccurate historical reportage but that it is an improbable picture of how humans behave in general. What offends our sense of what history is like would equally offend us if The Lusiad's events were entirely imaginary. Whether as history or as epic fiction we do not feel that it is a likely story.

Few neoclassical epics are as tied down to history as The Lusiad.

6 De Poetica, IX, 1451a—1451b.
Usually they take their story from history so remote that the poet is free to work up characters and events as he imagines them. Yet though such epics are free from responsibility to history, they stand in the same case as *The Lusiad*. They are improbable narratives, and they remain improbable, even if we try to discount an obvious kind of improbability, the marvellous intervention of the supernatural. In *Orlando Furioso* and *Jerusalem Delivered*, beautiful women distract armies from their warfare, and heroes drive hosts before them single-handed. In *Absalom and Achitophel*, a king by the force of a well-turned speech quells a rebellion and ushers in a golden age. As for Milton -- but since one of his epics records "the history of a miracle" the other the deeds of a man who was also God, it is hard to discount the intrusion of the supernatural. Epic clearly involves characters endowed with extraordinary attributes, capable of prodigious actions. The marvellous is not merely supernatural machinery, not merely an extraneous ornament applied to a lifelike semblance of things for the sake of elevating them. The human world in epic is hyperbolical and excessive in itself; the marvellous is its natural dimension. And so the problem that I raised about *Paradise Lost* at the beginning of this dissertation, how a poem treating supernatural events and theological issues can be a criticism of life, is a particular form of a general problem that confronts us with neoclassical epic, how poems so marvellous and improbable can represent human experience.

Yet though neoclassical epic is an improbable picture of things, it was supposed to be an imitation. How can we reconcile this doctrine of the critics with the extravagance of epic?

C. **Aristotelian Imitation**

We should distinguish two ideas of imitation. The first is Aristotle's, the second a neoclassical one. These are not contradictory but they are different, and the difference is important, for it will help us later to pin down what distinguishes *Paradise Lost* from other neoclassical epics.9

Aristotle's idea is unfortunately not straightforward. As we have seen, he distinguishes an imitation from history on the grounds that imitation constructs a plot. Indeed for him proper organization of the plot makes a piece of imitation comparable to a living organism.10 At the same time imitation is not merely structure, a well made plot. The plot imitates something. And this something, the object of the imitation is not the scenes of life or character but something Aristotle calls "an action."11

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9 I have tried to distinguish neoclassical and Aristotelian theory as sharply as possible. It should be borne in mind that much neoclassical poetic was commentary on Aristotle. I follow Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), 1, 154 -- 55, 423, in thinking Aristotle was misinterpreted in the light of an essentially rhetorical poetic derived from Horace. I have not considered Aristotle's particular remarks on epic because it is his general remarks on poetic imitation that bring out the distinction between his theory of imitation and the neoclassical one most clearly.

10 *De Poetica*, VII, 1450b; XXIII, 1459a.

11 *De Poetica*, VI, 1450a.
This is a puzzling term. Aristotle thought an action possessed a unity and completeness which a good plot should imitate, and consequently at least some of the formal properties of the plot's structure corresponded to an object in the world of experience. A third and apparently unrelated characteristic of an imitation is, as we have already noted, that it deals with things more universally than history. Where history, according to Aristotle, merely records events that happened, an imitation shows how events might happen, how they generally happen.

Part of what makes Aristotle's ideas difficult to understand is that it is not clear how they fit together, how the organization of the plot is connected with the imitation of an action and how these in turn link up with the universality of the imitation. I shall try to explain how they do so.\(^\text{12}\) It is not necessary that imitation should start with a myth as its donnée. But simply to demonstrate the idea of imitation with, it is the least complicated case. Let us suppose then a poet faced with an archaic story as the Greek tragedians were, for example, or among epic poets, Milton. The task of imitation then would be to invest this primitive form with the lineaments of the world of experience, filling in character and thought, motivation and situation. But so to endow the stiff and rudimentary outline with the semblance of life is to work it out as a human action. The puzzling simplicity of the events in the original story becomes rationalised as what humans think and do. But if the events have been rationalized and made human in this way, the poet must have understood what

humans are like. Human nature or human experience is what gives those laws of probability or necessity to his shaping of the plot. Imitation is therefore simultaneously to give semblance of life to a story and to treat it showing the operation of what is universal in human behaviour and experience. In this way two of the ideas involved in Aristotle's idea of imitation, that it imitates an action and that it is universal, fit together. And that it organizes a plot, Aristotle's third idea, also fits in. For to work out a story as an action, as a concatenation, that is, of characters and events, implies an ordering and disposing of the narrative.

This then is how it seems to me Aristotelian imitation works. And if it gave a helpful account of neoclassical epic, there would be no need to look further. Unfortunately it does not. Of course by unexacting standards almost any neoclassical epic, except perhaps the Faerie Queene, answers in some way to Aristotle's idea. But though character and event usually hang together, they do so in a conventional and not very interesting way. It is immediately obvious that in this respect Jerusalem Delivered makes a very poor showing in comparison with a non-epic like Macbeth. And in general, as imitations of human actions, neoclassical epics are rather rudimentary. To this generalization, Paradise Lost is an exception. I shall make much of the exception in due course. Meanwhile, though, we are left without a workable idea of imitation.

D. Ideal Imitation

One would naturally turn to neoclassical critics for help. But among them I can find no general agreement about imitation. Indeed I feel sure of

only one generalization: of the many who talked about imitation and who are indebted to the Poetics, or at least refer to it, none mean what Aristotle had in mind.\textsuperscript{14} I hazard, nevertheless, the following general assertion about neoclassical criticism, which distinguishes its ideas of imitation from Aristotle's and will, I think, be found to hold for its most significant figures. Neoclassical critics are not really concerned with the imitation of an action; they are concerned, rather, with the imitation of ideas.

The most accessible writing on the imitation of ideas is Sidney's Defense of Poesie. What he says there is not an original theory, nor on the other hand is it a statement of what everyone else held.\textsuperscript{15} But it does set down clearly and without the theoretical complication one finds in Mazzoni's Discourse in Defense of the Comedy and Tasso's Discourses the notion of ideal imitation that lies behind neoclassical discussions of the epic.

And yet the most famous passage in the Defense seems to deal with matters very different from imitation. It talks of the poet as maker with a godlike power to create. And whereas other human arts are tied to the

\textsuperscript{14} Weinberg, 1, 350, remarks: "Thus the appearance of the Poetics was essentially an anachronism: the newest, most exciting, and most promising text of Aristotle came to light precisely at the moment when men were least prepared to read and understand it correctly." Joel E. Spingarn, Literary Criticism in the Renaissance (New York: Harcourt, 1963), p.19, maintains, however, that Aristotle formulated a theory of ideal imitation which became the basis of the Renaissance theory.

\textsuperscript{15} Allan H. Gilbert, Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1962), p.404, remarks on the non-originality of Sidney's ideas.
forms of nature, the poet, according to Sidney,

disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with
the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another
nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth
forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature,
as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such
likes; so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed
within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging
only within the zodiac of his own wit. Nature never set
forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done;
neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling
flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth
more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a
golden.

Here Sidney characterizes poetry by its power of inventing those marvellous
fictions we come across in epic. One would say that he was concerned with
imagination rather than imitation.

And still Sidney speaks of poetry imitating as if there were no
difficulty to be resolved between the claims of imitation and imagination.

How this may be is that for Sidney imitation means making images. For him
imitation consists in the first place in fashioning of an illusion, in
feigning, in the making of an artifice. And in this sense there is no con­
flict between imagination and imitation: imitation means giving shape to
imagination in words. But it is true that for Sidney the images have
objects; they are imitations not merely by virtue of being artificial
shapes. The images, however, do not copy actions; they copy ethical ideas.

16 Sir Philip Sidney, A Defence of Poetry, Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip
Sidney, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan van Dorsten (Oxford: Clarendon,

17 "Poetry therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in
the word μίμησις, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or
figuring forth — to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture" (Defence,
pp.79—80). Cf. Rosemond Tuve, Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery: Re­
naissance Poetic and Twentieth Century Critics (Chicago: Univ. of Chic.
Sidney distinguishes between philosophical, astronomical, or historical poets and poets who properly may be said to imitate.

Betwixt whom and these second is such a kind of difference as betwixt the meaner sort of painters, who counterfeit only such faces as are set before them, and the more excellent, who having no law but wit, bestow that in colours upon you which is fittest for the eye to see; as the constant though lamenting look of Lucretia when she punished in herself another's fault, wherein he painteth not Lucretia whom he never saw, but painteth the outward beauty of such a virtue. For these third be they which most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined: with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be.

The passage brings out clearly how imitation consists in fashioning or inventing an image. At the same time it is clear that the image is not of what things are like but of what they ought or ought not to be like. And in this sense, a very different sense from Aristotle's, poetry is more philosophical than history. For according to Sidney, poetry is universal, not because it shows a grasp of how humans behave generally, but because it copies universal moral ideas.

Sidney's idea of imitation fits in with his view that poetry is a didactic art. Here he distinguishes poetry not only from history but also from moral philosophy. For moral philosophy, he says, furnishes precepts to virtue, but these precepts are not only general and hard to understand and apply, they are also of little effect in moving the will to obey them. Here poetry is superior because it makes the precept clear by fashioning images or examples. Moreover, the example shows the application of the

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18 Defence, pp. 80 — 81.

19 See Defence, pp. 87 — 88.

general precept to the individual case, even if the case is fictitious.
And finally poetry works not only upon the understanding but upon the will. This is partly because imitation delights and so is able to insinuate moral teaching even into those recalcitrant to direct teaching. But it is also because an example or imitation of virtue itself inspires its reader to imitate it. Poetic imitation encourages practical moral imitation.21 And here the idealizing and marvellous nature of poetry merely makes the example more effective. The golden world of poetry fails to show things as we know them in the brazen world of nature in order to fire the will with a desire for things as they ought to be. Conversely poetry makes vices look ugly in order to disaffect the will from them, and for the same reason regulates its world according to poetic justice.

As Sidney has it, then, poetry does not show us what experience is like but what it ought to be like. His theory places no bounds on the extravagance of epic. Indeed it seems to justify it. Yet there is in other neoclassical theorizing on poetry talk of verisimilitude, of the probable or the credible. This talk, however, gives little direction about representing the permanent contours of experience. It is a matter mainly of decorum, or of literary tradition, or of circumstantial faking.22 The standards of verisimilitude were unexacting. The main effort of epic imitation was directed elsewhere, and we look in vain for the serious concatenation of event and character that Aristotelian imitation consists of.

21 See Defence, pp.91—94.

22 For decorum and verisimilitude, see Horace, Ars Poetica, 11.119--78. Weinberg, 1, 182 -- 83, 436 -- 37. For verisimilitude and literary decorum, see Boileau, L'Art Poetique, 3, Oeuvres Complètes de Boileau, ed. Antoine Adam and Françoise Escal (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p.173. For verisimilitude and marvellous reconciled by tradition, see Tasso, Discourses, pp.37--38. For circumstantial faking see Spingarn on Robortelli, p.20. See also Weinberg, 1, 122, on mingling truth with falsehood.
We should look instead for a structure of didactic images. For if there is a central line of neoclassical thinking about epic, it is probably the didactic one. Sidney's idea of imitation is only one expression of this concern. Nor did the notion that epic is a didactic fiction come to an end with the decline of Italian criticism. It was formulated with, if possible, even more rigour by the French critic, Le Bossu: "L'épopée est un discours inventé avec art, pour former les moeurs par des instructions desguisées sous les allégories d'une action importante, qui est racontée en vers d'une manière vraisemblable, divertissante et merveilleuse."23 (One notes that the "vraisemblable" is put on the same level as the diverting and the marvellous). Later Seventeenth Century and Augustan criticism in England agreed with Le Bossu. Even Hobbes thought that fancy had the power in heroic poetry to impress the precepts of morality more effectively than philosophy.24 And Addison and Johnson defer to Le Bossu's opinion that the epic features a moral, even while they demur at his extreme view that a poet first fixes on a moral and that thereafter poetic composition is simply dressing it up.25


B. Ideal Imitation and Eloquence

The didactic theory of poetry we have been discussing lent itself to the defence of humanist learning. Sidney's *Defense of Poesie* is typical not only of Renaissance poetic theory but of writing on the value of *studia humanitatis*. What he says about the power of literary examples to inform the mind with virtue recalls those ideas of Cicero and Salutati I treated earlier when I dealt with the connection between eloquence and the *studia humanitatis*, ideas of the power of the literary image of heroic men to influence conduct. Such views of the power of literature to move men's wills and shape their minds ally poetry closely with eloquence. Like eloquence, poetry according to the theory of ideal imitation is discourse that applies ideas to life and like eloquence it applies them in such a way that not only the intellect but the whole man, intellect and will, is engaged. And to turn from the large consideration of eloquence and poetry as humanizing discourse to their arts of language, rhetoric set forth the rules of style to both. Early humanists, as I have remarked, called themselves indifferently poets and orators. In his "Goldyn Targe" Dunbar calls Chaucer, not poet or makar, but "rose of rethoris all." And we cannot say that such a substitution is a peculiarly medieval confusion. For Milton and Dryden as for Chaucer and Dunbar rhetoric was the art of poetic as well as of prose style. I might add that verisimilitude,

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26 See above, Ch. 3.


whether we think of it as decorum or as paralogism, had become a rhetorical idea.

In his pamphlet *Of Education*, Milton suggests that poetry should be taught before rhetoric "as being lesse suttile and fine, but more simple, sensuous and passionate." By poetry here Milton means the art of poetry, poetic, the sort of thing the seventeenth century student would have gone to the treatises of Aristotle, or Horace, or Mazzoni, or Tasso for. The difference he is pointing to is one rather of degree than of kind. It is true that logic and rhetoric are "organic arts", arts, that is, instrumental to any discourse, whereas poetic is concerned with the making of a specific sort of discourse, poems. But admitting that distinction, the important point for our discussion is that Milton places poetic alongside the organic arts. And in this he was by no means singular. The first chapter of Weinberg's *History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* usefully tabulates the various ways in which Italian critics placed poetic among the other arts and sciences. By far the most common arrangement is to place poetic along with rhetoric as an instrument of moral philosophy. Such is the arrangement in Tasso's *Discourses*, probably the most important Italian neoclassical treatment. Even Mazzoni, who classes poetic paradoxically as a species of sophistic, still thinks of poetic as an instrument of moral philosophy. Poetry then was like eloquence because it was part of the discourse of reason. And if we compare poetry and eloquence on this basis we can at the same time understand the difference.

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30 *Of Education*, p. 401.
31 Weinberg, 1, 33; Tasso, *Discourses*, pp. 29--32.
that Milton was calling attention to when he spoke of poetry as being less subtle and fine and more simple, sensuous and passionate. For the imitation of ideas in images and examples is clearly a less articulate and fine drawn way of reasoning than arguments of a logical and rhetorical kind. Besides, as Tasso remarked, the example is a weak method of logical proof.\textsuperscript{33}

On the other hand, it has the advantage of simplicity since it can convey a complicated idea in a single image, of sensuousness since it impinges on the mind through the imagination, and of passion since it engages the will. Of course eloquence might and did in fact make use of the example, and poetry might and did make use of the other sorts of reasoning that eloquence employed. Nevertheless, the characteristic method of poetry was the imitation of ideas in examples, and Milton's comparison is a generalization of this characteristic.

Milton's comparison suggests another aspect of Renaissance poetic. Poetry addresses itself to lower as well as higher faculties, to the senses and passions as well as to reason. This is why it is such an effective form of teaching. But it is effective also because it reaches a wider audience. Logic appeals to a rational elite; poetry gets through to people at large (at least that was the theory). It is for that reason that in The Reason of Church Government Milton can speak, perhaps in a rather fulsome way, of the poet's power "to imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of vertu, and publick civility."\textsuperscript{34} One is accustomed to think of the public task of educating a whole nation as peculiarly epic's. This is not Milton's view since he assigns the same task to dramatic and lyric poetry as well.

\textsuperscript{33} Tasso, Discourses, p.29.

But in the period of neoclassical humanism epic comes closest to answering the specifications of poetic theory. One might call epic the institutional form of neoclassical humanism.

Neoclassical poetic, then, thought of imitation as a form of eloquence, a theory best borne out by the epic. In the last two chapters I have argued that eloquence was the informing principle of neoclassical humanism. The theory of ideal imitation is, it follows, a particular development of the general set of ideas that neoclassical humanism worked with. There is a specially close connection between the theory of ideal imitation and the neoclassical humanist idea of the study of literature. That poetry makes images or examples of virtues and vices is for both the central fact.

F. Neoclassical Epics

1. Introduction

The question now arises how epic, the institutional form of neoclassical humanism, measures up by our own best humanist standards. In Chapter 3, I remarked on how a study of literature based on eloquence differed from our notions of fineness of truth. Neoclassical epic as a didactic form brings up the same problem. I tried to show in the foregoing chapters how a humanism based on eloquence, to us a strange and mechanical theory of literature, developed what we can recognise as a finely adjusted criticism of life. The study of four neoclassical epics that follows brings out a comparable development. The Lusiad and Jerusalem Delivered, display remarkable powers, but the didactic form is managed in ways that achieve what we can only judge inadequate criticisms of life. With Absalom and

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35 Above pp. 88—96.
Achitophel, on the other hand, ideal imitation is managed with finesse and truly interesting moral discriminations are made. Paradise Lost is an anomaly. It contains a magnificent treatment of some of the possibilities of ideal imitation, but its interest as a criticism of life lies outside the scope of ideal imitation, outside the scope of a theory of literature based on eloquence, and indeed outside the scope of a humanist study of man that retired before the Christian study of the will. Yet in spite of this oddity, the action of Paradise Lost, like that of Absalom and Achitophel, involves the notion of human creatureliness, which I have argued went with the developing critical movement of neoclassical humanism. Here both differ from The Lusiad and Jerusalem Delivered, whose actions involve a divinizing of human ends. The general development of epic towards an adequate criticism of life is in line therefore with the developments of neoclassical humanism that we have marked earlier.

Before we come to grips with the poems it will be helpful to explain some concepts that are involved in epic ideal imitation.

Ideal imitation is a making of images of moral ideas. Though allegory is the most obvious way of showing moral ideas through images, in neoclassical epic the normal sort of ideal imitation is not allegorical. Tasso supplies an allegoresis to his Jerusalem Delivered. He says for instance that his hero Godfrey is an allegory of understanding. I think this is a mistaken way of putting it, though it may sound arrogant to correct the poet, who should know. Godfrey is the image rather of a reasonable man and good commander because his actions show the virtues of prudence and understanding at work. With an allegory there should be a disparity between the idea and

the image. Sin, for example, in *Paradise Lost* is a proper allegory because, though sin may be attractive and entail unpleasant consequences, there is only a metaphorical connection between these ideas and the image of a woman beautiful to the waist but snakes and dogheads below. In epic, allegories are usually fantastic personifications of ideas. Epic heroes or villains on the other hand are examples or illustrations of ideas. This explains why Tasso's allegorizing of his epic is at once a distortion of the kind of fiction he is writing and at the same time an accurate account of the moral scheme of the poem. *Jerusalem Delivered* is a complicated image of the moral ideas he mentions in his allegoresis, but the images are examples rather than the personifications or metaphorical and metonymic constructions of pure allegory.\(^{37}\)

It is important to be clear what an image is. I have spoken of it as if it was the same thing as a moral example. That is how Sidney uses the term when he speaks of exemplary figures like Aeneas, or Xenophon's Cyrus.\(^{38}\) Characters then are the most obvious kind of image but not the only kind, for actions and places may also be images of moral ideas. Epics are clearly full of such images. *The Faerie Queene* is composed of them. Perhaps since

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\(^{38}\) *Defence*, pp.97--98.
it is an allegorical poem *The Faerie Queene* seems a special case but in fact it does not differ from other epics in this respect. *Paradise Lost*, for instance, makes much of the moral significance of actions arrested in visual form. Satan disguised as a cherub hoodwinking Uriel is the occasion of a moralizing reflection on hypocrisy (Bk.3, ll.681--89) and his perching on the tree of life in the shape of a cormorant provokes another on the proper use of God's gifts (Bk.4, ll.198--204). And as an illustration of virtue, Abdiel standing up in a flame of zeal calls forth epic praise for his heroic loyalty (Bk.5, ll.896--903). These are visual images moreover, whose moral ideas receive explicit pointing. But it is not necessary that images should be visual or made explicit. Nor is it necessary that they should be located in one incident. Sidney speaks of Aeneas as an image of virtue, yet Aeneas has no portrait given him; he emerges as an image of virtue, *pius Aeneas*, from the whole poem. To be an image it is necessary only that an idea should be presented to the imagination. And it may take form in the course of the whole poem not just in sharply defined emblematic pictures such as those I have picked out of *Paradise Lost*.

Simply to point to images is not enough; it is important to see how they hang together and how they are complicated to form that composite and evolving image that is the whole poem. The poem is an arrangement not a mere congeries of images. **In the first place the arrangement is spatial.**

The four epics that I shall be considering take place in a universal theatre, for in one form or another their actions involve not just the earth but

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heaven and hell. The places in this arrangement have moral implications. The gates of heaven "on gold'n Hinges turning" in *Paradise Lost*, to take an uncomplicated example, are set against the gates of hell that open "with impetuous recoile and jarring sound" (Bk.5, l.255; Bk.2, l.380). From the one issues forth the host of heaven to the creation of the world; from the other, Satan bent on its destruction. These celestial and infernal locations clearly have a moral import. There are other gates in *Paradise Lost*, the gates of Eden, which are the entry to the field of action lying between heaven and hell. Here again the physical location is at the same time a moral location. Whatever takes place on such a field of action will feature the conflict of good or evil or the choice of one or other. The other epics arrange their images within the same universal scheme, *Jerusalem Delivered* most obviously, but also *The Lusiad* and *Absalom and Achitophel*. As far as these epics are concerned the imitation is universal not just because it fashions images of universal moral ideas but because it mounts them in a moral universe.

But the universal scheme is not just spatial but also historical. The epics we are looking at picture what takes place as part of universal history. *Paradise Lost* is again the best example, for it shows the fall of man within a plan of history that takes in the beginning and the end of time. The other epics have a narrower scope. Nevertheless all image their actions as significant events in the providential government of the universe, victories or defeats in the universal conflict of good and evil. This means that the actions of the poems will themselves be composite images of moral ideas. We need only call to mind titles such as *Jerusalem Delivered* or *Paradise Lost* to see summed up, how this is so. And the same goes for the incidents that make up the actions. All the incidents that further
the deliverance of Jerusalem, for instance, will show the strength of
taste or the weakness of evil, the prompting of heaven or the machinations
of the infernal powers. Ideal imitation then is not limited to the
fashioning of static images of moral ideas, examples of virtues and vices
arranged in a universal scheme of moral places. The epics we are con-
sidering show moral ideas at work in their actions.

The action shows moral ideas in action. For the most obvious way
of showing a moral idea engaged with particular cases and the conditions of
human experience is in the semblance of human acts. Static images of
moral ideas tend towards metaphor and symbol, which are really as general
as the precepts they convey. So Milton's metaphor "a flame of zeal"
represents only such general qualities of zeal as that it aspires upwards
and burns with ardour (Bk.5, 1.807). But it is Abdiel's act of defying
Satan that shows the moral idea at work. Earlier I distinguished between
ideal imitation and Aristotle's notion of an imitation of an action.
Here I must add that the closer ideal imitation comes to making images
according to the Aristotelian art of imitating how people behave the more
it will have succeeded in applying moral ideas to life. But though the
two sorts of imitation do not rule each other out they aim at different
things. For ideal imitation, the human action is not the object of imi-
tation; the action is itself an imitation of a moral idea.

The epics we are considering are composite and evolving images of
moral ideas. Their actions are universal not just because they feature
universal ideas but because they involve the universe spatially as they de-
velop into cosmic arrays of images and historically as they work out an
episode in the universal conflict of good and evil. The heroes, the chief
actors in these universal actions, are invested with more than human dignity.
It is an epic convention going back to Homer that the hero should be a godlike man. And it suits the didactic purpose of neoclassical epic to cast a divine lustre over figures who image moral ideas. But the heroes of the epics we are considering are touched with divinity also because their actions are instrumental in the divine government of the universe. The godlike hero is in fact a representative of the image of God in man because he is God's agent in the working of the world. These ideas of images and actions, of divine images and universal actions, which I have set down so baldly here will make better sense in the course of our looking at the four epics. These fall into two sets, The Lusiad and Jerusalem Delivered on the one hand and Paradise Lost and Absalom and Achitophel on the other. In the first set, a heroic quest is the action, in the second, a fall and restoration.

2. The Lusiad

There are further respects in which The Lusiad and Jerusalem Delivered go together. Both are Virgilian epics. Like the Aeneid both deal with the advance of an empire. Where the Aeneid deals with the founding of Rome, The Lusiad deals with the opening of the east to the Portuguese empire, the new Rome, and Jerusalem Delivered with the recovery of what was at least metaphorically the centre of Christendom. The Lusiad and Jerusalem Delivered consequently also have this in common; they can both be seen as episodes in the history of the kingdom of God.

40 On the hero as godlike man, see Steadman, pp.XIV--XV. Cf. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle, Bk.7,1, tr. W.D. Ross (London: Oxf. Univ. Press, 1954), p.159: "To brutishness it would be most fitting to oppose superhuman virtue, a heroic and divine kind of virtue, as Homer has represented Priam saying of Hector that he was very good, 'For he seemed not, he,/The child of a mortal man, but as one that of God's seed came' (Iliad, 24, 11.258f.)."
This comparison brings out how the action of *The Lusiad* is a universal action imaging a moral idea. The main narrative treats Da Gama's voyage of discovery. Set into this narrative are narrations of heroic episodes in the history of Portugal before Da Gama's voyage and prophecies of others to succeed. Da Gama's voyage is itself a member of this series and consequently it has the odd property of being included in the series that it frames as epic narrative. The oddity comes out strikingly in the account Da Gama gives to the King of Melind of Portuguese history, which includes the earlier fortunes of their expedition. To begin in medias res and insert the beginning in an inset narrative is common enough epic practice. But for the frame to be framed in turn by a narrative that it ostensibly frames is unusual. It is not merely a *trompe l'oeil* device. It is from its place in the series of heroic Portuguese exploits that Da Gama's exploit takes on its momentousness. It becomes representative of Portuguese greatness and of the virtues that are supposed to have made Portugal glorious. And hence Camoens can sum up the success of Da Gama's voyage (which in truth only discovered that India might be reached round the Cape) by attributing to him the conquest of a whole empire.

The hero band adorn their monarch's name;  
Sceptres and crown beneath his feet they lay;  
And the wide East is doom'd to Lusian sway.41

In short by a sort of heroic metonymy Da Gama's voyage becomes the action of winning an empire.

41 *The Lusiad*, Bk.10, p.482. I have used Mickle's translation throughout because it is splendid. I have checked the passages I quote against *The Lusiads*, tr. William C. Atkinson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1952) and *Os Lusiadas*, tr. Richard Francis Burton, ed. Isabel Burton, 2 vols. (London: Quaritch, 1880), for Mickle is an expansive translator. I give page nos. because Mickle has no line nos.
But The Lusiad makes out that this action is more than the triumph of heroic violence or national aggrandizement. Just as The Lusiad imitates and indeed boasts of outdoing the Aeneid, so it celebrates the Portuguese empire as the successor of Rome. And consequently the Portuguese empire has a moral destiny to spread government and civilization throughout the world. And more than a moral destiny it has a religious destiny. For far from being pictured as the spread of a colonial empire, or even of European civilization, the conquest of the east is pictured as a crusade. This is how the action of the poem is an episode of universal history, a significant event in the advance of the kingdom of God.

But the action is not universal merely as it fits into the divine plan of history. It is actually shown to carry out the will of the powers governing the universe. That means that it carries out the will of God. Camoens images this in a rather bizarre fashion, for he takes over the machinery of classical epic and converts it allegorically to Christian purposes. So Jove is God and fate is what he wills. And he wills both of his own accord and at the intercession of Venus, who represents heavenly love. Since the aim of heavenly love is to draw all things to God, Venus is patroness of Da Gama and of the Portuguese enterprise of bringing the world under Christian rule. Set against Venus and Portuguese success is Bacchus, the tutelary power of paganism and all the forces that stand in the way of the expedition. It is not easy to make a Christian allegory out of such a Bacchus, whose voice is after all heard in the councils of Olympus or heaven, and perhaps one should not press too hard. He may be simply a general demon of discord, or possibly a disguise for Satan, who was thought

42 Da Gama is a greater hero than Aeneas (Bk.1, p.2).
to be admitted to heaven in Job. At any rate he does not represent a power whom Jove has in any way to conciliate, and once Jove has decreed his will that the Portuguese should prosper, Bacchus simply leaves to work his own designs in despite of heaven. Camoens has therefore rationalized the machinery of classical epic so that it accords with the government of the Christian universe by an omnipotent God. Unlike the Jove of the Aeneid, the Jove of The Lusiad does not have to shuffle with two hostile goddesses and hence there is no ambiguity in the divine will, and so no doubt of Da Gama's success.\(^4\)

It is in the first place because Da Gama and his men are agents of the divine will that they are heroes, actors in a more than human exploit. And while Camoens does not in fact apply the epithet "godlike" to them, he nevertheless speaks of the "prowess more than human" with which they "forc'd their way / To the fair kingdoms of the rising day."\(^4\) It is also true that they owe their heroic stature to the exercise of heroic virtues. But I shall discuss them as moral patterns later.

The most remarkable way in which Da Gama is shown as an agent of the divine plan is when it is shown to himself. As the Portuguese fleet returns triumphant from India, Venus arranges a reward for the sailors. She has a floating island meet them on their way. This turns out to be a paradise of earthly delights stocked with nereids for the recreation of the heroes. It is with surprise that we learn that the pleasures of this epic

\(^{43}\) The classical machinery seems to me less strained than is generally allowed. Greene, Descent from Heaven, and A. Bartlett Giamatti, The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966), pp.211--15, find it confuses the poem. Mickle's translation points the allegory by calling Venus "Venus-Urania" (Bk.1, p.11) and "Heavenly Love" (Bk.2, p.56). See Mickle's account of the machinery, pp.CXXXV--CXL.

\(^{44}\) Bk.1, p.2.
set piece are not only licit but an allegory of the glory wedded to Portuguese heroic exploits.

The nymphs of ocean, and the ocean's Queen,
The isle angelic, every raptured scene,
The charms of honour and its meed confess,
These are the raptures, these the wedded bliss:
The glorious triumph and the laurel crown,
The ever blossom'd palms of fair renown,
By time unwither'd, and untaught to cloy;
These are the transports of the Isle of Joy.

Before they leave the island, the heroes are feasted in the palace of Thetis, goddess of the sea, where a siren inspired by Jove prophesies the careers of those who will follow them in carving out an empire in the East. At the close of the song, Thetis leads them to the summit of the island up steep and thorny ways representing the paths of heroic virtue, and since the heroes have already overcome them in reality, they overcome them now in allegory with ease. On the summit, a pre-Copernican model of the universe appears in the air. The goddess explains its workings leading their sight from the Empyrean down through the planetary spheres to the earth, where she points out the regions open to Portuguese exploitation, and their part in the advancement of the kingdom of heavenly love. There could be no clearer way of tracing Da Gama's voyage and the designs of Portugal upon the workings of the universe.

What is perhaps not so clear is how The Lusiad itself takes part in these workings. The heroes' pursuit of the nymphs and their love making is, I have remarked, an allegory of the winning of fame. The issue of these

45 Bk.9, pp.408-09.
46 Bk.10, pp.441.
47 Bk.10, pp.441—80.
unions is the continuing race of Portuguese adventurers whom the fame of Da Gama's expedition has inspired to emulation. Fame then is part of the divine impulsion governing the world and drawing it upwards. It is a conventional enough idea that Eros or heavenly love inflames heroes to more than human deeds. In The Lusiad this celestial attraction works through fame because fame prompts the love of heroic virtue. That is why on the isle of Venus the celebration of love turns out to be a figure for the celebration of heroic action. It is here that The Lusiad itself becomes an agent of the universal power of heavenly love. It celebrates heroic human actions and the golden image the literary imitation holds up will inspire its readers to imitation in deeds. In other words through imitating the universal action of heavenly love the poem becomes part of what it imitates.

About the agency of the heroic poem Camoens is quite explicit.

What boundless joys are thine, O just Renown,  
Thou hope of Virtue, and her noblest crown;  
By thee the seeds of conscious worth are fired,  
Hero by hero, fame by fame inspired:  
Without thine aid how soon the hero dies!  
By thee upborne, his name ascends the skies.  
....
This knew Augustus, and from Mantua's shade  
To courtly ease the Roman bard conveys'd;  
And soon exulting flow'd the song divine,  
The noblest glory of the Roman line.

The heroic poem shapes the minds of its readers by shaping heroic images. That is given in the notion of ideal imitation. But to this we can add that the informing power or didactic effectiveness is, at least in The Lusiad, the impulsion of a universal power drawing the human world to the divine.

48 Bk.5, pp.228--29.
through heroic action. What would complete the chain of impulsion would be the inspiring of the poem by the same force that it is an agent of. And in a general sort of way we can say that since Camoens involves himself in his poem as a heroic attempt to treat a subject he claims is greater than that of any former epic, he is inspired by heroic ambition. Yet the powers he invokes, the nymphs of Tagus and Calliope, are only remotely, if at all, connected with the heavenly love that takes charge of Portuguese heroic endeavour. So although The Lusiad co-operates with the power whose universal action it celebrates, it does not see itself as an effect of that power. And in this it is incomplete in comparison with Jerusalem Delivered or Paradise Lost. I am not suggesting that this is a flaw. Yet since one of the chief reasons for taking up The Lusiad was that it supplies an uncomplicated paradigm of how neoclassical epic works as ideal imitation, I must remark on the incompleteness. And it is important to take the incompleteness in, if not for our estimate of The Lusiad, at least for our understanding of the genre it belongs to. Epic set great store by inspiration and this was not merely a matter of convention or self-importance. It was called for by the actual nature of ideal imitation. For the didactic effects such poetry claimed, the shaping of minds and the moving of wills required godlike powers, and these the poet tried to lay hold of through his invocation. If then the poem takes for subject an action that shows the shaping and moving of human affairs by a universal power of divine origin, it follows that the same power might very well be at work in the poem. So in Jerusalem Delivered the capture of Jerusalem is the victory of divine truth over the powers of darkness, and to recreate this victory in the minds

of his readers Tasso invokes this same power of divine truth in the person of the heavenly muse. The invocation, accordingly, sets the didactic poem inside the universal action that the poem itself images. But this peculiar reflexiveness of ideal imitation is not fully realized in The Lusiad.

What The Lusiad realizes with great clarity is the involvement of the heroic images in the action of a universal power, not merely as it impels history but also as it governs the physical universe. I have said enough about how the action expands into universal history. I have still to show how it is traced upon the structure of the world. Of course what I have said about the universality of the action in terms of history has naturally taken in a good deal of the cosmic field, notably in the visionary globe where Da Gama and his men are shown the destiny of Portugal. And besides, simply that the expedition moves on under the eye of heaven sets the happenings on a universal stage. But more remarkable than these is the way in which the action is involved with the workings of the world's system. These workings are themselves another example of the compelling power of heavenly love winning order out of chaos. In Book 6, Bacchus, exasperated at having been unable to turn back the Portuguese fleet, descends like so many malign supernatural agents in epic to the underworld to stir up mischief. Only, in this case the underworld is submarine not subterranean, nor is it hell but the realm of Neptune. Arrived at the gates of Neptune's palace, he sees imaged in a frieze the obscure origins of the world's system.

Here various colours in confusion lost,
Old Chaos' face and troubled image boast.
Here rising from the mass, distinct and clear,
Apart the four fair Elements appear.50

50 Bk.6, p.236.
There follows a description of the world articulated from these four elements.

High o'er the rest ascends the blaze of fire,  
Nor fed by matter did the rays aspire,  
But glow'd ethereal as the living flame,  
Which, stolen from heaven, inspir'd the vital frame.  
Next, all-embracing Air was spread around,  
Thin as the light, incapable of wound;  
The subtle power the burning south pervades,  
And penetrates the depth of polar shades.  
Here mother Earth, with mountains crown'd, is seen,  
Her trees in blossom, and her lawns in green;  
The lowing beeves adorn the clover vales,  
And fleecy dams bespread the sloping dales;  
Here land from land the silver streams divide;  
The sportive fishes through the crystal tide,  
Bedropt with gold their shining sides display;  
And here old Ocean rolls his billows gray:  
Beneath the moon's pale orb his current flows,  
And round the earth his giant arms he throws.  

But beside this frieze, which represents the work of heavenly love, even if Camoens does not explicitly ascribe it to Venus, stands another frieze depicting the Titans' war against heaven, which represents the irruption of the primal discord that heavenly love had tempered to bring forth the world. Bacchus enlists Neptune in the cause of discord and a tempest overtakes Da Gama with such fury that it threatens the world's foundations and is indeed compared to the Titans' war.

Expiring worlds on worlds expiring rush'd  
And dim-browed Chaos struggled to regain  
The wild confusion of his ancient reign.  
Not such the volley when the arm of Jove  
From heaven's high gates the rebel Titans drove.  

51 Bk.6, p.237. For other accounts of the world's system in epic, see Virgil, Aeneid, Bk.6, ll.705-892; Cowley, Davideis, Bk.1, ll.71-80; Rape of the Lock, Canto I, ll.57-66. For Jerusalem Delivered, see below, pp.223-24 and cf. the metabolism of nature in Paradise Lost.

52 Bk.6, p.261.
Yet in the midst of this unloosening of primal discord Da Gama manages to spring to the poop and deliver an effective prayer. Heavenly love, moved to restore concord among the elements, summons her nymphs.

Her lovely nymphs she calls, the nymphs obey,
Her nymphs the Virtues who confess her sway;
Round every brow she bids the rosebuds twine,
And every flower adown the locks to shine,
The snow-white lily, and the laurel green,
And pink and yellow as at strife be seen.
Instant, amid their golden ringlets strove
Each flowret, planted by the hand of Love;
At strife, who first th'enamour'd Powers to gain,
Who rule the tempests and the waves restrain:
Bright as a starry band the Nereids shone.  

The effect of the nymphs so decked is to charm the winds, "th'enamoured powers ..../Who rule the tempests", sympathetically to peace. The supernatural agencies here are not merely epic decorations of a storm. They show the calming of the storm as part of the working of the vital universe. They also connect Da Gama's voyage with these workings, the patronage of Venus linking the Portuguese enterprise with the forces tempering the world, the enmity of Bacchus ranging against it the forces of chaos.

The way in which The Lusiad casts its images into universal shapes is through elaborating a very simple idea: God is behind the greatness of Portugal. This granted, it follows that Da Gama's voyage, which is representative of Portuguese greatness, will be in harmony with the course of universal history and even with creating nature. But the images are not only universal but moral. Obviously if Da Gama is an agent of the will of God, he should exemplify moral ideas. And indeed he does. The very simple idea that lies behind the universality of the epic imitation lies behind the

53 Bk.6, pp.265--66. The loving strife of the flowers emblematic of the concord won by tempering opposites is Mickle's embellishment.
moral images also. But whereas the simple idea evolves into magnificent images of the universe, its working out is morally uninteresting. The mission of Da Gama divides the world into black and white, the forces that stand against and the forces that advance Portuguese success. The enemies of Da Gama's expedition are not merely hostile to him but pagan and treacherous and therefore images of vices. The friends are honourable, generous and open to Christianity. As for the Portuguese themselves, their virtues are summed up in Da Gama. At no point does he fail to exemplify the ideal standards for a Portuguese hero of resolution, prudence, patriotism and Christian fervour. He destroys cities with his guns, but they deserve it, and he is not taxed with the unchivalry of Satan. Since he meets no serious moral difficulties, the epic cannot engage our serious interest. And since the moral difficulties of colonial expansion are obvious, Camoens' picture must strike us as not only morally uninteresting but as morally false. It is true that at one point there is some questioning of the value of the expedition. At its departure an old man delivers a tirade against vain glory. And certainly his speech coming as it does unanswered at the end of Book Four, is impressive. But the epic does not take up the doubts he voices seriously, and if they are unanswered, they are triumphantly outweighed by the crowning of the expedition with success and the allegorical glories of Venus's isle. It is Camoens' intention to inspire the Portuguese with a consciousness of their destiny as a nation, and so Da Gama is quite simply a godlike image of the qualities that make a nation glorious. In this simple moral scheme the national glory cannot be vainglorious.

A comparison with The Aeneid at this point will help to bring out how simple, even for a patriotic epic, The Lusiad is. Like Da Gama, Aeneas has a divinely appointed mission to fulfil, and in that way the action is
universal. But the divine appointment in *The Aeneid* is ambiguous. I have already remarked how Jove in *The Lusiad* represents an omnipotent governor of the universe, whereas Jove in *The Aeneid* must deal with the conflicting will of Juno and Venus. Indeed it is Aeneas rather than Jove who brings about order, and Juno submits in the end to the hero's destiny and the concord he imposes by force of arms. Aeneas's mission has in fact little to do with the contrivings of Olympus. It is his household gods he serves and the genius of his race, and these are connected with the underworld rather than Olympus. In Book 6, he comes upon a swarm of souls thronging Lethe.  

These, Anchises' shade explains, are subject to rebirth, and in them he is able to descry the future of Aeneas' line. Then he adds that the universe is an animate being which the souls of men are part of and which goes through a process of refinement and purification. The idea of the hidden workings of the universe comes from the *Timaeus*, but it fits into the epic's central interest in the genius of Aeneas' family. It is as if the history of the family were written in the inward parts of the living world. This universal direction that Aeneas's adventures obey is underworldly and mysterious. Nothing could be further from the well organized scheme of things that Da Gama's mission obeys. In *The Lusiad* everything is clearly subordinated to the will of heaven. Even the four elements, which the world's system takes its rise from are under the control of the supernal power of heavenly love. The action that is enfolded by such a universe is correspondingly simple. There is never any doubt that Da Gama will carry out the designs of its providential government. Virgil's universe is by contrast incalculable and the force which Aeneas obeys is obscure. The

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54 *Aeneid*, Bk.6, 11.705--892.
action enfolded by such a universe is correspondingly ambiguous. It is not only the success of the mission that is in doubt. Morally it drives through a field where good and evil do not divide conveniently before it into black and white. For this reason *The Aeneid* is interesting where *The Lusiad* is not. Like Da Gama, Aeneas is the bearer of his nation's greatness and like Da Gama, he closes in himself the virtues of the commander. Like the hostile kings and officials in *The Lusiad*, various forces are ranged against Aeneas. Dido is a distraction from his mission and Turnus a threat to it. But neither Dido nor Turnus are villains or mere examples of vices. For though Dido faces Aeneas with a conflict of love and duty and though Turnus is taken over by the forces of irrationality and ill-discipline, they are noble and pathetic as none of the figures are who stand in the way of Da Gama's expedition. And while the departure of Aeneas from Carthage and his battle with Turnus are images of moral ideas, the ideas are tempered with a sense of what human ties and worth Aeneas's extraordinary duty cuts through.

"Good and evil we know in the field of this World grow up together almost inseparably."\(^{55}\) Here Milton is, admittedly, concerned with the act of moral judgement, whereas *The Aeneid* is, I think, concerned rather with the human good and evil involved in duty. Nevertheless, simply because *The Aeneid* deals with a knowledge of good "so involv'd and interwoven with the knowledge of evil", it is not merely an imitation of ideas but a serious application of those ideas to life.\(^{56}\) It is easy to suspect that ideal imitation involves a certain amount of moral forgery. And with *The Lusiad* the suspicion is borne out. It casts Da Gama's voyage into a heroic action representing a moral idea and harnesses the universe to national panegyric.


\(^{56}\) *Areopagitica*, p. 514.
The Aeneid, however, is not less an ideal imitation than The Lusiad. The virtues it shows examples of are much the same and its action involves the universe in a comparable, if less splendidly ambitious, way. Only, it is in touch with moral reality because it takes in the mixed condition of human life. In The Aeneid ideal imitation attains a serious criticism of life; in The Lusiad it falls considerably short.

3. Jerusalem Delivered

It seems to me that in Jerusalem Delivered also ideal imitation falls short of a serious criticism of life. The images of virtue and vice fail to discriminate finely between the mixed issues of good and evil. Indeed I shall argue that the way in which Tasso involves his scheme of moral ideas in a universal design turns the attention of the poem from the condition of being human in which fine discriminations of good and evil are made.57

The action of the poem is the delivery of Jerusalem. This is fraught with the same sort of significance as the Portuguese voyage to India. It is a representative endeavour of Christendom as an earthly successor to Rome and so carries a heavy moral loading. Like The Lusiad, Jerusalem Delivered treats an episode in the universal conflict of good and evil. In consequence its characters and incidents are polarized into images of virtue and vice. But Jerusalem Delivered is far more analytic in the moralizing of its action. For where Da Gama is a generalized type of Portuguese virtue and the success of his voyage a triumph of general goodness over general

57 My concern with the criticism of life probably does not do justice to Tasso. For more sympathetic accounts, see C.M. Bowra, From Virgil to Milton (London: Macmillan, 1945), and Giamatti, The Earthly Paradise.
evil, various virtues are distinguished in *Jerusalem Delivered* in various heroes, and the incidents arranged so as to show how the forces of good must be concerted if the city is to be won.\(^5^8\)

The master idea behind the ideal scheme of *Jerusalem Delivered* is the idea of right order. This idea Tasso subjects to analysis or elaboration in several ways. The first is by treating it on public and private levels. On the public level the idea is further elaborated by distinguishing the nature of order through the conflict with the forces of disorder. The pagans are naturally the forces of disorder. Even their most puissant champions, Argantes and Soliman, are examples, like Virgil's Turnus, of furious and ill-governed valour. And what works against the overwhelming numbers of the pagan army, more than the prowess of the Christians, is their lack of military discipline. When the Christian forces are united under Geoffrey's command and concerted into a three-pronged attack on the city, the pagan forces are unable to withstand the forces of order. Conversely the failure of the pagan campaign lies in an inability to co-ordinate their three forces into a concerted strategy. Not that the Christian army is by nature orderly. Godfrey is a pattern of reasonable commander supported by the good counsel exemplified in Raymond and guided by the divine counsel whose mouthpiece is Peter the Hermit, but it is only by the end of the poem that he is able to marshall his paladins together to the siege. Until then his army, divided by faction and distracted by beautiful women, is held up as much by its own disorganization as by enemy resistance. And here another elaboration in the representing of ethical ideas enters: the forces of disorder are within the forces of order as well as ranged against them, and

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disorder has to be overcome within before it can be overcome without. Partly this internal conflict belongs to the public level, for Godfrey's generalship has to contend with rumour and jealousy. But partly it belongs to the private level, and there the conflict takes the internal form of temptation. If Godfrey is the hero of the action on the public level, Rinaldo, who leaves the Christian army and lives with Armida on her delightful mountain until he is reclaimed, is the hero on the private level. The two levels of action of course fit together. When Rinaldo regains his self-command, he is fitted to undertake duties under Godfrey's command. Indeed he becomes Godfrey's most powerful lieutenant.

This rough scheme of the moral action of Jerusalem Delivered should make it clear how it is a more complicated analysis of virtue and vice than The Lusiad's simple conflict of black and white. The most interesting complication of Jerusalem Delivered is the possibility that a champion of virtue may succumb to vice. The heroes of The Lusiad are blameless. Rinaldo on the other hand falls from being an example of martial virtue to exemplifying sensuality, and the same impetuous force is as vigorously occupied in making love as in making war. Rinaldo then is an ambivalent image, or rather he may present an image of virtue or of vice, and with this ambivalence personal will enters into the moral ideas that the epic imitates.

It might be thought that an ethical concept such as the will is intellectually too refined to be imagined and so not suited to the way ideal imitation renders ideas in images. Better, one might think, to treat the matter discursively in the language of deliberation. In fact, however, ideal imitation is within limits successful in rendering the ambivalence of the will in images, and in images moreover of the most overtly visual kind. The method is to place one descriptive set piece against
another so that the one appears the inversion or eclipsed version of the other, the figure and its disfigurement. *Jerusalem Delivered* has a striking example of this counter imaging. On Armida's island Rinaldo's heroic image is disfigured. The two knights sent to rescue him come forward when Armida leaves and show him in a diamond shield the image of what he has become, "a carpet champion for a wanton dame" (Bk. 16, st.32). Just before, Rinaldo has been looking at an image of himself, which, however, failed to move him.

Down by the lovers side there pendent was  
A Christall mirrour, bright, pure, smooth and neat,  
He rose and to his mistresse held the glas,  
(A noble Page, grac'd with that service great)  
She, with glad lookes; he with enflam'd (alas)  
Beautie and love beheld, both in one seat;  
Yet them in sundrie objects each espies,  
She, in the glasse, he, saw them in her eies.  
(Bk.16, st.20)

In other words Armida sees her own beauty in the mirror with love; Rinaldo sees beauty in her eyes and himself reflected in their pupils gazing with love. The point of this elaborate mirror and eyes conceit is to contrast the false mirror of love with the incorruptible martial mirror of the diamond shield. What Rinaldo sees there is an image of himself defaced.

Upon the targe his lookes amas'd he bent,  
And therein all his wanton habite spide,  
His civet, baulme, and perfumes redolent,  
How from his lookes they smoakt, and mantle wide,  
His sword that many a Pagan stout had shent,  
Bewrapt with flowres, hung idlie by his side,  
So nicely decked, that it seemd the knight  
Wore it for fashion sake, but not for fight.  
(Bk.16, st.30)

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59 All citations of *Jerusalem Delivered* are to Godfrey of Bulloigne, or *The Recoverie of Jerusalem*, tr. Edward Fairefax (London: Jaggard, 1600). On the mirror and eyes conceit, see Giamatti, pp.202—07.
Its effect on him, together with the reproaches of the knights, is to shame him and stir up the warrior within. He returns with the knights, is received by the army and prepared for duty by the hermit. At this point Tasso inserts another description, the inversion, or rather reversion, of Rinaldo as amorist. Godfrey appoints Rinaldo to cut down the enchanted grove, whose wood is required for siege engines. Before undertaking this task, Rinaldo prays on Olivet while it is yet dark, repenting the errors of his "unbridled youth" (Bk.18, st.14). As he finishes, it dawns, the light touching his armour and the coat cast over it.

The heav'ny dew was on his garments spred,
To which compar'd his clothes pale ashes seem'd,
And sprinkled so, that all that paleness fled,
And thence of purest white bright rays out-stream'd;  
So cheered are the flowres late withered,
With the sweete comfort of the morning beam;
And so return'd to youth, a serpent old
Adornes her selfe in new and native gold.  

(Bk.18, st.16)

This painterly transfiguration of Rinaldo is clearly an image of the Christian hero restored.  

We must now ask how successfully Tasso has adapted epic images to the representation of moral ideas. Granted Jerusalem Delivered may be more advanced than The Lusiad, is it really successful as a criticism of the mixed condition of human life? To me its moral ideas seem confused and lacking in finesse, just where they touch on the most interesting issues. For it seems to me that there is something inadequate about Tasso's treatment of the will particularly in Rinaldo. In his imaging of Rinaldo's fall and restoration, Tasso reduces the freedom of the will to a matter of temperance

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60 A christianizing of the supernatural effulgence shed on Achilles returned to war, Iliad, Bk.18, 11.202--27.
or self-restraint. In Armida's arms Rinaldo's will has given way to appetite. When he leaves her, his will regains control. This means that his love for Armida is merely sensuality, and Armida, as far as he is concerned, is merely an enchantment, a snare, the flesh. The moral issue then is a matter of self-direction or of firmness of character. Armida faces Rinaldo with no temptation of the sort of reason that is also choice. The issue is whether or not Rinaldo will have sufficient strength of mind to return to the crusade. 61

The ambivalence in Rinaldo as a moral example, then, which looked so interesting, turns out on inspection to be a figure for a rather limited moral idea. But there are more serious objections than limitation. The trouble with Rinaldo's choice is that Tasso presents it as a matter of self-direction rather than as a choice of action involving others. It is true that Rinaldo is torn between private sensuality and a temperance that is involved in social duty. And since social duty involves others, it might be said that Rinaldo's choice does take other people into account. But this moral possibility is not what Tasso stresses. Significantly it is the image of himself in the military shield and not the image of himself in another's eyes that moves Rinaldo. The preoccupation with self-image belongs to a rather primitive ethic of honour. Of course the ethic of honour goes very well with ideal imitation, for in fashioning heroic images it tries to compel the reader to admiration and so to imitation in his own conduct, a moral effect that can only come about through the reader's concern with his own image. Real moral choices that involve reason, however, are judgements about the world and about dealings with other people.

Rinaldo's rejection of Armida is not shown as such a choice, for it is his sensuality he rejects rather than her. This is to reduce Armida and the conflict of virtue and vice in Rinaldo to psychological allegory. And here Tasso's representation of a moral idea is not only limited but confused, for in the rest of the epic Armida is more than a personification of Rinaldo's sensuality. Indeed the reconciliation with her after she has been thoroughly humiliated and the pagan armies defeated suggests Tasso's embarrassed recognition that in Armida he has drawn not a vice personified but someone with a claim upon Rinaldo.

The limitation and confusion may come out more clearly if Tasso's treatment of Rinaldo and Armida is compared with Virgil's of Aeneas and Dido. Dido involved Aeneas in a conflict of love and duty, and this is in some respects like the conflict Armida involves Rinaldo in. But for Aeneas, Dido is someone, not simply the representation of a weakness he must overcome. Consequently Aeneas's choice to sail to found a new Troy rather than marry her is a choice of objects in the field of moral action, not merely the setting right of a temperamental disorder. Virgil does not pretend that Aeneas's choice is humanly attractive, or that it is free from blame, or that Dido deserves to be deserted. Aeneas's decision is made in a world where good and evil "grow up together almost inseparably," where to prefer one good is to reject another and to do right may be to commit an injury at the same time. It is because, unlike Aeneas's choice, Rinaldo's does not take place in "the field of this World" but within his character, or the place of his desires, that Tasso's treatment of choice is limited. And it is because he makes Armida at the same time more than an allegory of sensual distraction that his treatment of choice is confused.

I should put down the inadequacy of Tasso's moral ideas to a platonizing
account of the will. Tasso platonizes in two respects: first with will in the sense of choice he represents it as a choice of temperance or self-restraint rather than a choice of a course of moral action; second, with will in the sense of desire he thinks of it as properly directed at an infinite object: desiring Armida, the will is fallen; desiring Jerusalem and God, the will is erected. Clearly if the will in the sense of desire has an infinite object, then will, in the sense of choice, cannot be engaged in the choice of determinate objects. The will retires from the exercise of choice in the field of this world to its exercise within, the sublimation of the desires towards God and the restraint of them from earthly objects. The exercise of the will as choice becomes a form of ascetic discipline and the will as desire becomes the erotic drive of the will towards God. Although Jerusalem Delivered is not a mystical epic like Beaumont's Psyche or Benlowe's Theophila, its moral ideas are of much the same order.

These remarks need to be qualified as well as amplified. It is obviously hard to maintain that Rinaldo's heroic virtue is really a mystical appetite. What one can assert, though, is that even as a Christian soldier his desire must be withdrawn from earthly loves and directed at otherworldly ends. The reconciliation with Armida at the end is quite as much a distortion of earthly love as his rejection of her. Nor is his love peculiar in this respect, for all the other loves in the poem are oddly twisted or thwarted. In The Lusiad, which also harnesses infinite desire to Christian ends, the apparently very carnal loves of the sailors mount into an allegory of earthly glory and become without distortion part of the erotic impulse by which heavenly love draws human endeavour to God. Tasso is not so naive. He feels a rigorous division between earthly and
heavenly love, between the spiritual and the passionate man -- hence the
embarrassment of Rinaldo's love, the melancholy of Tancred's and the
spiritual flames of Sophronia's and Olindo's. The humanity of his charac-
ters is pinched or disturbed by the demands of his Christian theme and its
platonizing moral ideas.

It might seem that the action of delivering Jerusalem goes against
what I have said about the otherworldly drive of Tasso's ethical ideas.
Jerusalem is an earthly goal, the centre of an earthly kingdom. Yet
obviously the war is a holy war, the kingdom, the kingdom of God even if on
earth, the city an earthly symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem to be attained.
If Jerusalem is no infinite object, it is realized in the poem most vividly
as an earthly symbol of the infinite object of human desire. This comes
out best in the romantic upwelling of sorrowful joy the crusaders feel
when they first behold Jerusalem.

Soft words, low speech, deepsobs, sweetsighes, salt teares
Rose from their brests, with joy and pleasure mixt;
For thus fares he the Lord aright that feares,
Fearson devotion, joy on faith is fixt. (Bk.3, st.6)

They put off the panoply of war and go forward barefooted as penitents
praying inwardly.

Flower of goodnes, root of lasting blisse,
Thou well of life, whose streames were purple blood
That flowed here, to cleense the fowle amisse
Of sinfullman, behold this brinish flood,
That from my melting heart distilled is,
Receive in gree these teares (O.Lord so good)
For never wretch with sinne so overgone,
Had fitter time, or greater cause to mone. (Bk.3, st.8)

The action of Jerusalem Delivered is at heart a pilgrimage and the desires
and the will are bent upon a goal beyond the world.
The otherworldliness determines the ethical ideas represented in the holy war of which the episode of Rinaldo's fall and restoration is only a part, if the most interesting part. I have remarked that epic imitation is universal, not just because it imitates universal ideas, but because it involves universal agencies and is an episode in a scheme of universal history. How the delivery of Jerusalem fits into the scheme of the history of the kingdom of God upon earth needs no elaboration, and I have already touched on the matter in comparing Tasso's action with Camoens'. But how the action engages the powers governing the universe remains to be discussed, and the discussion should show how the perspective of the epic is heaven directed and why this limits the representation of choice in the field of this world to ideas of order, temperance and the upward path of the soul.

The universal powers engaged in Jerusalem Delivered are the orthodox Christian ones, and they are engaged for obvious reasons in a holy war. The war is the theatre of contending heaven and hell. This means that the battle lines have to be drawn fairly rigorously between vice and virtue. I do not mean that where heaven and hell are engaged in human actions it follows that the choices are unambiguous and leave nothing to serious ethical deliberation. The human action of Paradise Lost confutes such a notion. But in Tasso's epic the involvement of heaven and hell does go with a regimentation of virtue and vice and a simplification of moral strife. And this, it seems to me, is inevitable where moral ideas are represented at war. The contrast between the moral subtlety of Milton's treatment of Adam and Eve and the moral simplicities of his war in heaven corroborates this view. It is where epic warfare is the field of conflict between virtue and vice and where God is on one side and the devil on the other that moral simplification is inevitable and the universal forces of
the two otherworlds diminish the choices in the field of human action. It is true that Tasso tries to invest the pagan army with some nobility, but his attempts are rather perfunctory. Soliman, for instance, has many of the attractive and compelling features of the classical epic hero, the same pride and sense of honour. But he has the rash and imprudent temper that Virgil had shown in Turnus. And there is more finesse in Virgil's treatment. We regret the destruction of much human worth in Turnus; we are meant to accept the destruction of much splendid vice in Soliman—nor is his destruction so painful nor his vices so splendid as Milton's Satan's. 62 Given that the action of the poem is a holy war, there can be perhaps no compromise. On the one hand, there is the army directed by God and his hermit under the government of reason in the person of Godfrey, with Rinaldo hacking down trees and pagans; on the other, there are the ill-disciplined heathen troops and charms of Armida inspired by Satan, with Rinaldo pleasantly dressed and perfumed, his sword garlanded in flowers. The array of virtues and the counter array of vices are drawn up in battle order on opposite sides, so there is no place for that act of moral judgement or decision that distinguishes the stronger from the weaker reason or the good from where it lies involved with evil.

And it is not only in this respect that the supernatural and the universal perspective of the poem diminishes the sphere of earthly action. What distinguishes *The Lusiad* is the way in which the action is involved in the workings of the vital universe. The supernatural agency of heavenly

love appears most memorably in compelling peace out of the storm at sea. And even such a vision as Da Gama had on Thetis' island is a vision of nature on a cosmic scale. The Lusiad divinizes human action by magnifying its sphere of operations and irradiating it with the divine; Jerusalem Delivered on the other hand shows the supernatural as an interruption of the natural order of things and divinizes human action as it turns away from natural towards divine ends. Tasso's angelic visitations, and demonic infestations suspend the natural order. It is true that God is pictured as sustaining his creation but when he looks down on the world he sees a dim and confused spot.

The Lord of heaven meanwhile upon this fight,  
From his hie throne bent down his gracious sight.

From whence, with grace and goodness compass round,  
He ruleth, blesseth, keepeth all he wrought,  
Above the aire, the fire, the sea and ground,  
Our sense, our wit, our reason and our thought;  
Where persons three (with powre and glory crown'd)  
Are all one God, who made all things of nought,  
Under whose feete(subjected to his grace)  
Sit nature, fortune, motion, time and place.

This is the place, from whence like smoke and dust,  
Of this fraileworld the wealth, the pompe, and powre,  
He tosseth, tumbleth, turneth as he lust,  
And guides our life, our death, our end and howre.  
(Bk.9, sts.55--57)

Godfrey rapt into the heavens in a dream sees a similarly contemptible sphere. The spirit of Hugo appears to him disclosing how he will shortly take his place among the saints in heaven, though not before he has founded
a Christian empire. He continues,

But to encrease thy love and great desire
To heaven ward, this blessed place behold,
These shining lampes, these globes of living fire,
How they are turned, guided, moov'd, and roul'd,
The Angels singing here and all their quire;
Then bend thine eies on yonder earth and mould,
All in that masse, that globe, and compasses see,
Land, sea, spring, fountain, man, beast, grasse, and tree,

How vile, how small, and of how slender price,
Is there reward of goodness, vertue's gaine;
A narrow roome our glorie vaireup-ties,
A little circle doth our pride containe,
Earth like an Isle amid the water lies,
Which sea sometime is call'd, sometime the maine,
Yet nought therein responds a name so great,
Its but a lake, a pond, a marrish street.

Thus said the one, the other bended downe
His looke to ground, and halfe in scorne he smil'de;
He saweat once earth, sea, floud, castell, townes,
Strangely devided, strangely all compil'de,
And wondred follie man so farre should drowne,
To set his heart on things so base and vile,
That servile empire searcheth and dombefame,
And scorne heav'n's blisse, yet profreth heav'n the same.

(Bk. 14, sts. 9-11)

Nothing could make clearer how the involvement of heaven at once raises and reduces the importance of the action. Tasso's hero is divinized as his heroic action fades from an earthly to a heavenly splendour. His endeavour reaches into the divinely irradiated dimension of the heroic because he acts in accord with the sphere of grace rather than the sphere of nature. And for this reason he seems more like a churchman than a general.

Indeed the vision brought him by Michael at the final assault, in which heaven opens on the scene and the crusaders struggling below are aided by the blessed spirits of dead crusaders and by the hosts of embattled angels, is in all but name a vision of man triumphing in the church triumphant.
It is not surprising that in a poem where the heroic effort is to cross the gap between the earthly and the divine the action of the poem should not be involved in the natural workings of the universe. Where in Camoens' poem the supernatural entered into the elements and one heavenly force drew nature into harmony, Da Gama's expedition onwards, and human endeavour upwards, in Jerusalem Delivered, the supernatural draws human endeavour from the world. In The Lusiad, the island of delights that heavenly love prepares for the sailors is the finest tempering of which earthly materials are capable and, being a hyperbole of nature, is a recreation of the true Paradise. The equivalent in Jerusalem Delivered is the false Paradise of Armida's island. Armida's Paradise is a perversion not a hyperbole of nature: it is a tropical garden maintained on a snowy summit by art; and while in the Paradise of heavenly love heroic endeavour is regenerated, at least in allegory, in Armida's the hero degenerates in the sensual enjoyment of his fallen nature. It would be wrong to argue from this counterfeit and corruption of nature that Tasso, unlike Camoens, sees nature itself as corrupt. Nevertheless it would be unthinkable for Tasso to idealize the fruition of natural desire as Camoens does or to see the plenitude of earthly and creaturely life invested with the divine.

And still Jerusalem Delivered does contain a splendid picture of the bowels of the earth comparable to the submarine picture of the elements of the world's system in The Lusiad. The two knights commissioned to fetch Rinaldo back to battle are prepared for their journey by a wizard, who leads them down to the subterranean fountain of the world's waters and below that to the fountain of metals, for the minerals tempered by the sun's rays undergo a natural alchemy and are transmuted up the scale of nature from base to precious.
There spacious caves they saw all overflown,
There all his waters pure great Neptune keepes,
And thence, to moisten all the earth, he brings
Seas, rivers, flouds, lakes, fountaines, wells, and springs:

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But under these a wealthie streamedoth goe
That Sulphur yieldes and Care, rich, quicks and new,
Which the sunbeames doth polish, purge and fine,
And makes it silver pure, and gold divine.

(Bk.14, sts.37–38)

This is a description of the world's circulation, a process that is worked out more fully in *Paradise Lost* in the metabolism of creation. But the action of *Jerusalem Delivered* is not involved with the hidden workings of the earth's system as the actions of *The Lusiad* or *The Aeneid* are, or in a different way *Paradise Lost*. The circulation of waters and minerals turns up in *Jerusalem Delivered* as an epic decoration rather than as a part of a universal action of which the human action is part. Still it is very much in keeping with the ascetic cast of Tasso's epic that the world's system should be alchemical and that the wizard should be a sort of neo-platonic magus. His original knowledge of the secrets of nature was pagan (st.41), but now baptized, he continues to practise his science for the glory of God. Admittedly the rather Faustian drive of a magus like Ficino, with his attempt to make revelation of natural magick, is severely chastened in Tasso's magus. Still his speculative lore has a place however peripheral in the advance of the kingdom of God.

I have tried to show how ideal imitation works in *The Lusiad* and *Jerusalem Delivered*. Ideal imitation, I remarked earlier, with its didactic aim and rhetorical theory of fiction was in keeping with the neoclassical humanist notions of the study of literature. The poetic method of *The Lusiad* and *Jerusalem Delivered* applies ideas to life and makes them compelling by mounting them in a universal scheme, and this is a method that belongs
among the ideas of eloquence that informed neoclassical humanism. Indeed The Lusiad and Jerusalem Delivered show clearly why neoclassical humanism took epic as its institutional form. Yet to have demonstrated how they answer to an obsolete poetic is not enough. The permanent humanist question remains, whether ideal imitation achieves an adequate criticism of life. And what I have said about the limitations of Tasso's and Camoens' moral ideas means that as criticisms of life their poems fall short. There are of course many things that are admirable in both poems and I do not pretend to have done justice to them -- the descriptions in both poems, Tasso's feat of organization, especially formidable in view of the baggy and episodic form of earlier Renaissance epic. Nevertheless, on what is for our inquiry the central matter, the criticism of life, The Lusiad and Jerusalem Delivered are inadequate, and we are left with a feeling that the ambitious form, whatever its beautiful excrescencies, has an underdeveloped intelligence about life.

What I have said about these epics should be tied in with what I have said earlier about the development of humanism. Both epics are in keeping with the Christian Ciceronianism that it was the great achievement of neoclassical humanism to get beyond. It will be recalled that Valla questioned the union of Ciceronian philosophical theism with Christianity and that in his writings notions of human finitude and creatureliness make themselves heard. 63 Though such notions were influential in Sixteenth Century thought, the advances were being made in France and Germany rather than in Italy and Portugal, and there is no trace of them in The Lusiad or Jerusalem Delivered. Toffanin suggests that the Jesuits were the true inheritors of Italian

63 See above, Ch.4, pp. 153—57.
humanism. His definition of humanism differs from mine, but I agree with his characterization of Italian humanism (apart from the new ideas at work in Valla) and the connection he makes with the Counter Reformation. His theory would explain why Counter Reformation epics like The Lusiad and Jerusalem Delivered should illustrate what, in the scheme of development I put forward in the last chapter, is a comparatively primitive stage in the treatment of humanist and Christian ideas.

What made up this primitive stage of neoclassical humanism was the traditional Christianizing of Cicero's culture. Cicero had made it his task to make Greek philosophy accessible to the literary mind and in so doing brought philosophical theism within the sphere of eloquence. It was easy for Christian learning to take over such a study of letters and to imagine a harmony between religions and humanist concerns. The epics we have been considering imply just such a theory of letters. Both put the epic form to celebrating an action in such a way that it shows earthly ends glorified in the universal and divine scheme of things. Both apply an epic eloquence to showing the interpenetration of human striving and divine order. And in the glory they cast about their heroes they show man in touch with the divine through his heroic endeavours. In short both The Lusiad and Jerusalem Delivered show the Christian divinization of man that Toffanin and, following him, Trinkaus consider characteristic of Renaissance humanism. Nor is this divinization merely a matter of epic convention and

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of epic representation of the human condition. The Lusiad sees its celebration of the glory of Portugal as actually taking part in the divine and human advancement of the kingdom of God. Similarly when Tasso asks to be inspired by the divine truth he is asking that his own heroic literary activity should take part in that universal triumph of light over darkness of which the action he has chosen is an episode. Both epics then show letters in harmony with a theology of glory.

I wrote earlier in my historical sketch that a humanism preoccupied with the divinization of man was an inadequate humanism. The shortcomings of The Lusiad and Jerusalem Delivered corroborate that judgement. In both the heroic perspective shows man's divinization rather than his creatureliness. In The Lusiad the appetitive and passionate life of man becomes through hyperbole as much as allegory a figure of his divine fulfillment and the heroic effort is shown directed at divine ends. In Jerusalem Delivered there is a fracture between natural and divine desire. Nevertheless it is clear that the heroic, the truly human vocation is to become divine and that through rational discipline, the divine interpenetrates human action. And it is because in both epics the mind and will are bent upon infinite and divine ends rather than on those choices that make us definite and human that their moral ideas are limited and their criticism of life inadequate.

4. "Paradise Lost"

a) Introduction

With Paradise Lost the neoclassical epic breaks out of these limitations. It succeeds in treating its Christian theme in such a way that it becomes a serious criticism of life. But in doing so, it goes beyond ideal imitation, and it is possible to account for the central human action only in terms of Aristotelian imitation. It is there that we shall find
the answer to the problem this dissertation is addressed to, how *Paradise Lost* bears on the study of man. I shall try to explain why this is so in section "b", where I shall compare Milton's heroic action with Camoens' and Tasso's. But in this chapter, as a whole, I do not mean to explore the ways in which the action of *Paradise Lost* works in Aristotelian terms, for that would be to overburden the frame of comparison I have set up. I shall put off that task to Chapter 6 and in this chapter limit myself to mapping the ways in which *Paradise Lost* works in terms of an ideal imitation. For although *Paradise Lost* goes beyond ideal imitation, it is at the same time an intricate working out of the epic possibilities of ideal imitation that we have seen at work in *The Lusiad* and *Jerusalem Delivered*. The action of the poem is involved in elaborate schemes of universal images. I shall try to show how this is so in section "c" where I shall give an account of the images of unfallen creation and of their inversions in the images of uncreation. It will emerge from these accounts how the pivot of these schemes of universal images is the obedience that entails choice and free will. It will also emerge how in contrast to Camoens' and Tasso's schemes of universal images, Milton's are set up in such a way that the heroic vocation is a standing in one's human creatureliness not an attempt to rise beyond it. And in this contrast I see the possibility of a more developed humanist study of man.

b) The Heroic Action of "Paradise Lost"

The action of *Paradise Lost* is the fall and repentance of man. This is a very different sort of action from the sort we have been looking at in *The Lusiad* and *Jerusalem Delivered*. The action is explicitly part of divine history. There is no need for an epic treatment to place it in a universal perspective. It is given that the fall is the beginning of universal history.
The involvement of the supernatural is also given. Where other epics try to raise their action to universal significance through an epic assault on the divine, *Paradise Lost* treats an action whose universal and moral significance is written into it from the start. Moreover, unlike Da Gama's voyage or the delivery of Jerusalem, the fall and repentance of Adam and Eve is not a heroic attempt to get in touch with divinity. It is not even a heroic exploit, at least not in the ordinary sense. And it need not be. The universal importance of their action makes it epical. It does not matter that, far from celebrating a heroic striving towards God, *Paradise Lost* treats rather a falling away from divinity and a return that, as far as the human heroes are concerned, has nothing of the conventionally heroic about it. It is, of course, very much grist to my mill that the falling away from divinity should be in many ways a heroic assault on divinity, an attempt to become as gods. There remains, however, something paradoxical, almost anti-epical, about an action that turns on a failing of the will and on a divinization of man that comes through human passivity rather than through heroic striving.

That Milton's peculiar reversal of what was conventionally expected of the heroic was deliberate, was indeed a Copernican revolution in the epic tradition has been cogently argued in John M. Steadman's book, *Milton and the Renaissance Hero*. That this reversal accords with a Protestant view of human creatureliness should be clear from what I have said earlier about Luther and Pauline Christianity. That, in addition, some such reversal of the tradition was necessary if the epic was to be a morally intelligent form should be clear from the inadequacies of the standard epics we have been studying. It seems to me, at any rate, that Milton's Copernican revolution was the critical response of a humanist to the moral inadequacies
of the conventional epic as much as it was the vigorous reshaping of epic action to suit the requirements of Protestant Christianity. The creaturely man of Protestantism has in any case more to do with moral experience than the divinized man of Counter Reformation epic. But more than that, Milton's action displaces a mass of epic luggage from the centre of concern. It displaces war to heaven. One could argue of course that the fall and restoration of man are episodes in a holy war. And support for that argument could be found in the fact that the war in heaven is recounted in the central books of the epic and moreover, as a lesson to the human pair in what is at stake in their obedience. Nevertheless the fall and restoration of man is itself not a military episode. That is an enormous advantage. War as we have seen is a clumsy image of the moral life (Milton's war is not the least clumsy example), and with its main action Paradise Lost avoids that clumsiness.

There are excellent grounds for thinking that Milton's avoidance of epic war as a subject was deliberate. We know that in his early flush of epic ambition he thought Arthurian legend might offer a subject. An Arthurian epic would almost certainly have been patriotic and military, like the Faerie Queene or perhaps even more like Blackmore's Prince Arthur.


67 See "Mansus", ll.80—84; "Epitaphium Damonis", ll.166—68. See also Reason of Church Government, Complete Prose, 1, 813—14.
Probably in changing the history of Britain for the history of the universe he wished to overgo all previous epic. But if mere stupendousness had been his aim, his choice of subject would be of little critical interest. The invocation to Book 9 of *Paradise Lost*, however, suggests that, "long choosing, and beginning late", he fixed on his subject for critical reasons (Bk.9, 1.26). He speaks of his subject, the fall of man and the ensuing human passions and wrath of heaven as

*Not less but more Heroic than the wrath
Of stern Achilles on his foe persu'd
Thrice Fugitive about Troy Wall; or rage
Of Turnus for Lavinia disespous'd,
Or Neptun's ire or Juno’s, that so long Perplex'd the Greek and Cytherea's Son.* (ll.14--19)

And he goes on to declare himself

*Not sedulous by Nature to indite
Warrs, hitherto the onely Argument
Heroic deem'd, chief maistrie to dissect
With long and tedious havoc fabl'd Knights
In Battels feign'd; the better fortitude
Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom
Unsung.* (ll.27--33)

This is a splendid Miltonic sarcasm suggesting that the purpose not only of heroic wars but of heroic poems is to cut up knights, who (an annihilating touch) are fictitious anyway. It is clear that Milton was critical, not to say dismissive, of the martial epic.

But what have "Patience and Heroic Martyrdom" to do with *Paradise Lost*? Milton surely implies that he will celebrate them when he says they are as yet unsung, unlike the oversung havoc of war. Yet I cannot see how they are the substance of his poem's action. It is easy to say that he is thinking of the Son. And the Son's patience and martyrdom do come into Books 3 and 12. But they are hardly the action or argument of the poem as a
whole or of the part on hand from the beginning of Book 9. If Milton is thinking of Adam and Eve, he must have in mind the vision Michael gives Adam of life out of Eden, the history that he is called to go forward into as father of mankind. There it is true that patience and martyrdom are the heroic human calling. For the long and rather depressing vista is punctuated with holocausts like that of Samson, which turn out to be acts of God made possible through human martyrdom. And in the sense that the epic culminates in the prospect of human history, *Paradise Lost* leads up to patience and martyrdom as the elements of true heroism, the Son's human life and sacrifice being a sort of heroic paradigm. And still patience and heroic martyrdom do not really enter into the central action of *Paradise Lost*, the fall and restoration of Adam and Eve. And if they did, let me insert, they would constitute a heroism remarkably different from the active striving towards God that *The Lusiad* and *Jerusalem Delivered* celebrate.68

That the constituents of Milton's heroic ideal do not square with the central action of his poem brings us to one of the peculiarities of *Paradise Lost*. The failing of the will and its repentance do not make up an ideally

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68 Kurth, pp.27, 55, points out that patience and heroic martyrdom had become part of the Christian epic tradition. This is not, however, to argue that they are the theme of the central human action of *Paradise Lost*. Michael Cavanagh, "A Meeting of Epic and History: Books XI and XII of *Paradise Lost*", *ELH*, 38 (1971), 215, argues that Adam's acceptance of the history Michael shows is heroic. But in my view the education of Adam at Michael's hands is not fully part of the action that Milton works out as a study of the will, however well integrated into the design of the poem.
heroic exploit, and in consequence Adam and Eve the heroes, in the sense of chief actors in the action, are not heroes, in the sense of exemplars of heroic virtues. Of course the last lines of the poem picture Adam and Eve going out into the world and history with courage. And no doubt patience enters into their courage and willingness to undergo what lies before them. And yet the light that is cast upon them is surely not a heroic lustre nor is martyrdom their fate. We are moved by the half-regretful cadences, the chastened yet tender mood of

The World was all before them, where to choose
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:
They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
Through Eden took thir solitarie way, (Bk. 12, 11.646–49)

but not to imitation. We are moved rather because we feel with them than because we feel admiration for them.

Even where Milton does represent what he considers an examplary heroic act in the Son's volunteering to die for man, his treatment cuts below the conventional show of heroic magnanimity to more elemental and indeed human emotions of pity and trust.

I for his sake will leave
Thy bosom, and this glorie next to thee
Freely put off, and for him lastly die (Bk. 3, 11.238–240)

has something of the conventional hero's magnanimous regard for his glory, even if here it is paradoxically made perfect by voluntary humiliation and

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69 For the distinction between heroes as chief actors and as exemplars of heroic virtues, see John M. Steadman, "Heroic Virtue and the Divine Image in Paradise Lost", JWCI, 22 (1959), 89.
self-sacrifice, and

I through the ample Air in Triumph high
Shall lead Hell Captive maugre Hell, and show
The Powers of darkness bound (11.254—256)

is a sort of heroic self-glorification. But what makes the Son's speech moving is not lines such as these, or not in isolation, but their combination with the plea to the Father that mankind should find mercy and the trust that through trust he, like the rest of mankind, shall be restored from death:

by thee I live,
Though now to Death I yeild, and am his due
All that of me can die; yet that debt paid,
Thou wilt not leave me in the loathsom grave
His prey, nor suffer my unspotted Soule
For ever with corruption there to dwell. (11.244—49)

In these lines, the Son speaks with the trust or faith that the ordinary human believer might speak with. What moves us is not so much the sublimity of his confidence or the bigness of his gesture -- we have seen enough of those in Satan's volunteering to go on his mission -- as the flesh and blood of his declaration. The Son's volunteering is very carefully mounted in contrast to Satan's, and clearly Milton is opposing an example of truly heroic patience and heroism against falsely heroic self-regard, setting off genuine against meretricious splendour; clearly the distinctions he is making are finely critical of the heroic ethos. In that respect the art of Paradise Lost is intelligent ideal imitation, the art of fashioning ideas of virtues and vices in images. But what is remarkable about the poetry of the Son's volunteering -- in this entirely

70 Steadman, Milton and the Renaissance Hero, pp.141—47.
different from the conventional representation of Abdiel as a heroic image -- is that, even where it is most concerned with a heroic ideal, it engages us through its intimacy with human motives rather than through the admiration it compels for heroic splendour.

Without such a grasp of human motive, *Paradise Lost* would be a heroic and theological fantasy. Grasp of motive distinguishes *Paradise Lost* from *The Lusiad* or *Jerusalem Delivered*. But this is not merely an excellence; it is almost a necessity for *Paradise Lost*. The central action is not the heroic rivalry of Satan and the Son but the fall and repentance of Adam and Eve. This is an action that has to be worked out in terms of human volition. Ideal imitation is not sufficient. Imitation in Aristotle's sense, the involvement of actor and act in a chain of volition is called for. One remarks that the notion of imitation Aristotle develops in the *Poetics* applies better to classical tragedy than to classical epic and that the fall of man, if not his repentance, comes closer to a tragic action than the conventional epic war or journey. The action of *Paradise Lost* is not heroic in this conventional way, and it does not entirely fit inside the conventional neoclassical form of ideal imitation.

There have, of course, been attempts to reduce the action involving Adam and Eve to a scheme of ideal imitation. A typical account goes that Adam represents reason, Eve appetite; Satan the spirit of insubordination stirs up Eve and appetite against the rule of reason, and reason and Adam are overborne. The fallen pair can only be restored through the operation

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of right reason in the person of the Son. And certainly this scheme of virtues and vices takes in some of the issues of the poem. But it is out of touch with the human actors involved in the issues and inadequate to deal with the motions of their wills. It makes the poem grotesque and banal. Nevertheless, ideal imitation and the kind of imitation Aristotle speaks of are not mutually exclusive, and we can talk of *Paradise Lost* in terms of both kinds. To my mind the Aristotelian is the more interesting. It is where he is dealing with the motions of the will that Milton is most penetrating and it is there, besides, that the answer to the question about Christian theology and the criticism of life lies. This sort of imitation, however, lies within a framework that we can account for in terms of ideal imitation. The framework in *Paradise Lost* is a universal scheme of images of good and evil. This is comparable, though significantly different from the universal conflicts in *The Lusiad* and *Jerusalem Delivered*, and it is useful to make the comparison in this chapter in terms of ideal imitation. Inside the universal and ideal framework lies the human action on which the whole framework revolves; but this I shall deal with in a later chapter in terms of Aristotelian imitation.

We might compare this human action with the Rinaldo story in *Jerusalem Delivered*. Like the story of Adam and Eve, the story of Rinaldo lies inside a larger story of universal conflict and involves a failure and restoration of the will. But Rinaldo, unlike Adam and Eve, is not the chief actor of the epic and his story is not the central but an ancillary action. *Paradise Lost* shifts the whole structure on to the action involving the motions of the will. And the difference is more than structural. The treatment of the motions of Rinaldo's will is fairly mechanical. The image of Rinaldo defaced is set against the image of Rinaldo restored, but
the account of the process is perfunctory. Apart from a certain embarrassment and shuffling with Armida, the treatment is hardly a study of how humans work. In other words, although the story of Rinaldo, like the story of Adam and Eve involves motions of the will, Tasso's treatment, unlike Milton's, does not go beyond those appearances that ideal imitation can easily handle.

c) Ideal Imitation in "Paradise Lost"

1) Introduction

I do not mean to disparage ideal imitation. In Milton's hands it is capable of surprising range and subtlety, and I only hope some notion of these will come out of the following discussion. Of all epic imaging of the golden world of poetic art that Sidney speaks of, Milton's seems the most fitting for its subject. For he does not gild the fallen world but pictures the unfallen one, golden in itself without the help of art. And Paradise Lost is also distinguished by its enormously elaborate representation of its golden world. The descriptions of heaven and hell and the accounts of creation take up far more space in Paradise Lost than the visions of the universe and the cosmic powers in other epics. Moreover, the action is far more intimately involved in the universe, not only because of the theology and indeed ontology of creation and man's place in it that Milton is obliged to treat, but also because of the curious and beautiful way his poetry works out these matters. When we have the clue, Paradise Lost unfolds as an astonishing complication of universal images. And where other epics are content with episodes or visions that link the action to the universe, universal processes enter into almost every part of Paradise Lost directly or by implication. The clue to the unfolding is Raphael's disquisition in Book 5, where he explains that the creation is a
monistic system. The reason why we need this clue is that Milton's copious development of the system of creation in images is often peculiarly refined and conveyed in fugitive effects. This alone would justify glossing Raphael's account. But there is another reason for doing so. The universal process the images convey is what Adam and Eve fall out of. To explain the images of the creation that Adam and Eve are part of in Paradise is to explain at the same time the terms of the action. In what follows I shall not be attempting to justify Milton's theology or ontology. They are no doubt open to logical as well as scientific objections. What I am concerned to do is to trace the interwoven scheme of images and how they make up the frame of the moral action.  

That everything derives from God, is sustained by him and is, in a sense, part of him is clear from the scheme of things Raphael outlines to Adam. Yet, at the outset, a difficulty arises that we must solve if we are to see how the fall of man is a possibility. Raphael tells Adam that

one Almighty is, from whom
All things proceed, and up to him return,
If not deprav'd from good. (Bk.5, ll.469—71)

And according to Michael, God's omnipresence fills even the fallen world (Bk.11, ll.335—38). Now the mode in which God is present in creation is important: it leaves room for freedom of the will; it makes freedom of the will the essence of creatureliness; and it casts around Adam and Eve the godlike radiance of the epic hero in their creatureliness. But the place of free will is a problem. For if God is present in his creation, then it is

72 Kester Svendsen, Milton and Science (New York: Greenwood, 1956), pp.4—5, makes the point which should be borne in mind throughout my remarks on Milton's universe, that his use of scientific ideas does not imply a scientific commitment to them.
hard to see what room is left for choice, let alone falling away from God. It is hard to answer Satan's question to Eve, "What can your knowledge hurt him, or this Tree Impart against his will if all be his?" (Bk.9, 11.727--28). This is the moral crux of the monastic system. If all things proceed from God, how can evil enter into things? How can there be a choice of anything but good?

I can see no way out of this difficulty unless the will is free to fall out of things and evil is in a sense no thing. The choice facing Adam and Eve is a choice between being in nature or falling out of nature towards unbeing.73

The notion that evil was a sort of negation or privation of goodness is after all traditional. Augustine uses it against the Manichaean doctrine that evil lies in matter and has a power equal to God's.74 The Augustinian account became a standard way of absolving an omnipotent God from whom all things proceed, not only among scholastic theologians but also among men of letters. The humanist Salutati, for instance, whose defence of the study of letters I have referred to in an earlier chapter, proceeds in the Augustinian manner, though his language is scholastic.


74 Augustine, Confessions, Book 7, Ch.12.
You find in that context not only these acts which we do and liberty of choice but also deformity of those acts, which are entirely nothing except defects of human actions since they are of no entity and put nothing into human acts but privation....Although God concurs in every act of will and nature as long as they are entities and good, yet He does not work the deformities of actions, which is a defect not an effect and has no efficient cause but a deficient one, since that deformity is no entity (otherwise it would be good), but pure privation of good.  

And the idea that evil is negation is current among Seventeenth Century English poets also. Donne and Herbert make use of it. And Fulke Greville's Caelica, C11, is a remarkable exposition of the fall as an unaccountable seeking out of privation.

The use of this idea to us is not only that it will help us later to explain the fall of beings created perfect but that it points to the way Milton images creation. Creation is precarious not because it is flawed or unstable in itself but because it can lapse into uncreation. So that while, as Raphael says, all things derive from God, they may also fall away towards nothing. The images of creation are reversible, the forms of being capable of turning into unbeing. The method of imaging is to picture creation as order. It is through its laws that God is present in creation and sustains it. Things are what they are in so far as they conform to the

75 De fato, fortuna et casu, quoted Trinkaus, In Our Image, 1,91.

76 See e.g. Herbert's "Sinne" and Donne's "The Bracelet", 11.71--75. Cf. Donne's summary of the opinions of the schools in the Sermon Preached at Whitehall, Mar. 4, 1624, The Sermons of John Donne, ed. Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1953), 6, 238: "You know, I presume, in what sense we say in the Schoole, Malum nihil, et Peccatum nihil, that evil is nothing, sin is nothing; that is it hath no reality, it is no created substance, it is but a privation, as a shadow is, a sickness is; so it is nothing." See also John Calvin, Commentaries on the Book of Genesis, tr. John King (Edin.: Calvin Trans. Soc., 1848), 1, 142: "We must conclude that the principle of evil with which Satan was endued was not from nature, but from defection."
law of being with which they were created. But order can be undone by disorder. Nothing new enters; only the elements of order are set askew. And since creation is order, such a displacement is uncreation. It is accordingly possible to fall out of the system involving all that is into what is not. There are consequently two schemes of universal images, a scheme of images of the unfallen creation and a scheme of images of the inversion or undoing of creation. The schemes hinge on the issue of obedience and offer those alternatives that make free choice possible. It is in this way that the moral action of the poem, the fall and restoration of man, is involved in the universal images.

2) The Images of the Unfallen Universe

The images of the unfallen universe work out how all things derive from God and how they return to him. While Adam and Eve are unfallen, they fit inside the universal constitution of things. I shall take up first the ways in which the universe is imaged as deriving from God. Here the master idea is right order. This means that Milton images obedience as a universal principle of which the free obedience of Adam and Eve is part.

The most explicit image of creation as order is where Paradise Lost pictures God creating by divine fiat. The point about the fiat is that it is an unconditional act: "Necessitie and Chance/Approach not mee, and what I will is Fate" (Bk.7, ll.172--73). Consequently God is in no sense compelled to unfold like the neoplatonic godhead by his divine nature.77 So although

creation may derive from him, he is at the same time disengaged from it and absolute in himself. The creation does not incorporate its creator. It is the order established by his will, created through his "Omnific Word" (Bk.7, 1.217). This is clear from the natural theology of the prayers of Adam and Eve (Bk.4, 11.720--35; Bk.5, 11.153--208), where nature points to the transcendence of God because it is his work. God is present to Adam and Eve in creation, not because he is diffused in it, but because they see in it evidence of the divine majesty that ordained it. Moreover, as the universe conforms to the divine laws, it is his kingdom, not only through coming under his laws, but through showing forth his state like an unending ceremony. So in their prayer at the beginning of Book Five, Adam and Eve picture the celestial bodies and the elements "that in quaternion run" (1.181) praising God by moving according to their ordained motions. Elsewhere the motions of the celestial bodies are likened to the ceremonies of the angels in the court of heaven when they dance and sing about the throne of God. These images of God's kingship show us how to take Raphael's statement that all things derive from God. There is a curious detail, by the way, in his account of creation, where he remarks that the Father "went/invisible" with the Son on his journey to make the world, "yet staid: (such priviledge/Hath Omnipresence)" (Bk.7, 11.588--90). One thinks, perhaps, of Cusanus's circle whose centre has an uncircumscribed mode of being everywhere.78 But the puzzle can be more easily understood as a fact about kingly power than as a geometrical paradox. Absolute rulers have a not very mysterious way of being everywhere their laws hold sway, while they sit "on th'Imperial Throne", "fixt for ever firm" (11.585--86).

The presence of God in creation is the obedience of creation to the divine will. At the same time the obedience of created things to the divine will is obedience to the law of their being. They are what they are through obedience and in this way derived from God. Now in a universal system where everything depends on obedience it is easy to see how being is a precarious standing and how the possibility of disobedience carries with it the threat of falling out of the order of creation into unbeing. If God had been pantheistically diffused in everything, there could be no such alternatives of good and evil, and consequently no moral choice. All things would be equal. But in Paradise Lost, the mode of God's presence in things at once puts him into creation and separates him from it. And because he is present through an act of will ordaining laws of being and bounds of things, the possibility of falling away from him enters into the constitution of the universe.

This is a principle on which the human action as well as the universe of Paradise Lost hinges. Indeed it is how the elaborate image of the universe universalizes the human action. For it means that obedience, the conformity of creation with the divine will is the axis of Milton's universe. And through obedience the wills of Adam and Eve are wound into the workings of the world's system.

One of the forms we should expect cosmic obedience to take would be conformity with a hierarchical scale of being. The natures of things would then be ordained by the place in which they are set. Yet the odd thing is that Milton does not particularly stress the hierarchical principle.

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79 See Roy Daniells, Milton, Mannerism and the Baroque (Toronto: Toronto Univ. Press, 1963), p.82.
It is as if the divine will were present immediately at every point in creation instead of being mediated through a hierarchical chain. This is of course, an exaggeration. There are many places where order takes hierarchical forms. It is implicit in the celestial system in which the sun is the fountain of light ordered by the stars and planets as God is circled by the multitudes in heaven. It is also I think implicit in the heraldic pictures of the newly created beasts, which generalise the idea of an ordered array without specifying a strict Linnaean protocol. And it is, on the other hand, explicit in the account of the creation of man, whose place, higher than the animals and a little lower than the angels, indicates that his nature is both animal and rational and that he is the masterwork, the point at which creation becomes articulate and free to worship God (Bk.7, 11.505--16). And it is painfully explicit in the relation of husband to wife. Nevertheless it seems to me that degree receives surprisingly little imaginative treatment in Paradise Lost. Hierarchy has a way of dissolving into its principle, obedience, a far more direct link between creator and creature.

The pressure of obedience might suggest regimentation. And it must be said that the angelic orders are military. They are of course at war. There is, however, another side, even to angels' obedience, but more conspicuously to the order of the universe. This is the astonishing and baroque intricacy of the images of order. In their morning prayer Adam and Eve call upon the four elements to let their "ceaseless change/Varie to our great Maker still new praise" (Bk.5, 11.183--84). Such a notion of a varying yet constant movement comes out wherever Milton describes the unfall-
en world. In the same way the heavens, planets, and angels move in mazes intricate,
Eccentric, intervolv'd, yet regular
Then most, when most irregular they seem. (Bk.5, 11.622–24)

In Book 8, Raphael expatiates on the whirling intricacy of the system to confound Adam with a sense of God's superior wisdom. But in Book 5 the complications delight rather than confuse. The picture implies that the order in heaven and the world is not a regimentation but a liberal discipline unfolding into individual, indeed curly, movement. In The Reason of Church Government, Milton has a passage that makes the sense of these images explicit. He describes the ordered happiness of heaven as 'not "confin'd and cloy'd with repetition of that which is prescrib'd" but as orbing "itselfe into a thousand vagancies of glory and delight, and with a kinde of eccentricall equation [being], as it were, an invariable Planet of joy and felicity." So "Eccentricall equation", "invariable Planet", both speak of regular irregularity, variation in constancy. The order makes possible the free play of things and their free play is the plenitude or "enormous bliss" of the order. So if on the one hand the images of the ordered universe feature the obedience that engages the freedom of human wills, here on the other hand they feature the freedom of unfallen nature in which Adam and Eve choose.

So far I have dwelt on how Milton's images of the universe suggest order. And that fits in not only with his moral notions but with the root idea of a cosmos. The Greek kosmein means to arrange; the cosmos is the

80 Reason of Church Government, Complete Prose, 1, 752.
array of being. Milton pictures the universe in other ways, however, ways that might suggest that he was even more interested in its unity of being and that in spite of all I have said about the separateness of God from his creation, Milton inconsistently imaged him diffused in it. It remains to show, then, that the images of how God creates and sustains creation by flowing into it do not contradict what I have said about order and the precariousness of being.

We are told on the one hand that God creates with a pair of golden compasses (Book 7, ll.225--231). Clearly that is an image of making by setting things in order, of giving things shape by appointing their bounds. This creation through subtraction is like carving where what makes, say, the spoon out of the formless stuff is the cutting away. But on the other hand God also creates by impregnation, which is a sort of addition. When the Son has finished with the compasses the Spirit infuses warmth and vital virtue into the fluid mass of primary matter (Bk.7, ll.234--39). And Milton elaborates each act of creation with a hylozoic account of the evolution of things. So on the second day the earth is fomented by the generative waters that envelope it, and when God commands the separation of sea and land, the earth heaves and hollows as if leavened by a living force. The seas generate fish and the earth gives birth to the animals. As for the complete creation, Michael tells Adam that God’s omnipresence foments all living creatures by his "virtual power" (Bk.11, ll.335--38).

God then is the source of life and the generative force streaming through things comes from him. Indeed it is part of Satan’s temptation of Eve to suggest that the sun, not God, is the fountain of life (Bk.9,

81 See Curry, pp.92--113; William B. Hunter, Jr., "Milton's Materialistic Life Principle", JEGP, 45 (1946), 68--76.
ll.718--22). But if God flows into things in this way, how can Milton escape the pantheism that would rule out choice and the possibility of lapsing out of creation? 82

To this we may make a logical rejoinder. All life may come from God, but that does not mean that life is God. All things, even matter, may in a sense be contained in God, but it does not follow that creation contains him. So if God is in creation, he may at the same time be outside it and separate from it. And such a relation is compatible with the relation of absolute ruler to kingdom that I described earlier.

This argument for the consistency of Milton's image of the universe is negative; nothing contradicts it. But a more positive argument for the consistency of Milton's universe is that all the images of God's flowing forth into creation imply order. The love of God, for instance, is pictured as the chain of love Satan sees, that series of links binding earth to heaven. More arrestingly, the impregnation of Chaos is the infusing of a principle of order. 83 So the Spirit of God brooding and infusing vital warmth into the primary stuff of creation effects a separation of the material capable of receiving life from "The black tartareous cold infernal dregs/Adverse to life" (Bk. 7, ll. 238--39); then sorts out the confused embryon atoms into homogeneous conglomerations of the four elements from which the world will be articulated; and finally roughly disposes the stuff into the spheres of earth and air. A residue remains. This also is "disparted" to "several place" (Bk. 7, ll. 240--41). Curry suggests that it is


83 Cf. Eros as seperator and drawer of like to like in Spenser's, "An Hym in Honour of Love", ll.50--402.
ether or fire, which would be the material of the heavenly bodies. But in any case the striking point about Milton's picture of God's generation of the world is that it shows an ordering of the formless and a separating of the confused. It corresponds, more or less, to what Uriel says he witnessed when confusion heard God's voice (Bk. 3, ll. 708–21). So the creation through impregnation, the image in which we should perhaps expect to see God least differentiated from creation, turns out on inspection to be a first differentiating and ordering of things in preparation for further stages of ordering.

The generative power of God is associated with light. Creatures are lights and God the father of lights. At points in Paradise Lost -- the invocation to Book 3, for instance, -- the divine light seems to split into a spectrum, not of prismatic colours, but of the species of creation, into "the vernal bloom, or Summers Rose, or flocks, or herds, or human face divine" (Book 3, ll. 43–44). This is hardly hinted and I am not suggesting that Milton entertained a mystical theology of light. It is, rather, an image of the flowing forth of God into creation. And strikingly even this image of flowing forth is associated with order. Light indeed is an aspect, perhaps the first principle of order. Curry suggests that the vital warmth that the Spirit impregnates Chaos with setting the process of order in motion

84 Curry, p.107.

85 "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James, 1, 7). On forms as lights see Otto von Simson, The Gothic Cathedral (New York: Pantheon, 1950), pp.50–58.

is in fact a seminal principle of light, lightness invisible, which later springs forth from the deep "Ethereal, first of things" (Book 7, ll.244). And this suggestion fits in with what is implied in the invocation to Book 3 that the light of the world is generated by Holy Light and that the one is a sort of continuation of the other. The sun is then the "sovran vital Lamp" of Holy Light in the world (Bk.3, l.22). There are other vital lamps (not sovereign ones) that warm and quicken the earth. According to Adam, the stars

\begin{quote}
foment and warme, 
Temper or nourish, or in part shed down 
Thir stellar vertue on all kinds that grow. (Bk.4, ll.669--71)
\end{quote}

In this way they prevent the return of total darkness and the extinction of life. The influence of light quickens even the mineral world, for the sun engenders precious stones, those crystallizations of light, in the bowels of the earth (Bk.3, ll.609--12) as the light of heaven prompts the materials of heaven's soil to shoot forth in plants and gems (Bk.6, ll.475--81). Physical light is the generative force passing through creation and sustaining life, often in what are to us surprising forms. And yet if the physical light is continuous with Holy Light and certainly an image of the sustaining energy flowing from God into creation, it is again necessary to see how this does not imply that God is diffused or emanated into things. Just as God sustains things in their being through their conforming to his laws, so light is transmitted through the order of things. The stars draw their light from the sun through a complicated

\begin{footnotes}
87 Curry, 105--106.
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protocol (Bk.7, ll.364--86). At the beginning of time their aspect is benign and life giving, and they move in a constant astrological equinox. With the fall they undergo disaster. They lapse out of their life sustaining order into the procession of mutability, and consequently their original light is confused and brings about perturbances of life. The unfallen order of light in the solar system corresponds to the order in heaven. Indeed it is through that correspondence or conformity to the divine pattern that solar light reflects the divine light. Similarly the sanctities in heaven receive their radiance from the fountain of light in so far as they move and have their being within the heavenly order. Satan, who as Lucifer shone as the morning star, is in eclipse in hell (Bk.1, ll.594--99), whereas the Son reflects the glory of the Father because he is perfectly obedient. He is the radiant image of the Father (Bk.3, 1.63) and the Father impresses him with his image or reflection (Bk.3, 1.388).

The order of things is then a complicated system of mirrors and prisms reflecting the light of the wisdom of God. Indeed in the book of nature created things are images of God's wisdom, and Adam waking from creation is able to see what they reflect and as the original philosopher reason up to God (Bk.8, ll.270--82). Man, along with the angels is in addition more than a reflection of God's wisdom. He actually reflects the image of God. That is what is meant by the oxymoron, the "human face divine."

Milton's image of the universe conveys God's unbounded creative energy. But notably the unbounded energy works through bounding and ordering things,

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90 Bk.10, ll.656--91.
through distinguishing them and setting them apart in their proper places.\(^91\) In this respect his universe differs from the model favoured by Romantic or Transcendentalist pantheism where God is both below Nature, the seminal principle of all forms, and beyond Nature, the infinitude towards which all forms are a becoming. The God of *Paradise Lost* is infinite behind and beyond his creation. But his presence in it is a limiting and ordering exercise of power. So it is not in their sharing the nature of infinity that created things derive from God but in their finitude and boundedness, in their creatureliness, in other words.

Creation, however, is not simply a flowing forth but a return of things to God. This return of which Raphael speaks and of which there are abundant images in the poem might seem to upset what I have said about the order and boundedness of creation. It might suggest, even, that Paradise, far from being the garden of creatureliness, is in fact the retreat of the platonizing mystic bent on ascending to God. Yet the poem does not miscarry, and in fact the ascent of things to God works in much the same way as the derivation of things from God, only in reverse.

Raphael explains the process in the course of answering Adam's question about how he can eat. His discourse expatiates into the workings of the universe, which in his account make up a metabolic system. Creatures are not only set in a universal order and an array of lights but inside a great chain of digestion. The basic principle is that "of Elements/The grosser feeds the purer" (Bk.5, ll.415--16). So from the earth and water exhalations arise into the air and these feed the bodies of fire. The spots in the moon are in fact the meals sent up from the earth, yet undigested.

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\(^{91}\) For a later and more explicit account of God as boundary setter see Pope's *Essay on Man*, 1. The comparison was suggested by Prof. Ross.
And the moon in turn sends up further exhalations to feed the purer fires of the sun, these meals, before they are digested, appearing as sun spots. The same process is at work in the digestion of man and angels. The grosser elements of food are concocted into spirits that feed the rational mind. So even though he is used to ambrosia, manna and nectar, Raphael is still able to transubstantiate an earthly meal to his spiritual substance. To Raphael's analogy of universal digestion, Milton adds the further one of alchemy. The conversion of food to spirit is like the transmutation of base metals to gold. Indeed the chemistry of the universal metabolism is of an alchemical sort. One recalls that when Satan landed on the sun he found that it was a mass of alchemical potencies.

Things ascend then, but how do they return to God? It is in answer to Adam's second question about how banqueting in heaven compares with Eve's vegetarian dinner that Raphael broaches this doctrine. His answer is truly puzzling. Moreover, it is no answer to Adam's question that I can see. For first of all Raphael merely repeats what he has told Adam about the great chain of digestion, adding a further illustration of how "body up to spirit work[s]" (1.478): the plant draws sustenance from the earth, sublimating it into "spirits odorous"; the plant in turn becoming man's sustenance, aspires finally to animal and intellectual spirits giving

both life and sense, Fansie and understanding, whence the soul
Reason receives, and reason is her being. (11.485--87)

Raphael then repeats his former point that the conversion of all things to

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spirit explains how he is able to eat human food. Man, however, is a little lower than the angels so that while angels' digestions are robust enough to cope with human food, man would find angels' food insubstantial. But then lest Adam should grow discontented with his earthly meals, Raphael holds out the prospect that man may be refined into a more spiritual creature, digested and "'Improv'd by tract of time" (l.497) up the scale of being. With this answer Adam professes himself gratified remarking that Raphael has taught him about the scale of being and how "In contemplation of created things/By steps we may ascend to God" (ll.511--12). I find this conversation baffling. Raphael does not answer Adam's question and Adam's rejoinder goes off at a tangent.

The greatest difficulty from our point of view, however, is that Raphael does not explain how things return to God. If it is through man they return, how does the return take place? In the peculiar destiny Raphael pictures for mankind, man becomes pure spirit like the angels. This may be to tend nearer God, but is it actually to return and be assimilated by him? This might be so if Milton held that body and spirit are inimical and that the spirit returns to the One through separation from body. But Milton did not. For him spirit is a refinement of matter. And angels themselves are creatures separate from God. Perhaps, then, there are further stages of refinement that Raphael omits or perhaps he has in mind some hypothetical eschatology whereby God becomes "All in All" (Bk.3, l.341) without the intervention of the Fall and the Son's joining manhood to Godhead. One thing, however, is clear. Raphael's account of the return of things to God does not describe a platonic union of the soul with God. In the first place it is not the soul of man that ascends, but the entire nature or form of man, his living soul; and it is not the individual but
the race that is involved. Moreover, the ascent takes place through gradual evolution during which man's nature will be tempered through obedience. So the ascent is not an ascetic one. Indeed the whole point about the meal is to insist that the abundance of unfallen nature is not rejected even by spiritual beings. If it were, then the implication would be that there is a fracture in creation, that the body is somehow at odds with spirit, and it would take some subtlety to show how such a vitiated existence could proceed from God and be good. Milton insists on the integrity of man in his creaturely condition and on the integrity of the entire creation that derives from God. The meal shows an intercourse between heaven and man that, far from straining man out of his creaturely condition, delights in its fulness. It is hard, consequently, to grasp what sort of promotion Raphael is offering Adam. The meal, at any rate, connects earth and heaven physically and symbolically as angel participates with man in enjoying God's bounty.93

There is something obscure in Raphael's image of a universal metabolism. But Adam's rejoinder suggests a way in which things might return to God, a way in keeping with the distinctness of God from his creation.

Well hast thou taught the way that might direct
Our knowledge, and the scale of Nature set
From center to circumference, whereon
In contemplation of created things
By steps we may ascend to God. (Bk.5, ll.508--12)

This may of course be a mistake of Adam's and show a vellacity towards forbidden knowledge and vain learning. But if it were, Raphael would not have let it pass and it seems to me in any event that the sort of knowledge that Adam is talking about is not an uncreaturely unitive contemplation of God. Raphael has just distinguished angelic intuition, which is perhaps capable of union with the object of its thought, and man's discursive thought, which moves through argument to understand its object. So Adam, if he has grasped Raphael's distinction, will not be talking of those intellectual raptures that transport beyond the human mind. Rather he is talking of a process of thinking about creation until the creator is apprehended. So he talks about "contemplation of created things" not of the creator. And the contemplation he has in mind is of the sort waking from creation impelled him to or the prayer at the opening of Book 5 expresses. In both utterances the speakers are moved to lyrical praise. In Adam's first prayer to heaven the contemplation of his being and of the world around him flows out into a longing to give praise:

Thou Sun, said I, faire Light,  
And thou enlight'nd Earth, so fresh and gay,  
Ye Hills and Dales, ye Rivers, Woods, and Plaines,  
And yee that live and move, fair Creatures, tell,  
Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?  
Not of my self; by some great Maker then,  
in goodness and in power pre-eminent;  
Tell me, how may I know him, how adore,  
From whom I have that thus I move and live,  
And feel that I am happier then I know. (Bk.8, ll.273--82)

The lyrical feeling here, caught in its Edenic naiveté in the repetition "tell/Tell if ye saw .../Tell me...", is a longing to know whom to return praise to. The contemplation of the creatures that are lights and of the "enlight'nd earth" prompts Adam's mind not to a platonizing return to God out of his creaturely condition but to return thanks for it. One way, then,
in which things return to God is in prayer and praise. This by the way is a return that even angels render, as Satan complains (Book 4, ll.51--57).

Of this return through praise, there is a striking metabolic image, in Book 9 where Milton describes the morning. The exhalation of the yet unpolluted earth rises up to God in the same way that according to Raphael exhalations rise from earth to moon to sun, and so to spiritual matter.

Now whenas sacred Light began to dawne
In Eden on the humid Floors, that breath'd
Thir morning Incense, when all things that breathe,
From th'Earth's great Altar send up silent praise
To the Creator, and his Nostrils fill
With grateful Smell, forth came the human pair
And join'd thir vocal Worship to the Quire
Of Creatures wanting voice. (Bk.9, 192--99)

The whole process of return is reduced to modalities of breath. The plants breathe metaphorically exhaling scent. That exhalation becomes the inhalation of the animate creatures that draw vital breath. The conversion of breath is pointed up by "breath'd" at the end of one line set off against "breathe" at the end of the next. Breath then passes through the creatures up to God, who in turn inhales it like the smell of sacrifice. Finally joining in this process of universal breathing is the prayer of Adam and Eve, the point where breath and the metabolism of creation become vocal, unlike the silent breath of the rest of creation.

What is remarkable about this passage is how the metabolic image is conveyed through a refinement of style. The metabolism of creation is a process in which one thing is transformed into another. Or rather it is an energy descending and ascending through all things. And to convey that energy Milton seizes on breath, a process capable of assuming various forms and passing and mediating between things. It has often been asserted that Milton's descriptions, particularly his descriptions of Paradise, lack
particularity. And it seems to me pointless to deny that if we look for the Shakespearean particularity of

why, he was met even now
As mad as the vex'd sea; singing aloud;
Crown'd with rank furmifer and furrow-weeds,
With hardocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers,
Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow
In our sustaining corn, (Lear, Act 4, sc.4, ll.1--6)

we look in vain. The whole effect of Milton's style is directed to breaking down the concrete particularity of things into energies and forces. He passes over the sharp features of things to suggest the presence of something far more deeply interfused. And in the descriptions of Eden the presence, or energy, is the divine sustaining flow into creation and its return -- in short the metabolism of nature.

The stylistic point is worth insisting on. Once one is alerted to it an extraordinary number of fugitive effects emerge. The style of *Paradise Lost* is sublime, for the generalizing of details conveys a divine energy. At the same time the way in which the details convey the energy is often astonishingly delicate. Milton's unfallen "world is charged with the grandeur of God./It will flame out, like shining from shook foil." But the style conveys not only the splendour of the divine energy but also "the dearest freshness deep down things." For this reason alone it would be worth while examining the image of Paradise in Books 4 and 5 more closely.

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But another reason for attempting a fairly extended examination is that it will summarize how Milton pictures the organic system of the unfallen world, and its derivation from God and return to him.

The first passage to consider is the landscape of Eden viewed by Satan as he perches on the tree of life disguised as a cormorant (Bk.4, ll.205--68). What is being conveyed is the flowing forth of divine opulence. Paradise is "In narrow room Natures, whole wealth, yea more,/A Heav'n on Earth" (Bk.4, ll.207--08). There "Nature boon/Powrd forth profuse on Hill and Dale and Plaine" (ll.242--43) and "the flourie lap/Of som irriguous Valley spred her store" (ll.254--55). The form the opulence takes is variety. This comes out in the composition of the picture of the "happy rural seat of various view" (l.247). Glades "were interpos'd" (l.253) between groves. A "palmie hilloc" is set off against some "irriguous Valley" (ll.254--55), and linking these scenes is the sinuous and intricate progress of the waters of Eden. Simply as a painterly composition then the image of Eden is the equivalent in landscape of the irregular regularity of the order among stars curling itself into complicated and wandering symmetries out of sheer abundance of life.

The energy comes out in other forms of composition. The description breaks down the contours of things so that they can be rendered in terms of the processes of water, light, vegetation and air, and the passage of one into the other conveys the energy flowing from its divine source through the metabolism of nature. The garden is on top of a mountain piled on a river. The mountain itself is organic, the waters of Paradise being drawn up by

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96 On this passage, see Leavis, pp.49--51. Christopher Ricks, Milton's Grand Style (Oxf.: Oxf. Univ. Press, 1963), pp.82--83, makes the point about flow.
capillary action. 97

for God had thrown
That Mountain as his Garden mould high rais'd
Upon the rapid current, which through veins
Of porous Earth with kindly thirst up drawn,
Rose a fresh Fountain, and with many a rill
Waterd the Garden; thence united fell
Down the steep glade, and met the nether Flood.

(Bk.4, ll.225--231)

The process, which is later repeated even more intricately, is of division
and dispersion into things and then of reuniting. The odd use of "Rose"
captures the passage of the water from one form into another: the current
rose a fountain. Later the same sort of usage with "Ran" suggests the
transformation of water into vegetation:

from that Saphire Fount the crisped Brooks,
Rowling on Orient Pearl and sands of Gold,
With mazie error under pendant shades
Ran Nectar, visiting each plant, and fed
Flours worthy of Paradise. (ll.237--41)

The brooks ran nectar: the fountain in its convolutions has insinuated
itself into vegetation. Later this curly, wanton movement becomes the creeping
vine and then is taken up in the wriggling confluence of waters:

the mantling Vine
Layes forth her purple Grape, and gently creeps
Luxuriant; mean while the murmuring waters fall
Down the slope hills, disperst, or in a Lake,
That to the fringed Bank with Myrtle crownd,
Her crystal mirror holds, unite their streams. (Bk.4, ll.258--63)

Here the deviousness of the syntax of lines 260--63 captures the meandering
of the streams. But not only does the water ramify into vegetation, it

97 See C.S. Lewis, p.51, on organic imagery of garden. Also Isabel
Gamble MacCaffery, "Paradise Lost" as Myth (Cam., Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press,
also involves light. That is the point of the jewel imagery, of "the Saphire Fount" and "Brooks/Rowling on Orient Pearl and sands of Gold." The glittering of the water has become a mode of light. Similarly the trees overhanging the stream are reduced to an effect of light, to "pendant shades." And finally the whole process of water, light and foliage passes into air:

The Birds thir quire apply; aires, vernal aires,
Breathing the smell of field and grove, attune
The trembling leaves. (ll.264--66)

"Aires" is a pun. It is both the birdsong and the breath of air into which the field and grove have passed as smell. And the ambiguity between breeze and music is kept up, for the leaves stirring with the breeze are attuned by the air. The pun transforms one thing into another. Indeed the whole description has depended on a sort of ambiguity. In verbs like "rose" and "ran" the water is in transition between forms. And it is in the very nature of water or air or light to be passing from one shape into another. Milton deliberately uses hovering language as he uses transitional imagery to convey the metabolism of the divine energy through creation. And having noticed this trick of style, one finds such later descriptions as the following strangely animated:

Under a tuft of shade that on a green
Stood whispering soft, by a fresh Fountain side
They sat them down. (ll.325--27)

It is hard to imagine description more generalized. The trees are reduced to a tuft of shade; the motion of their leaves to the whispering

98 See Ricks, pp.53--58, 100--02, 104--106, on "airs". William Empsom, Some Versions of Pastoral (London: Chatto, 1950), p.157, noticed the pun.
shade. And yet in context, this simplification to functions of light and air is immensely suggestive of the sustaining force passing through things.

The opening of Book 5 shows the return of the process to God:

Now Morn her rosie steps in th'Eastern Clime
Advancing, sowed the Earth with Orient Pearle,
When Adam wak'd, so custom'd, for his sleep
Was Aerie light, from pure digestion bred,
And temperat. vapors bland, which th'only sound
Of leaves and fuming rills, Aurora's fan,
Lightly dispersd, and the shrill Matin Song
Of Birds on every bough (1.1—8)

Here man's system is part of the metabolism of nature. Adam sleeps well and wakes early not simply because his digestion is sound but because, being part of the great chain of digestion, the fumes and exhalations rising from his stomach are dispersed by the sound of foliage, water and birdsong. But there are pleasing complications. The rills themselves are exhalating and the account of the processes of Adam's digestion slides into the processes of external nature. There are, besides, ambiguities that recall the passage I have just analysed. Sound connects the leaves and rills, and grammatically "Aurora's fan" is in apposition to that. Yet clearly Aurora's fan must be the early morning stir of air, and while that has something to do with the sound of leaves, it has nothing to do with the sound of the rills, though it may have to do with the motion of the mist rising from them. So Milton blurs the processes of sound and air into one another. Similarly the sound of leaves fades into the birdsong in the boughs. The blurring works admirably. Though the sounds of nature peacefully stirring do not properly disperse even the blandest of vapours as a breeze does, the influence of external nature on the human body is obviously not direct but works, rather, sympathetically through sound and wind in one general, if elusive and subtle, process.
But it is not only that unfallen man is part of the metabolism of creation. The whole universal process passes through him. So after Adam has comforted Eve the universal process seems to pass through their lips in their magnificent prayer, to become as it were a vocal exhalation of the earth ascending to God in praise. Near the end of the prayer, after they have expressed the creation's praise of its creator, they fit themselves into the process they describe:

Witness if I be silent, Morn or Even,
To Hill, or Valley, Fountain, or fresh shade
Made vocal by my Song, and taught his praise. (Bk.5, ll.202—04)

The effect recalls the way that the poet is caught up into the hymning of the angels in Book 3, lines 412—15 (a good example of the way epic poems have of entering into the universal forces they describe).

I have pointed out how Milton's image of the order of creation is a cosmic elaboration of the moral idea of obedience and the Protestant idea of creatureliness. A cognate idea is temperance. "Temper" is a key word for the unfallen metabolism of things. Etymologically it stems from the Latin "temperare", whose root meaning is of cutting, dividing, separating, setting bounds, in short the process of creation. By derivation it comes to mean to set or keep in order. Creation is well tempered like Bach's clavier or the angels "soft Tunings" (Bk.7, l.598): it is attuned to God. While the sun moves in perpetual equinox the world is temperate, for it has not yet swerved from its appointed bounds into extremes (Bk.12, l.636); similarly the vapours rising from Adam's stomach are temperate because his reason, will and appetite are attuned to one another, and his being is in turn attuned to the temper of creation (Bk.5, l.5). At the same time "temper" means to compose through judicious mixture, as an alchemist tempers one
element with another to bring forth finer materials. So the sun tempers
the earth to bring forth plants (Bk. 4, l.670), and so Eve "tempers duloet
creams" (Bk. 5, l.347) to bring forth new tastes in Eden. One thing that
comes out of this incomplete concordance is the enormous range of the word
in *Paradise Lost* and its association with the vital and enjoyable ordering
of things. Clearly Milton has in mind something very different from the
military virtue that Rinaldo requires to make war not love. In *Paradise
Lost* it combines obedience and creatureliness in a notion of harmony; it
means a harmonious state of being and a condition of being perfected in the
completeness of one's being.99

To speak of the divine metabolism is again to insist on order. Things
are digested by being separated and arranged. The *Christian Doctrine*
speaks of matter being "digested into order" by the hand of God, and no
doubt Milton was aware of the root meaning of the word when Raphael speaks
of three stages of transforming corporeal to spiritual, concoction,
digestion and assimilation (Bk. 5, ll.412--13).100 The process of the meta-
bolism is a refining things upwards through ordered stages of a chain of
being. So just as things derive from God through order, they return up to
him through order. If then we are to describe God's permeation of the
universe in organic metaphors, we must distinguish a Miltonic notion of the
organic from the one current in post-Coleridgean aesthetic. The Coleridgean
idea is that an organism is an inviolable and mysterious union of the whole

99 Cf. Thomas Traherne, "Of Temperance in Matters of Art", *Christian

100 Sumner translation, *Christian Doctrine, 1, 7*, The Works of John Milton,
Univ. Press, 1933), 23. The Latin has "digessit" for "digested."
in the parts. But Milton's universe is organic because it is a process of analysis and separation. Even the total order of creation is not self-existent in Milton's scheme. The first stage in the scheme of derivation is a mysterious act of will. The final stage in the return of things to God, the stage beyond becoming angelic substance, is equally mysterious. I should think it would again depend on an act of God's will. Even the acceptance of prayer and praise as sufficient return for an infinite debt is probably an act of grace. There is a hiatus in the continuity of the chain where it links on to God and the link can only be a matter of his will.

That creation is an order of things and that that order is an intricate system of divine laws returns us safely to the point from which we began this account of Milton's universe. Because nature is separated from God and because it is an order, choice is possible: it is possible to break this order and fall out of being. Or it is for man. He is the point amphibious between beast and angel (the two natures being tied in a subtle knot to make him man) where the world reaches rational being and, since reason is also choice, becomes precarious. It is for this reason that it is possible to speak of Adam and Eve as presenting a heroic image of humanity.

In the first place Adam and Eve in Paradise present a heroic image simply because they reflect the divine image. They do so merely by enjoying the plenitude of their creaturely state; such is the force of the description of their nakedness in Book 4, lines 288-94, and while they remain obedient, they tap the enormous energy by which God sustains creation. They have a heroic nature because they are endowed with the primitive splendour of the nature in which they were created. Perhaps the best image

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for the godlike completeness of their creaturely state is the meal they share with Raphael. In treating the idea of urbanity in neoclassical humanism, I have already mentioned how the meal images the intercourse of man with heaven in the complete and harmonious perfection of his creaturely humanity. And we can add that Raphael's account of the universal digestion assimilates even the bodily processes of eating into the divine participation with man. Of course Adam and Eve are set apart from nature through their faculty of reason and the power of choice. But in their unfallen state their reasons spontaneously obey the laws of rational being. And this obedience is compatible with free play. According to Raphael, human reason is discursive: it comes to the point by moving about through a process of discussion with itself or with God or angel. So Eve and in turn Adam may wonder about astronomy in order to be corrected. And the free play of other sides of man's nature involves other strayings, blameless ones because they are contained within the frame of obedience. The love for Eve, which Adam confesses to Raphael almost overpowers his judgement, is not sinful while it is kept within bounds. Similarly Eve's strayings, her original preference for her own image to Adam's, her wish to wander out at night, even her wish to work apart from Adam are part of the free play of an unvitiated nature. Eve is certainly one of the curliest parts of Milton's curling and baroque creation, and I find his superior enjoyment of that curliness off-putting. Nevertheless, the point is that Eve's waywardness is contained within an enclosing obedience and that until the Fall everything can be righted like her dream. The free play of man's creaturely nature is, like the mazy wanderings of the water and the exuberance of the vegetation, the form that the abounding divine energy takes in passing through things. In Paradise nature wantsons in her prime. And so these vagrances of Adam and Eve are part of the heroic abundance of their unfallen natures and entirely enfolded in the
The free play of man's unfallen nature is not trivial nor are the rational discriminations he makes. He plays a part in the scheme of creation as God's gardener ordering and tempering the exuberance of Paradise. Best of all Adam's free exercise of his mind gets him Eve. But the garden state is heroic not just because it shows the plenitude of man's creaturely being. If the free play of his nature were man's only freedom, he would differ only in degree from the other creatures: essentially he would be one of God's toys. But man's standing in the garden is heroic not merely through a certain splendid excess of nature, but because his nature is at stake in his will. The garden is a field of moral action as well as a place for natural virtues to grow. It is not a cloister of fugitive virtue. Adam and Eve are free to fall and they are tried. And their freedom is exercised on an issue of heroic magnitude: though everything is derived from God and filled by him, they may choose to cut themselves off and fall into uncreation. They have in fact a heroic mission to remain obedient to God. They are his champions against his adversary since they are the point at which creation is vulnerable. They are consequently images of excelling virtue (as long as they stand) in a moral as well as natural sense.

Their moral freedom enters into the scheme of things in a paradoxical way. It is the prohibition that sets man free. The prohibition is the final cut or bounding of things that makes man fully rational and free. By the prohibition man's obedience is freed from mere natural obedience to the order of creation. He becomes free to obey or disobey. And since creation

only exists through obedience, he becomes free to uncreate himself. Put another way, if being derives from God, then the prohibition confronts Adam and Eve with a choice of being inside God or of not being outside him. The command is arbitrary so that man may be free. A command with moral reasons behind it would be pointless since Adam and Eve are created naturally good. They do not need to be told, for instance, to love one another. And all their comings and goings in Paradise are merely the free play of their goodness in the liberal dispensation of Eden. In their goodness they do not know evil, which is the corruption of good. So evil can only appear to them as the possibility of disobedience. The possibility lies outside anything they know or are by nature and therefore takes the form of an arbitrary symbol. The prohibition locks up the issue of evil in a form that can be known by natures created entirely good. And indeed the simplicity of the symbol makes their natural freedom possible, for when they have fallen, they gain with the knowledge of good-and-evil a moral perplexity that puts an end to the free play of natural goodness. But in Paradise this free play is possible because moral perplexity is reduced to the single prohibition.

Milton's image of the universe, I have tried to show, is a monistic system in which all things derive from God and all things are good. The prohibition completes that system and makes it fully rational in man. By a cut in things it sets the moral or human world inside the metabolism of the universe. And through it man's gardening in Eden becomes freely rendered obedience of the same sort that the angels render serving freely in heaven.

103 See Christian Doctrine, Bk.1, Ch.10, Complete Prose, 6, 352.
Moreover, it makes man's link with God a creaturely one. I have explained how the prayers of Adam and Eve show how God is present in creation in the sense that creation points to its maker and how their praise is a return of things to God. This is a return entirely in keeping with their creaturely standing. But the prohibition makes an even closer link between God and man. I have called the prohibition the bound; I might equally well call it the centre of Adam's and Eve's being, for on it, their human and creaturely natures turn. It is there, in the divine law and the moral freedom implied in it, that God is most intimately present in creation. Consequently Adam and Eve possess the godlike qualities of the epic hero of the Christian poem not through aspiring beyond the human but through the attentiveness to their creaturely standing implied in obedience.

3) Images of Fallen Creation

If only good can proceed from God, evil cannot proceed from God. So if all things proceed from God, evil must in some sense be no thing. But as the devils, even if we accept Moloch's view that they are "at worst On this side nothing" (Bk.2, ll.100--101) are still not at that point, evil is not so much nothing as an infinite regress towards it. Evil is the corruption of good, the privation of the fullness of being in which things are created, a fall into unreality rather than an actual annihilation. The forms evil will take will consequently by the uncreating of creation, the disordering of order, the disfiguring, defacing or deforming of the original forms and images of being, the distempering of the divinely tempered constitution of things. Evil will not be any new thing but the undoing of things. It is

true that Milton mentions that God is capable of turning evil into good and of turning Satan's malice to good ends. God calls Sin and Death his scavengers. But this does not mean that evil derives from God or that it returns up to him, but simply that, being omnipotent, he is able to twist what is against him to his own purposes apparently without being tainted with collusion. This is not a very satisfactory account of God's transaction with evil and perhaps Milton does not mean it to be. But at any rate the essential point remains: evil is merely an anti-principle, a negation or crack in things.

The crack originates in the defection of the will. The first negation is disobedience. I shall leave the treatment of that subject to the next chapter, when I shall examine Satan's despair and the instantaneous fall of Adam and Eve. As far as the rest of this chapter is concerned with *Paradise Lost*, I shall be attempting to show in what ways Milton's universe inverts into images of evil. Many of these inversions will be of a kind familiar in other Seventeenth Century works. And many of my Miltonic examples will also be fairly familiar, for much work has been done on versions and inversions in *Paradise Lost*. What I hope to achieve at this point by classifying some of these is more a matter of stress and articulation than anything new. The stress on the principle of negation behind the various images of evil will turn out important later when I deal with the action in terms of volition.

While Raphael's picture of creation is of a divine downflow and return to God, evil and uncreation take the form of a diabolic rising up to godhead and a consequent reversal of nature or the experience of things backward. If creation works as a sort of metabolism, evil works in an anti-metabolic fashion. Instead of the process of assimilation upwards,
there is a purgation downwards. So when the devils are cast out, Heaven is "Disbur'd'nâ" (Bk.6, l.878). So after the fall the pure temper of Para-
dise expels Adam and Eve who have become impure (Bk.11, ll.45--57). So Belial ridicules Moloch's suggestion that the devils storm heaven armed with infernal explosives on the grounds that the pure composition of heaven would quickly purge itself of the destructive fire (Bk.2, ll.60--70; 137--142). Where the metabolism of nature is the process of God's genera-
tive power, the anti-metabolic process acts as his wrath. This does not mean that the anti-metabolic process originates with him. For though Milton insists that the punishment is not simply the mechanical operation of the order of creation, that God wills to punish and does so rightly, he also insists that the corruption originates in the will of the creature, self-
destroyed (with God's permission). Uncreation like creation is brought about by an original act of will. Only, in the case of men and angels the original act so far from bringing about creation cuts them off from it. And since in their falling away into uncreation, they are unable to reach the asymptotic point of extinction, they experience the divine metabolism backwards as in a kind of endless regress or worm that never dies. At least this is true of the fallen angels. When Satan describes how "in the lowest deep a lower deep/Still threatning to devour me op'ns wide" (Bk.4, ll.76--77), he describes this process in its subjective form of despair.

Evil is the degeneration of what was originally generated good. For this reason the devils are invested in the first books of Paradise Lost with remnants of the splendour of their creation. And because they retain some

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105 For imagery of purgation, see MacCaffery, pp.136--38.
106 Cf. Lawry, pp.130, 135.
of their original goodness, they are in fact more like Faustus, or Macbeth, or Othello than the diabolical Mephistopheles, or the witches, or Iago. Othello provides perhaps the best analogy with Milton's study of evil. Othello swerved aside from what held his life together when he chose to believe Iago's truth rather than Desdemona's. Thereafter his love turns to jealousy, his nobility to folly, his judgement to cunning, his magnanimity to liberal and capacious vindictiveness. In other words his original goodness turns topsy-turvy and drives him downwards, making him monstrous. Similarly Satan is clearly a being of calibre, even if his merit has been inverted to diabolical ends. It is only by degrees that the process of corruption trivializes him and he becomes a wandering flow or negation in things.

It is not my purpose here to trace the process of Satan's moral degradation, and, besides, it is sufficiently well known. I shall point instead to those aspects of the diabolic process that come out in inverted images of the metabolism of nature. Evil or uncreation will bring about deformity. In the war in heaven the ethereal forms of rebels become gross enough to admit pain. In hell, though the angels retain their angelic shapes, the prophetic catalogue of the bestial shapes they will assume is a series of deformed images, the image of God depraved from good and taking on grotesque and counterfeit shapes. And while these are voluntary defilings of their original images, like Satan's disguises, there is a suggestion of a downward evolution of forms through the tempering of evil. There is also

a suggestion of loss of authentic being: the fallen angels no longer have a proper shape, only a series of evil transformations. The metamorphosis into serpents in Book 10 is the culmination of the process.

I have already pointed out that all creatures are lights because they conform to the light of the pattern in which they were created. The deformation of form entails a diminishing of light. Satan's form in heaven is of transcendent brightness. Evil is the obscuring of that brightness, so that in the first books in hell his splendour is faded, or in eclipse. Later, starting up in his proper shape when the angelic spear touches him, he is no longer recognizable, Zephon says, because his glory and shape have altered. But Satan becomes associated with another sort of light, a kind of infernal anti-light. Like the heavenly city, Pandemonium is brilliantly lit; but it is lit not by ethereal substance but by naptha and asphalt (Bk.1, ll.726--30). And when he is touched by the spear, Satan explodes and blazes like a magazine of gunpowder (Bk.4, ll.814--19).

The mineral sources of infernal light are important because they show how the chemical composition of hell and its tempering effects are the perversion of heavenly composition. I have already mentioned how heaven's ray vitalizes the soil of heaven to bring forth flowers and gems. Satan as first chemist reverses this refining process, for he tempers the crude sulphur and nitre to make gunpowder, the destructive perversion of ethereal substance. Though hell is not exactly composed of gunpowder, sulphur is its most prominent component and the infernal metals are apparently its work (Bk.1, ll.670--74). Sulphur, according to the lore of the times, was the father of metals and the suggestion is that in Milton's hell, without the

108 Duncan, pp.388ff.
tempering influence of light, sulphur becomes the principle of the infernal composition bringing forth the materials of Pandemonium, bitumen and darkness visible. ¹⁰⁹ The prospect that Belial (Bk. 2, ll. 217–19) and Mammon (Bk. 2, ll. 274–77) hold out that the fallen angels will at length conform to the temper of hell is in fact the horrible truth about the place. Its chemistry, which corresponds to Satan's original uncreating perversion of the elements of heaven, is an infernal inversion of the metabolism of creation and the fallen angels are now tempered by it.

The passage describing the building of Pandemonium is worth a closer look. The soil of hell from which the devils mine the materials is described in organic terms. But unlike the soil of heaven the organism is foul and deformed.¹¹⁰ The hill they dig the minerals from has a "griesly top" (Bk. 1, 1, 670); it "Belchd fire and rowling smoak" (1, 671) and shines "with a glossie scurff" (1.672). Moreover, "in his womb was hid metallic Ore" (1.673). The mining is compared to wounding and the gold lies in "ribs of Gold" (11.689–90). The imagery is confused and suggests a body horribly misbegotten. As for the raising of Pandemonium, the process is a strange parody of those processes we have seen at work in creation. One group of angels mines, another smelts:

¹⁰⁹ Carey and Fowler, p. 500, n. to Bk. 1, 1.514.

A third as soon had form'd within the ground
A various mould, and from the boiling cells
By strange conveyance fill'd each hollow nook:
As in an Organ from one blast of wind
To many a row of Pipes the sound-board breathes.
Anon out of the earth a Fabric huge
Rose like an Exhalation, with the sound
Of Dulcet Symphonies and voices sweet.  

Milton compares the passage of the molten metal to the passage of air in an organ. But in fact the comparison dissolves into other things. The moulds with their sluices are clearly like the flues and pipes of the organ. Not only does the building rise to music, but it is as if the process by which the metal becomes edifice were music exhaling from an organ and taking shape in the air. The transformation of one thing into another imitates the process of the magic art at work. At the same time it recalls those metabolic processes of creation in which, for example, air passes into bird song. But here we have an art process not tending upwards to God but raising a pile against him, in other words an artificial inversion of the natural process of things.

Hell is topsy-turvy because creation is a hierarchical scale. Cut off from God, the source of order, and fallen out of creation, existence will take the form of inversion. Milton conceives hell best in the minds of the devils as infernal subjectivity, and the great imaginative inversions are in their speeches, particularly in Satan's address to the sun on Niphates. The way evil works on the mind is a subject I shall have more to say on in the next chapter. There are, however, some witty and blasphemous examples that might illustrate the point neatly: Satan remarks that in hell the rebels shall be free because "th'Almighty hath not built/Here for his envy" (Bk.1, l.259--60); Mammon jibes about "Forc't Halleluiah!" (Bk.2, l.243) and observes that God has a way of making heaven hellish when he surrounds
himself with thunder clouds (1.268). Another, though not witty or blasphemous example is Satan's argument to justify his being at once liberator and ruler (Bk.2, ll.21—35): no one can envy his miserable pre-eminence; from this it follows that the perfect concord in hell will be an inversion of heavenly concord: in the one no one will compete in the hierarchy of pain; in the other the hierarchy of bliss is grounded in obedience. In other words the admirable order in hell is an anti-order. 111

Or one could call it a parody of the created order. And evil will take the form of other parodies. For since in a monistic system evil cannot generate anything real, it can only produce counterfeits. I have already mentioned the inversion of creative processes in the building of Pandemonium. Satan going forth to war in his "Sun-bright Chariot", "Idol of Majestie Divine" is another, for Satan, unlike the Son, who reflects the image of God, is the idol or counterfeit image of God (Bk.6, ll.100—101). 112

A certain amount of original goodness remains in the fallen angels, best seen in their energy and resolution. But since this original goodness is of celestial origin, it can only confound beings who have cut themselves off from its source and live an antipodean existence. To say that the mind is its own place is celestial virtue; to discover that myself am hell is the sort of irony or confounding that celestial virtue cut off from its origin is subject to. I do not think that this means Satan is merely ridiculous.


Indeed the spectacle of a being who has fallen into an absurd existence, whose mode is irony and parody, to whom reality can only appear in inversion is frightening. It is after all a state of despair we are shown, with its accompanying effects of dislocation and falling out of reality or the possibility of true seeing. But of this I shall have more to say in the next chapter.

Yet before I leave the images of the diabolical process of negation, I should say something about Milton's more oblique methods of imaging through style and other forms of composition. That will complement what I have said about his Edenic style. The first two books of *Paradise Lost* are peculiar in the thick studding of epic similes and comparisons and the effect is curiously "Argus-eyed. Partly no doubt this is because hell is darkness visible and can only be pictured in reflections drawn from another world partly because the heroic pomp of hell requires a glitter of invidious comparison. But there is, besides a characteristic effect of dislocation in the wealth of small images set within the greater image of hell.

It will be clear from what I have said earlier about the forms negation takes, why dislocation is appropriate to hell. The fall of the angels is a fall out of the created order of things. The most astonishing dislocation belongs not to the inset images but to the over-all epic fiction; I mean the shift of perspective between second and third books. The narrative at the end of Book 3 has followed Satan to the edge of the created universe where he sees heaven and the world hanging from it "in bigness as a Starr/Of smallest Magnitude close by the Moon" (Bk.2, ll.1052--53). Suddenly with Book 3 the perspective shifts to heaven. God looks down into the universe and sees Satan vastly diminished, a small malignant figure on
the edge of creation. But the effect of this shift is not merely to diminish Satan or even to confound his view of things but to suggest an alarmingly dislocated experience of the universe.  

The effect of many of the inset images is similar. One expects that since the images are usually introduced as comparisons the important thing about them should be points of likeness. Yet these are often at once obvious and an insufficient excuse for the ballooning epic image. Nor do more attenuated resemblances often make them more successful. What is the point of comparing Satan's shield to the moon? The moon is large, certainly, but how big does it look? And that is just the point. There are no proper comparisons for size in hell, for hell is outside the proportions of creation. To reinforce the point Milton adds what at first sight appears an entirely gratuitous embellishment:

the broad circumference
Hung on his shoulders like the Moon, whose Orb
Through Optic Glass the Tuscan Artist views
At Ev'n'ning from the top of Fiasole,
Or in Valdarno, to desory new Lands,
Rivers or Mountains in her spotty Globe. (Bk.1, 11.286--91)

But the apparent irrelevance of the telescope has the most peculiar dilating and dislocating effect. It is not simply that size and space enlarge and shrink but that the normal sense of proportion and perspective is violated. The image suggests a confounding of appearances and a disturbing, unreliable and displaced magnitude. The important thing about

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113 Cf. MacCaffery, p.60.
this and many of the images in the first books is not so much the relation of vehicle to tenor as the oblique operation they perform, not so much what they reflect as the odd way that they reflect or indeed deflect. If creation is a system of mirrors and prisms, uncreation is an alarming set of distorting glasses.

There are many other such dislocations and optical disturbances. Immediately after the comparison of shield to moon there follow the unfixed dimensions of Satan's spear,

to equal which the tallest Pine
Hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the Mast
On some great Ammiral, were but a wand. (11.292--94)

At first one thinks the spear as great as the mast, but immensity shrinks the mast to a wand. How big is the spear? The immensity is not so much the point as the collapse of proportion. And collapsing proportions are also the point of the astonishing shrinking that takes place at the end of Book 1, when Pandemonium is compared to a beehive and the giant angels to fairies (11.768--788). Finally, here is what seems to me a particularly refined example of dislocation. After Satan has taken off on his voyage to the world, he sweeps across and then up into the vault of hell. His approach to the gates elicits the following comparison:

As when farr off at Sea a Fleet descri'd
Hangs in the Clouds, by Aequinoctial Winds
Close sailing from Bengala, or the Iles
Of Ternate and Tidore, whence Merchants bring
Thir spicie Drugs: they on the Trading Flood
Through the wide Ethiopian to the Cape
Ply stemming nightly toward the Pole. So seemd
Farr off the flying Fiend. (Bk.2, 11.636--43)

Here obviously we have the full blown epic image drawn out and expanding into exotic regions. In that way it is apt enough for Satan's voyage.
The logic of comparison is, however, rather tenuous. The mirage of the fleet hangs in the sky and so does Satan. But the relation of vehicle and tenor is not really the point. The real work of the image is to bring about a dislocation of perspective. Until this point the narrative has followed Satan. Then as he approaches the gates of hell we suddenly see him a distant object like a fleet descried in a mirage, and the tract of geography into which the image trails is a prospect of the vast distance he has covered and has still to cover. "So seemed/Farr off the flying Fiend."

The perspective has shifted and we are looking at him from the point of view of Sin and Death sitting at the gates he is approaching. And there is more to this shift of perspective. The gates of hell are up in the ceiling. From there we look down on Satan, whereas until that point we had been following him upwards. It is not so much, perhaps, that he appears upside down as that his position relative to ours has been inverted. The dislocation is imaged in the mirage which inverts the fleet in the clouds.

The baroque virtuosity that Milton displays in the first books of \textit{Paradise Lost} imaging beings fallen out of the order of things is immense. By contrast his treatment of the fall of man out of Paradise is sober and wrapped up in the human action rather than projected on a universal screen. How evil is able to enter a system created good is nevertheless the crux of Milton's picture of the universe, and though it is also the crux of the action of the poem and for that reason best kept for a full discussion of the action, still to give a summary account of those derangements in the order of things ensuing man's fall is in order, if only to complete the survey of the images of uncreation.

The fall of Adam and Eve is a fall out of the created order of things, and it originates in an instantaneous deflection of reason and will from
their mark. The effects of this swerving are that things fall out crooked and creation is deranged. Creation, however, is not entirely confounded. While God allows the fallen angels to suffer the full course of evil, he allows man and his world to suffer a severe but limited impairment. Satan in attempting to break the circle falls out of the ring; the circle Adam and Eve sever turns out to be a Möbius strip. Evil in the fallen world takes the form of distempering rather than inversion. It is still of course the corruption of good and a partial uncreating of things.

The effect nearest to inversion takes place in the love of Adam and Eve immediately after the fall. Unfallen, their love had been a seal of their obedience and being in the created order of things. After their fall it becomes "of thir mutual guilt the Seale/The solace of thir sin" (Bk.9, 11.1043–44), the seal in other words of their separation from God. Their love, then, is corrupted because it is complicity in guilt. It is only as a consequence of the state of guilt that their sexuality becomes guilty and leads to those other distempers of love, hate and mutual recrimination.

Following the jangling of man's system the rest of creation is sympathetically distempered. Since the world was created pure, and man, its masterwork, is the crux as well as the epitome of the system, it undergoes a sort of constitutional crisis with the fall. Allegorically this is represented in the entry of Sin and Death and their infection of the air. The infection of the temperate air of the earth has long been prepared for in Satan's promises to his troops that they will escape the corrosive fires of hell to "the soft delicious Air" of the earth (Bk.2, 1.400), in his promise to Sin and Death of "the buxom Air" as their element (Bk.2, 1.842) and in all those images that associate Satan's delight in the delicate air of Eden with the smell of corruption. The infection of the air starts from
the moment Death upturns "His nostril wide into the murrkine Air/Sagacious of his Quarrey from so farr" (Bk.10, ll.260--81) and is completed in Satan's becoming "Prince of the Aire" (Bk.10, l.185). On the entry of Sin and Death, the celestial system is set askew by God's command into the procession of mutability. The earth is tilted on its axis to experience extremes of climate and seasonal change. Why God should play a part in uncreating things and bringing about discord is puzzling. It may be that the pure and harmonious constitution of the universe would not tolerate fallen man in the same way that the pure temper of Paradise ejects Adam and Eve. For when Adam and Eve eat the apple of godlike knowledge, they eat a food unsuited to their creaturely nature; it not only distempers their own systems but the universal metabolism. The sun actually turns away from the corrupted exhalations the earth supplies it "As from a Thyesteian Banquet" (Bk.10, ll.687--89) and heaven itself turns in "distaste" from man and the meals it shared with him (Bk.9, l.9). And this is no wonder, for Death smells how creation now sends up a corrupt exhalation:

    such a sent I draw
    Of carnage, prey innumerable, and taste
    The savour of Death from all things there that live.
    (Bk.10, ll.267--69)

Perhaps then God's distempering of things is actually a tempering of the heavens to the fallen condition of the world into which Sin and Death have been suffered to enter as scavengers of the polluted system. The derangement of the order is a sort of cure for the crisis in the constitution, just as death is a sort of cure for the corruption man suffers as a result of the

115 See Ricks, pp.69--72.
fall. The derangement is, of course, punitive as well, but probably the exercise of justice is also a form of tempering the order.

Michael shows Adam the long term effects of the fall. The first part of the vision is a short history of intemperance or excess in man's body and in the body politic, a picture of the various disorders to which man will be liable as a result of his rash eating and of the ensuing constitutional damage.

The picture of the fallen world is grim, not grimmer than actual history, but grim as an account of justice, and justice that is supposed to be merciful. The mercy lies presumably in man's being saved from the total inversion the rebel angels undergo and in his becoming subject to a new sort of tempering in a new sort of creation. The new creation involves an inversion of the original order, but a good inversion. Man aspired to godlike knowledge and fell. After the fall Michael and Adam "ascend/In the Visions of God" (Bk.11, ll.376--77) and see the prospect of human history that lies in God's mind. This and Michael's instructions give Adam his fill "Of knowledge, what this vessel can containe; Beyond which was my folly to aspire" (Bk.12, ll.559--60), a knowledge of divine things suited to his manhood. This is faith, and according to it, instead of man's ascending to God, God descends to become man, and then raises manhood to heaven to sit on the throne as the Son reigning in his incarnate human nature, "Both God and Man, Son both of God and Man/Anointed universal King" (Bk.3, ll.316--17). In this way the return of man to God, which in Raphael's prelapsarian scheme was mysterious, is clearly set down as the consummation of the redemptive scheme of history. In the unfallen world the tempering to spiritual nature was to be achieved through remaining constant inside a chain of digestion, in which man knows only good; in the fallen world man
is tempered to a higher tune and in a hotter fire through faith and obedience in the midst of the experience of good and evil. The ascent to God is no longer Raphael's gradualist programme but the redemption of man in history where man is "disciplin'd/From shadowe Types to Truth, from Flesh to Spirit" (Bk.12, ll.302--303), and the final return to God is the consummation of the process in the eschatological event of God's becoming "All in All" (Bk.3, l.341). So man falls out of Eden, not into the loss of being the devils suffer, but into history. In Paradise man experienced the archetypes or original images of things; in hell things are inverted types and the devils experience the confounding duplicity of counterfeit appearances; in history man will experience a benevolent duplicity in events, not as archetypes, nor as inverted types, but as types (promises, that is) of the divine events that will fulfill them. Since the "object of faith is the promise", man fallen into history enters into the new constitution of things through faith. 116

d) Summary

My examination of Paradise Lost has been extended and the argument intricate in places, but they have revolved round a few general points. I shall briefly summarize them. Milton involves his action in the working of the universe in an astonishingly elaborate way. Both the action of the poem and the universe it pictures turn on obedience. Milton has conceived the system of his universe in such a way that it can be inverted and furnish an array of images of evil; the inversion is the negating of creation. In this way the universe admits of choice and the obedience on which it turns

116 Christian Doctrine, 1, Ch.20, Complete Prose, 6, 476.
is a matter of free will. The proper occupation of the wills of Adam and Eve, the right choices, are matters of standing in their human nature. The other sort of will, the desire to get out of human nature, the infinite aspiration to godhead, falls outside creation into unbeing. The heroes of the poem are godlike in their creatureliness or humanity, not in their desire to go beyond the human world. In this respect *Paradise Lost* differs from *The Lusiad* and *Jerusalem Delivered*. Even in their poetic or imagistic use of the alchemical notions of their time it seems to me Milton and Tasso differ. The alchemy of Tasso's magus is speculative philosophy brought under Christian theology. The alchemy of Milton's universe is a poetic image for the tempering of things in their natural and creaturely condition. Indeed he scoffs at the inefficacy of the human alchemists' attempts to make themselves privy to those natural secrets through which the sun effects the transmutation of elements (Bk.3, 11.598–612). The scoff is the scoff both of the humanist and the Protestant poet at a vain learning that would distract the mind from the condition of its humanity. I have argued that the weakness of *The Lusiad* and *Jerusalem Delivered*, their inadequacy as moral actions and criticisms of life, lies in their seeing the heroic will as reaching out to another world and divinizing the infinite man. *Paradise Lost* is at any rate free from that misdirection. Whether its concern with the will as choice comes to a successful criticism of life remains to be considered in the next chapter. What we can say at this point is that *Paradise Lost* makes an intelligent break with the tradition of neoclassical epic ideal imitation. At the same time it is an extraordinarily evolved product of the art of ideal imitation. Its analysis and complication of universal images goes far beyond the fairly straightforward schemes of images to be found in Camoens and Tasso. And this feat of aesthetic organization is at the same time a feat of intellectual and moral organization.
5. "Absalom and Achitophel": The Urbane Epic

The last epic I mean to consider is *Absalom and Achitophel*, Part 1. Since this is complete in itself, there is no need to take in the second part added later and written mainly by Nahum Tate. *Absalom and Achitophel* is in some respects an anomaly among the epics I am considering. It is short, about the same length as an average book of *Paradise Lost*. It was hastily composed and lacks the highly articulated design of the *magnum opus*. For all that it is a great poem, finely, if not immensely, articulated. And in it, ideal imitation develops into serious criticism of life.

Smallness and unambitiousness are not the only reasons for thinking it an anomaly. One has an ill-defined, and I think, confused notion that *Absalom and Achitophel* is a mock epic. The epic fiction treats a biblical story. But the fiction is a disguise for contemporary events, the constitutional crisis of the Popish plot. Accordingly *Absalom and Achitophel* is an allegory as well as an ideal imitation. The epic fiction is a figure for something quite other than itself, as well as a set of images of moral ideas. On the one hand, Dryden portrays Achitophel as a type of overambitious politician. This is to make an image or an example of a sort of vice and that is the method of ideal imitation. But on the other hand Achitophel is also a disguised portrait of Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury and Achitophel are

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not examples of each other. Their relationship is not of idea to example, the relation of ideal imitation. It is, rather, a witty identification of two different things, and this relation between image and thing represented I call allegorical.  

The wit of the forced identification is what perhaps makes us think we have to do with mock epic. But this is a mistake about the genre. Mock epics are not allegorical. Certainly, like Absalom and Achitophel, mock epics treat contemporary events in the forms of epic fiction. And certainly there is a disparity between the mock epic fiction and the subject it treats, but the disparity is between the epic style of composition and the subject matter, between the dignity of the one and the triviality or indignity of the other. The events in The Rape of the Lock are trivial, but Pope consistently invests them with epic dignity. The style mocks the subject and so The Rape of the Lock is mock epic. With Mac Flecknoe and The Dunciad, on the other hand, the style and machinery of epic are inverted and the trivial subject matter is invested with a rather sinister anti-epical indignity. The epic (or anti-epical) treatment lampoons the subject. But with Absalom and Achitophel there is no such disparity between style and subject, and it is neither sort of mock epic. The events of David's reign are serious, quite up to epic standard. The events of Charles's reign that Dryden figured in the biblical events were at least momentous at the time and the epic treatment heightens rather than belittles them. The disparity them is not the mock epic disproportion between style and subject treated or glanced at, but

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the allegorical disparity of the two sets of events and characters.

Still even if *Absalom and Achitophel* is not mock epic, it is a witty and humorous epic, above all a good humoured and good tempered epic. The force of the "good humoured" and "good tempered" will emerge shortly. For the moment I confine myself to remarking that wit and humour are out of key with conventional epic grandeur.

In pious times, e'r Priest-craft did begin,
Before Polygamy was made a sin;
When man, on many, multiply'd his kind,
E'r one to one was, cursedly, confin'd:
When Nature prompted ....

(11.1–5) 119

At the outset the tone sounds libertine. Unrestrained sexuality, it suggests, was the primitive piety of mankind. The guild or mystery of priests have made a sin of it as later in the poem they are said to devise gods of every shape and size. So through a turn of wit biblical times are represented as the golden age of the contemporary fashionable set. The tone is, of course, ambivalent as we shall see. At the very least to compliment the King on his licentiousness is raillery, and there is a great deal more at issue in the context of the whole poem. But I do not mean to go into the adroitness with which Dryden manages his tone here. The point I want to make is the obvious one that the tone is urbane and unlike the conventional epic voice. It suits a poem about contemporary events of the court and the city. And here epic invocations, the boasted intention of no middle flight, would be absurd. They would be mock epical because out of key. So would epic machinery. It is true that Dryden includes two supernatural episodes.

The first is the ascent of Barzilai's son's soul to heaven where it is to raise a legion to come to the help of the king's guardian angel. This, in the panegyrical vein of the wonders, in Annus Mirabilis or the "Ode to the Memory of Mrs Anne Killigrew" is preposterous, not intentionally mock epical, and it is a blemish. The other supernatural intrusion is the conclusion where God ratifies the king's speech with a clap of thunder and a golden age is ushered in. The contrast between the King's rather jaded, if astute and good natured, speech on the one hand and the supernatural ratification of it is piquant. But it is not deflating and I should not call it mock epical. On the contrary, Dryden is serious about the divinity of the king and he uses the epic to make a serious case for it. Both Dryden's epic and the king's authority have been shorn of many of their powerful ornaments, and in the shearing both have become more sophisticated. The humour is part of that sophistication and the sophistication is put to serious ends. It is, moreover, a sophistication which is capable of grandeur. The generous mingling of sublimity and pathos in the portrait of Achitophel, the magisterial judgement behind the ridicule of Zimri, these modulations of voice convey an achieved humanity as grand in its way as the more elevated and ceremonious character of the conventional epic speaker.

The seriousness of the poem, however, is not finally a matter of tone but of its criticism of life. But to speak of that it is necessary first to show the poem works as an ideal imitation. The schematic simplicity of the narrative of Absalom and Achitophel makes it perhaps the best illustration of the way epics present an array of images of virtues and vices. The action is the corruption of part of the nation and the successful meeting of the corrupted part by the part which remains true. Clearly such an argument (the narrative is more of an argument than a plot) should dispose the characters into representatives of virtue and vice, and in fact the poem
opposes two sets of portraits, one of vicious types and one of worthy.

On the one hand Zadock stands for true piety combined with humility and learning, on the other the ignorant, conceited, and visionary Corah for the perversion of religion to private and factional interest. Jotham representing true wit constant in the service of his King, confronts no doubt the "Kind Husbands and meer Nobles" (1.572) but also Zimri, the wit-would, the man of freakish extremes. In Hushai's disinterested political economy there is perhaps the true version of the disfiguring avarice and business interest of Shimei. And in the portrait of Barzillai, patriotism, which is simulated by Achitophel, is ideally portrayed. His son's filial piety is set against Absalom's filial impiety. Finally, Amiel's art of politics put to defending the state contrasts with Achitophel's politics of private ambition.

The division between the two sets of portraits is not simply an antithesis of true and false. The virtuous characters show the mean of their political attributes. The vicious show the excess or defect. The virtuous are consequently not individualized. What is individual is odd and so the individualized portraits are of vicious characters, those degenerations from the true or generic type, those disfigurements of the ideal figures. The generalized excellence of Zadock or Jotham is rendered in general moral description; the peculiar viciousness of Corah's composition comes out in the grotesquely particular:

Sunk were his Eyes, his Voice was harsh and loud,
Sure signs he neither Cholerick was, nor Proud:
His long Chin prov'd his Wit; his Saintlike Grace
A Church Vermillion, and a Moses's face.  (646—49)
Behind Dryden's characterization lies a traditional theory of humours. The justly tempered man is exceptional only in his balance or soundness. But an excess or deficiency of temperament will express itself in some singular excrecence or deformity. An ill-compounded nature, such as Zimri's, lacking any principle of cohesion, will run out in freaks and unstable forms. A lumpish and dull one, such as Shimei's, will be sullen and resentful of whatever is sovereign and disinterested in government, the tempering of the body politic, and its ungenerosity will contract into municipal politics, the sphere of hot brains and cold kitchens. In Zimri and Shimei, Vanity and Dullness respectively, there is a sinister suggestion, surely, of human nature returning to chaos like the shapeless lump that was born to Achithophel.

At first sight it does not look as if Dryden's array of images of virtue and vice belongs to a universal scheme. Heaven is glimpsed, but there are no scenes in hell. Indeed the scene is restricted to the earth more than is common in epic. Yet in fact Dryden's scheme of virtues and vices does involve the world's system and heaven and hell, not through their being mounted in a described universe, but through the implications of imagery.

First the imagery that involves heaven and hell. The plot itself is inspired by hell, for "when to Sin our byast Nature leans,/The carefull Devil is still at hand with means" (11.79--80). The temptation and seduction

of Absalom continually call up the fall of man and indeed Milton's treatment of it. Achitophel's role is Satanic. Indeed Dryden calls him "Hells dire Agent" (1.373). His lengthy temptation of Absalom is in its way as splendid a display of fallacious argument as Satan's of Eve in Paradise Lost, and lest the comparison with the serpent should go unnoticed, Dryden says that he "shedshis Venome" (1.229) into Absalom's ear. Moreover, Achitophel pictures the fortune he tempts Absalom with as fruit that "must be,/Or gather'd Ripe, or rot upon the Tree" (11.250–51). Even the greatness of Achitophel and the ambition that corrupts his greatness are in character with Milton's Satan. It has been argued, plausibly I think, that the constitutional crisis that he takes advantage of, the adoption of another heir, recalls the exaltation of the Son in Paradise Lost. And his temptation of Absalom, like Satan's of Eve, is to aspire beyond himself until Absalom, recalling Eve, says to himself,

My Soul Disclaims the Kindred of her Earth:
And made for Empire, Whispers me within;
Desire of Greatness is a Godlike Sin. (11.370–72)

These images, of course, in no sense make Absalom and Achitophel into a coherent recapitulation of Paradise Lost. They point the action, rather, and involve it with universal forces of good and evil.

122 Broadwin, p.35.
There is a more latent resemblance, however, with the universal scheme of *Paradise Lost*. In *Paradise Lost* evil is a principle of negation and Satan is in league with chaos to undo creation. The vices in *Absalom and Achitophel* are involved in the same way not only with hell but with an un-creating force. I have shown how images of vice are set against images of virtue in the relation of excess or defect to a mean. And I have suggested that the excesses or defects are involved with images of reversion to chaos. The notion of the mean is involved with a notion of the universe. Like the tempering in *Paradise Lost*, the mean is the fullness of being. To depart from the mean through excess or defect is to fall into the grotesque or absurd shapes of unbeing. But whereas in *Paradise Lost* the creation at issue is the whole universe, in *Absalom and Achitophel* the images of creation and uncreation are mostly bodily. The mean is the fullness of the human body in its creaturely powers; the departure from the mean is the distempering of the body.

The crisis of the plot is imaged as if it were a crisis in the physical as well as political constitution. "If the Body Politique", Dryden concludes his Preface, "have any Analogy to the Natural, in my weak judgement, an Act of Oblivion were as necessary in a Hot, Distemper'd State, as an Opiate would be in a Raging Fever". And the body politic continues the master image. In the crisis the moderate party

> looking backward with a wise afright,
> Saw Seames of wounds, dishonest to the sight;
> In contemplation of whose ugly Scars,
> They Curst the memory of Civil Wars. (11.71--74)

123 "To the Reader", Kinsley, p.189.
The plot itself is imagined as the progress of a fever:

For, as when raging Fevers boil the Blood,
The standing Lake soon floats into a Flood;
And every hostile Humour, which before
Slept quiet in its Channels, bubbles off;
So, several Factions from this first Ferment,
Work up to Foam, and threat the Government. (ll.136-141)

One of the causes of this fermenting of idle humours in the body politic
is indigestion for the allegations of a plot were "swallow'd in the Mass,
unchew'd and Crude" (l.113). Other causes are suggested. The civil madness
is ascribed to the moon (ll.216-217) and to the heat of the dog star,
astrological influences disordering the complexion of the mind through their
influence on the body. The extremes of the state are pictured, then, as a
distempering of the body politic from its natural mean.

But the imagery of the distempered body works also in the individual
extremes, most notably in the portrait of Achitophel. He is an example of
a grander sort of excess than I have so far discussed. In Corah the aspiring
mind is likened to mephitic exhalations, which rise from the earth and shine
as meteors with a visionary and disastrous light:

What tho: his Birth were base, yet Comets rise
From Earthy Vapours ere they shine in Skies. (ll.636-637)

The grand astronomical image has a peculiarly diminishing effect. But with
Achitophel, whose ambition is allowed to be the consequence of great parts,
the apparently diminishing physical imagery peculiarly magnifies the
character. The disproportion between the angelically aspiring "fiery
Soul" and the creaturely inadequacy of "the Pigmy Body" invests the character

124 See Schilling, pp.175-99, on character of Achitophel and how manipulated.
with pathos. His human nature is, so to speak, a miscarried hyperbole and the designs of his spirit and the child of his body misbegotten. That the son is not merely "born a shapeless Lump, like Anarchy" (1.172) but is an "unfeather'd, two Leg'd thing" (1.169) conveys with Swiftian animus the physical absurdity of the human creature attempting to breed wings. And both his designs and his son are set against Barzillai's justly tempered politics and issue. But though Achitophel is played off against the mean, clearly he is a grand defect. The disproportion of body and soul suggests the greatness of the soul, its defiance of its creaturely condition in the tenement of clay. And even in appealing to a just standard of human creat-urelness, the portrait suggests something terrible in the precarious condition of wit or reason in the human creature. Admittedly in Achitophel the disproportion of mind and body goes with a sort of madness, a kind of human monstrosity. But it is the greatness of the portrait that it goes beyond mere satire or imaging of vice through its feeling for the general condition of humanity on "this isthmus of a middle state". One is made to feel that Achitophel's disproportion is a tragic version of a disproportion more or less innate in "the glory, jest, and riddle of the world", and of an entirely different order from the merely ridiculous and pinched, uncreature-ly disproportion of those who have hot brains and cold kitchens.

We have in Absalom and Achitophel a scheme of images of virtue and vice, of creation and uncreation analogous, though on a smaller scale, to what we found in Paradise Lost. Nor does the analogy stop there. The position of Absalom in this scheme is analogous to the position of Adam and Eve. What draws Absalom into the plot is not deficiency or disproportion but an excess of humanity, "a Spark too much of Heavenly Fire" (1.308). He has no natural affinity for the defective creatures of whom Achitophel
is first, no meaning to run "Popularly Mad" (l.336); he is corrupted, rather, through what is innately good and generous in him. But when he has been corrupted, the good is inverted or displaced in a remarkable way, receiving what one might call a negative sign. Achitophel's most inspired subversion of good, of God and monarchy is to hail Absalom as the Messiah anticipating the fulfillment of a prophecy (yet to be made of David's line) by many centuries. The identification is false and so blasphemous, and consequently Absalom, as he journeys like the sun from East to West and is received everywhere as a Guardian God, takes his place in the masquerade of vices as a grand counterfeit.

At first sight the position of the king in this scheme of virtues and vices seems anomalous. Clearly he is a figure of excess and yet he is not an image of a vice. On the contrary, if it is debatable whether he is the hero of the poem, it is certain that the virtues of the poem are most fully expressed in him. He is the sovereign image of creaturely man in a poem about the body politic. Like Adam and Eve he is godlike because the divine energy expresses itself in the primitive vigour of his frame. Adam's heroic redundancy, naturally, does not make "Promiscuous use of Concubine and Bride" (l.6) to scatter "his Maker's Image through the Land" (l.10). Nor am I saying that Dryden modelled David on Milton's Adam, nor indeed that he ascribes godlike virtues to the king's promiscuity without irony. What I am pointing to is that in Dryden's poem, as in Milton's, heroic humanity is godlike through the fullness of its creaturely powers. Accordingly the king's excesses are creative, or at least procreative, unlike Achitophel's which are uncreating. Whereas the huddle of Achitophel's spirit issued in a misbegotten progeny, the king's generous warmth begot Absalom, beautiful
It is not merely a libertine suggestion that moderation goes with the king's vigour. The suggestion is also that his excesses are the overflow of a generous, I might say Brobdingnagian, nature, and that means a basically well tempered and moderate nature. At any rate, the king is as blameless of extremities of mind and spirit as he is of undue exertion, to judge from the half-amused and self-deprecating speech that extinguishes the plot. He is a good tempered man and that is part of being a well tempered man; the poem makes a serious case for being good tempered. Good temper prescribes a sense of human proportion in the body politic, and combined with political astuteness, is the necessary virtue to moderate the extremities of the crisis and restore the state to a temperate course.

But Dryden makes more of the King's patriarchal vigour. He makes him godlike, not only in the sense of being exceptional in the generosity of his creaturely proportions, but also in the sense of being the father of his kingdom. Dryden's hero is godlike because the divine right of kings is lodged in him and the vigour of the king is also the vigour of the political constitution. It is this patriarchal sway that Achitophel wishes to lop: "every Sheckle which he can receive,/Shall cost a Limb of his Prerogative" (11.391—92). In his temptation of Absalom, it is his aim to suggest that the bond of father and son is humbug:

'Tis Natures trick to Propagate her Kind.  
Our fond Begetters, who wo'd never dye,  
Love but themselves in their Posterity.  
(11.424—26)
At the same time he makes out that the king's vigour is already much depleted and with it his authority. He speaks of "Old David" (1.262) and suggests that the king's "Goodness" (1.386) is greater than his wit and so implies that his clemency is impotence lacking in "Manly Force" (1.382). His suggestion that Absalom should assume that "Manly force" and "Commit a pleasing Rape upon the Crown" (1.474) is his final subversive insult to patriarchal authority.

Dryden connects the subversion of the king's authority with the subversion of God's authority, the deformation of the body politic by human hands with the deformation of God at the hands of idolatrous priests and godsmiths (1.50). The constitutional party

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Now, wondred why, so long, they had obey'd
An Idoll Monarch which their hands had made:
Thought they might ruine him they could create;
Or melt him to that Golden Calf, a State. (ll. 63—66)
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Here whoring after strange gods is a metaphor for innovation in forms of government. Later Achitophel flippantly recalls how Israel deposed God for Saul. The wit of these passages might suggest that it is Dryden who is being flippant. In fact his wit is directed at the levity of the constitutional party. To them nothing is sacred: kingship is merely a form of government they have made, not a divinely appointed frame of government, and they treat God's sovereignty with the same irreverence. All this is set right at the end of the poem. The divine form of government asserts its authority over the subversive powers. The "Godlike David" is again restored, and God makes his authority felt with approving thunder.

The investing of the king with divinity is ambiguous and necessarily so, since the vigorous warmth that begot Absalom is partly responsible for the heat that infects the people and the idle humours that ferment into a
rising. Yet as the crisis draws to a head, a sort of separation occurs, for its excesses and the king's become clearly of a different order. And more important it goes to such extremes as to sanction the office of king as guarantor of the nation's liberties and laws against the tyranny of the people. No doubt there is some irony in the stage management of David's speech and in the machinery of God's thunderclap, which ratifies it. Yet the epic does involve universal issues and its action naturally moves into the heroic element of the divine and marvellous. We are made to feel that the king's is the voice of a moderation which holds the poise of government, maintains the true spirit of the laws, sustains the human proportion of civility, and hence is in the image of the celestial and universal sway from which it derives its authority. Dryden is therefore being serious as well as witty when he adapts the epic fiction of the god-filled hero who carries everything before him to the picture of a king on whom the power of heaven devolves to dispel the anarchic and demonic powers.

The epic scheme in Absalom and Achitophel is surprisingly complete. It contains an array of virtues and vices involved in an implicit universal scheme. Its action is shown to be involved with the divine government of the universe and its heroic man, the godlike agent of the divine government. Such epic schemes can feature the heroic human vocation in two different ways. In The Lusiad and Jerusalem Delivered the heroic vocation is the pursuit of a more than human glory and man is divinized in his infinite striving. In Paradise Lost, on the other hand, and in Absalom and Achitophel the heroic vocation is to remain fully human. Both Paradise Lost and Absalom and Achitophel are concerned with creaturely man and the completeness of his nature. But whereas in Paradise Lost this human standing depends on a poise of will, in Absalom and Achitophel it depends on a balance of temper. And in
consequence the action of *Paradise Lost* is more interesting. A temper is more or less fixed. It may perhaps be improved through the imitation of good models or corrupted through the attraction of bad. But the moral possibilities in the shaping of a moral temper, the fashioning of a character or inner statue, seem to me less interesting than what a study of the will and its motions has to offer. And in any case Dryden's poem is not really concerned with the improvement of corruption of character.

The example of Absalom might seem to contradict that assertion. He is a good character and Achitophel corrupts his goodness. And certainly the poem shares with *Paradise Lost*, Swift's satire and Pope's poetry a sense of the precariousness of being, of the ease with which one falls away from humanity into nonsense and defect. Unlike Milton, however, but like Pope, if not Swift, the place where the poise of humanity is maintained is the voice of the author. It is through his balance, urbanity and observation that we feel that humanity is a feat of intellectual and imaginative control. Unlike *Paradise Lost*, which is properly the imitation of an action, *Absalom and Achitophel* is truly a work of eloquence. In it the rhetorical possibilities of ideal imitation develop into intelligent argument, and it is there the standard form of neoclassical epic becomes an adequate criticism of life.

Before I go on to suggest how the rhetoric is serious let me quickly dispatch the matter of how the interest of Absalom's fall lies in rhetoric. Achitophel's temptation of Absalom follows roughly the outward form of Satan's temptation of Eve. First he flatters Absalom, then delivers arguments

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125 See Feder, pp. 511--13; Ferry, pp.116ff., for discussions of Dryden's eloquence.
126 Cf. Ferry, pp.41--68, on abuse of words.
for plucking the fruit of constitutional monarchy and for the ripeness of the occasion. Absalom, like Eve, counters with orthodox arguments in favour of authority but finds within himself a godlike longing. Achitophel seeing his resolution wavering rather than his judgement heaps on further fallacious arguments and Absalom is swayed. But although the course of the temptation outwardly resembles Eve's, as a study of volition it is attenuated. It alludes to the fall of man as to a convention for a rhetorical pointing. It suggests that the opposition is diabolical, that Absalom's rebellion is at once a serious crime and the fall of a noble nature and that the king's clemency is like God's. And there are other ways in which it emerges that Dryden is interested in an argument about politics rather than an imitation of an action. To put the orthodox defence of the king in Absalom's mouth is to suggest that the rebels acted against their better knowledge, a particularly insidious way of establishing their wrongness and the rightness of one's own cause. In the same way to make a diabolical temptation of constitutional or republical arguments is to insinuate that they are perverse. In short the interest of the argument lies in the tactics of Dryden's debate with the other side and in this Absalom and Achitophel resembles Religio Laici and The Hind and the Panther. In Paradise Lost, on the other hand, the interest of the arguments lies in the tactics of debate between the characters of the poem.

It may seem that the rhetorical drive of Absalom and Achitophel merely converts epic into propaganda and that consequently to speak of the poem as a serious criticism of life is ridiculous. Dryden, the objection would go, falsifies as much as Camoens. Neoclassical epic, moreover, is an immensely affirmative form and the moral and universal scheme I have extracted from Absalom and Achitophel may seem at odds with the fine distinctions
of good and evil, that apply to the mixed conditions of human life. To make the king divine and the plotters diabolical is, one might think, to make as gross distinctions as any in *The Lusiad* or in *Jerusalem Delivered*. And besides who takes the divine right of kings seriously?

To these objections there are a number of replies. *Absalom and Achitophel* is discreetly epical. Unlike *The Lusiad* with its overt panegyrical design, *Absalom and Achitophel* has only one intrusion of a supernatural machine. Generally the supernatural or universal images are of a secondary nature, metaphors or similes not descriptions. And *Absalom and Achitophel* is, besides, a wittily epical poem. We take Achitophel as an agent of hell with a pinch of salt. The epic scheme rather colours than determines the argument of the poem. But these replies mitigate but do not remove the charge of oversimplification.

The truth is that *Absalom and Achitophel* is a serious application of ideas to life because it is very good propaganda. One of Empson's best insights is that *Paradise Lost* is enlivened with a remarkable feeling for the tactics of argument, and this he connects with Milton's spell as Commonwealth secretary in charge of propaganda. With Milton's interest in argumentative tactics we may certainly agree, and it is a point I shall return to. Here I am concerned with the general point that an interest in the tactics of argument goes with making reason and the will of God prevail, a formula that expressed the humanist idea of eloquence. Whether we go to the Italian humanist Salutati or indeed trace the matter back to the classical sophists, the concern is with a humane reason, a reason that is applied to the mixed condition of the middle state of humanity. That means a reason

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that is also choice, a reason bent on discerning the stronger reason in the case and making it prevail. It is in the very nature of such a reason that it is engaged in debate with other reasons and that its conclusions are rhetorically provisional and not theoretically final. Really good propaganda is an application of this sort of reason and it is in this that the greatness of Absalom and Achitophel as an ideal imitation or piece of applied eloquence lies.

There is more to Dryden's treatment of politics than adroitness. Or rather, it is through adroitness that Dryden is able to get at the reality of the political issue. The mixed condition of human life where good and evil are inextricably confused requires such a suppleness of reason if its issues are to be grasped. Behind the forms of divine right and constitutional monarchy, the issue that Dryden lays hold of is authority. And though he attaches authority to the king and God he nevertheless deals with the temporal condition of any authority. He brings out its precariousness through the ambiguously respectful treatment of the king at the beginning. The tone arouses mixed feelings about majesty. The apparently libertine suggestions of the opening seem half in league with the subversive wit and blasphemy of the constitutional party. It is only as the unrest develops to a crisis and the sound elements range themselves against the destructive, that the poet's wit is seen to disengage itself from subversion and assert a humane authority. At this point wit aligns itself with clemency and clemency shows itself as manly vigour. The explicit assertion of the king's authority is finely qualified. In lines 753--810 the poet makes out a case

for prerogative. The case is moderate; indeed it is based on the need for a moderating power. Nevertheless, it asserts the king's final authority categorically. But the authority that the king himself asserts at the end of the poem is a limited affair finely tempered to the condition in which he has to exercise power. This quite apart from vindicating the moderation of kingship shows moderation as an adroitness of judgement necessary in dealing with the confusion of human affairs. Of course for Dryden to show the king outdoing Dryden in moderation is the final coup of poetic or rhetorical adroitness. Dryden's art of poetry and the art of authority he shows are in fact akin; both are images of the fine tempering of reason to the mixed conditions of human life.

In *The Lusiad* and *Jerusalem Delivered* ideal imitation is different from the imitation of an action for it consists in making images of ideas rather than showing how people behave. *Paradise Lost* has many of the features of ideal imitation including a universal scheme of images of good and evil. But essentially it is the imitation of an action and the central part of the poem lies outside the consideration of neoclassical epic I have attempted in this chapter. *Absalom and Achitophel* on the other hand is essentially an ideal imitation. And yet unlike *The Lusiad* and *Jerusalem Delivered*, it applies ideas to life successfully. I remarked earlier that it was through showing ideas in action that images applied ideas to life. The static image of an idea is not properly involved with the human condition. It is perhaps because they are rudimentary and uninteresting as actions that *The Lusiad* and *Jerusalem Delivered* are unsatisfactory criticisms of life. But if this is so, how is it that *Absalom and Achitophel* whose action is as rudimentary is a satisfactory criticism of life? The images of excessive or defective, or, on the other hand, just human tempers are after all more
or less static. Temper, I remarked, is a fairly fixed thing. Here it seems to me that the tempering of reason to the mixed condition of human life, the act of judgement distinguishing good from bad reasons is a sort of human action present in the argument of the poem. It is in no sense present as the imitation of an action but it does supply a sophisticated involvement in the conditions of human life lacking in the epics of earlier humanism.

This act of tempering present in the eloquence of the poet resembles what is at issue in the obedience of Adam and Eve. Their obedience calls for an attentiveness of will and mind to what is truly human. On this reason, which is also choice, the fullness of their human standing depends. In the same way the act of reason present in Dryden's rhetoric is the exercise of reason and judgement about what is human. And it is on the poise and humanity of that act of judgement that the force of the poem's eloquence depends. The universal imagery implicit in the poem depends on it. The images of the fullness of creaturely humanity, on the one hand, or of defective and disfigured humanity, on the other, supply an abstract scheme of good and evil, creation and uncreation. But what these images turn on, the source of the values they reflect, is the humanity of the poet's judgement. The epic universe centreing on human creatureliness is an image that peculiarly lends itself to the poetry of the humanist mind attempting to realize its humanity. It is for this reason probably, more than any other, that Paradise Lost supplied a master image of the human predicament to Augustan poets. For it made of the epic scheme of universal images a precarious balance of creation and uncreation and made, moreover, of the precariousness the condition of a creatureliness that only a fully human mind and will could maintain. In his book, Pope's "Dunciad", Aubrey L. Williams shows how Pope's satirical images involve the uncreating, anti-cosmic
principle of Dullness, and how Pope's implication of images in a universal force of negation is indebted to Milton. And Pope fashions his images elsewhere in this way. But it is not only that Dryden and Pope are at one with Milton in the art of implicating universal principles in their images. Even more important is the crucial position of a justly tempered human nature on which everything stands or falls.

Having drawn this comparison, I must point to two quite as essential distinctions. The humane tempering of Dryden's mind takes two forms that I spoke of earlier treating Montaigne, urbanity and observation. Urbanity, the cultivation of one's being a man among other men, comes out in the judgements he makes of human tempers. In Absalom and Achitophel those characteristics of developed neoclassical humanism enter into the way epic ideal imitation applies ideas to life. They are absent from the other epics we have considered. And in The Lusiad and Jerusalem Delivered, which treat actions in the world of experience, this is a defect. They do not offer justly tempered criticisms of life. With Paradise Lost the case is different. It does not treat the world of experience, and urbanity and observation of Dryden's sort would be out of place. It is true that the meal with Raphael involves a kind of sublime urbanity, a generous notion of human conversation with heaven. But obviously this is different from Dryden's worldly urbanity. The sphere of action in Paradise Lost is not the public world but the private world of volition. And so just as Paradise Lost lies at once within and without the compass of ideal imitation, it lies within and without the development of neoclassical humanism.

129 Williams, Pope's "Dunciad", pp.131--47.
The discussion of *Absalom and Achitophel* has brought to a head what I wanted to say about the development of humanism in the neoclassical epic. With diffidence I suggest that if we wanted to get outside the limitations of poetic theories whose criterion is fineness of truth, and that means the limitations of our own humanism, we might find in Dryden's sort of ideal imitation material to work with. The nub of the matter lies in the replacement of the cruder sorts of didacticism and moving of the will with the notion of humane tempering. The surprising thing is that while rhetoric is uncongenial to our ideas of poetry, *Absalom and Achitophel*, of the three properly ideal imitations we have looked at the most rhetorical, comes closest to answering at least my notions of fineness of truth. But these are only suggestions. To settle the matter would require studies that lie beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Further than this, I think it is unnecessary to glance back at the main points of this chapter. The relation of *Paradise Lost* to the development of a criticism of life as serious as Dryden's needs further treatment. And there are other loose ends to be tied up in the following chapters.
A. Humanism and the Christian Study of the Will

In the Lusiad and Jerusalem Delivered, no serious difficulties arise in reconciling Christian and Humanist concerns. As humanist epics bent on applying moral ideas to life, both pick on the idea of Christian empire. In Jerusalem Delivered, the moralizing of Christian empire as government and order goes further than in the Lusiad but both feature the idea of an earthly kingdom. And both Christianize this theme in roughly the same way. For both, the earthly Kingdom is glorified as it advances the kingdom of God. The moral ideas fade into religious ones, and human ends are directed at a heavenly completion. In the Lusiad, the divinization of human striving appears in an allegorical shift of level; in Jerusalem Delivered, through a shift from the human to the divine perspective. The shift in Jerusalem Delivered is far more drastic. Still, for both epics, Christianity takes the form of an apotheosis of human striving for order on earth. One might feel inclined to say the same of Absalom and Achitophel. The moral idea at issue in the poem is human order and authority. The divine comes into the poem to sanction human authority. So the theophany at the end of the poem, one might argue, glorifies the human order represented in the King. All this may be conceded, indeed welcomed, but there are some important distinctions to draw that characterize Absalom and Achitophel as the product of a later and more sophisticated vein of humanism than the one Tasso and Camoens were working. What is glorified in Absalom and Achitophel is not an upward striving but a poise of temper. It is humanity in its creatureliness that is glorified, not humanity in its attempt to go beyond itself. One recalls Montaigne's remark in "Of Experience:" "It is an absolute perfection and virtually
divine to know how to enjoy our being rightfully. We seek other conditions because we do not understand the use of our own, and we go outside of ourselves because we do not know what it is like inside. Yet it is no use our mounting on stilts, for on stilts we must still walk on our legs. And on the loftiest throne in the world we are still sitting only on our own rump.\(^1\) The temper of that is close to Dryden's and as far as possible from Tasso's. And so while we may agree that Dryden, like Camoens and Tasso, has written a Christian epic and one that reconciles its Christian and humanist concerns, we must at the same time recognize that for Dryden the important thing is the distinctness of the human and the divine, and in this his Christianity and his humanism differ from the enthusiastic "Christian humanism" to be found in Camoens and Tasso.

And in another respect also Dryden differs from Tasso, if not from Camoens. He does not treat what Christianity is most concerned with, the sphere of private conduct. Even in his poems that discuss religious issues, \textit{Religio Laici} and \textit{The Hind and the Panther}, his concern is with public questions of religious authority and with its place in the polity. And so far as religion enters into \textit{Absalom and Achitophel}, it is a matter of public order. It is not a matter of the ordering of the individual will; there is no Rinaldo in \textit{Absalom and Achitophel}. One can of course say that public authority and order were the pressing issues of the Restoration settlement and add that religious enthusiasm had made the representation

of the bearing of Christianity on the individual conscience unfashionable. But whatever the contributory causes, the way Dryden chose to involve religion in poetry suits the cast of the humanism we earlier saw developing in Montaigne. Montaigne separated the spheres of nature and grace. The study of literature or humanism was then to occupy itself with the study of the natural man. Religious, or at least genuinely religious, man he relinquished to the study of Christian doctrine. This separation, as we saw, meant that his humanism retreated from the study of human volition, and particularly it left true repentance involved in the mythical language and spiritual operations of Christian faith. And this was in many ways a prudent delimiting of interest. The motions of the will are hard to grasp. Perhaps there is no proper secular language for them. Certainly the writings of those humanists who like Erasmus attempted to interpret Christian ideas about the will according to the ordinary notions of morality seem inadequate to the subject and far less penetrating than what religious teachers like Paul and Luther have to say on the subject, however veiled and mythical their language. A prudent delimiting of interest then, but distinctly a retreat on the part of letters from the study of the whole man. Yet there is one side of Christianity that such a humanism might engage in without violating the limitations it imposed upon itself. It might concern itself with the church as part of the good ordering of manners and society. And it is with this public side of Christianity that Dryden as man of letters engages.

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With the establishment — one can hardly avoid so deliberate a word — of Augustan humanism Montaigne’s separation of humanist and religious interests is the norm. It was the institutional or public side of Christianity Augustan humanism concerned itself with. Swift was concerned with the Anglican establishment. When Pope satirized the pomp of prayer, it was a breach of manners and a sort of social affectation he was concerned with. He implies a standard of true devotion of course, but the contents of true devotion, if not the forms, are a subject that lies outside his chosen scope. Dryden’s contrition in The Hind and the Panther (1, 11.66—99) is unusual — I can think of no other such passage in Dryden or in the other Augustan figures I have mentioned — in its being a dignified and moving utterance of personal devotion. Some excellent devotional poetry was written in the period, but it was not a form favoured by the representative figures of Augustan humanism. Johnson’s critical position on the matter is notorious and yet not really eccentric considering the state of letters he speaks for. He felt that the topics of Christian religion were unsuitable for poetry. They should be left to their proper place and occasion since they were too awful and too sacred to be treated in an interesting manner. This opinion lies behind his objection to the


religious subject of *Paradise Lost*. Another objection of his is that the proper subject for humane letters is the experience of human life among men and in this *Paradise Lost*, he thought, was deficient.\(^5\)

With the line of Augustan humanists we can speak for the first time of a humanist institution of English letters; for with Augustan criticism English letters became explicit about their vocation to humanize and civilize, to represent an urbane humanity in its central human concerns. That there were many other strains in the literature of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries besides the humanist one does not undermine the assertion that there is a consensus of literary principles among Dryden, Swift, Pope and Johnson of such influence that to speak of a literary establishment is not to overstate the case. And yet in spite of its immense cachet in Augustan criticism *Paradise Lost* is clearly not a work of Augustan humanism.\(^6\)

From the point of view of our inquiry the most important way in which Milton diverges from Augustan humanism is his treatment of religion. In spite of the important terms of comparison between Milton and Dryden that I adduced in the last chapter and in spite of those affinities between Augustan attitudes to knowledge and Milton's that I shall take up in the next, the kernel of *Paradise Lost* lies outside the scope of Augustan humanism. What is peculiar about *Paradise Lost* is that it treats the

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piece of history on which the central Christian teachings of sin and
redemption are founded. In this it differs from the Davideis, say, or
Absalom and Achitophel, biblical epics certainly, but treatments of a piece
of history not radically different from ordinary historical experience.
Milton's subject, on the other hand, involved the experience of fall and
restoration, which Augustan humanism relegated to a sphere of sacred
truth. And while Augustan criticism of Paradise Lost is probably the best
we have, it is still inadequate to treating the issues on which the epic
turns.

Perhaps then Paradise Lost belongs to an earlier cast of humanism.7
Yet any consideration of humanism in English letters before Dryden is full
of perplexities. There was of course an English humanism in the sense
that classical letters were established as a humanizing discipline in the
universities and more thoroughly in the grammar schools. Conspicuously
behind Johnson, Milton and Dryden stand the schoolmasters, Camden, Gill and
Busby. And most writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would
have had some humanist training in classical letters. Yet this is not
enough to make it sensible to talk of English letters in sixteenth and
seventeenth centuries as a humanist institution. It is not helpful to
call Herbert and Crashaw humanists as English poets on the grounds that they
were fine latinists. If we are to talk of the humanism of English letters
we shall have to find explicit pronouncements of a critical consciousness
of a humanizing vocation and this before the Restoration is remarkably

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7 See J. W. Johnson, Formation of English Neo-classical Thought, p.138,
on connection of Augustan and earlier humanism.
undeveloped. There are exceptions, Ben Jonson the most massive. But the tribe surrounding Jonson was not a school of humanism. There was, no doubt, much literary talk ranging from the sort of gossip to be found in Suckling's "Sessions of the Poets" to acute \textit{ad hoc} criticism of the sort represented by Carew's verse epistle "To Ben Jonson." But there is no evidence that any of the tribe of Ben held the sort of principles about the function of literature and the man of letters to be found, however sketchily, in Jonson's \textit{Timber}. Most of them were gentleman of letters. So that if we think of the English literature of the earlier seventeenth century, we can assert certainly that it was reared on a humanism of the classics but that in its conversation with itself, its literary scene, and its productions, anything we might call humanist letters was on the whole elusive and diffident, glancing out ironically for example in the Horatian side of Marvell or more candidly in Cowley's attempts at the institutional humanist forms, the epic and the celebratory or reflective ode, but nowhere, except with Jonson, confident of its position as \textit{magister vitae}. As far as humanism goes then the letters of "the Gyant Race, before the Flood" are irregular and indefinite and there is nothing that helps us to place \textit{Paradise Lost} and its perplexing combination of Christianity and humane letters.\textsuperscript{8}

If we cast further back to Elizabethan letters, we seem at first sight to hit on a more promising state of affairs.\textsuperscript{9} There was perhaps

\textsuperscript{8} Dryden, "To my Dear Friend Mr Congreve, On His COMEDY, call'd \textit{The Double-Dealer}", 1.5, \textit{Kinsley}, 2, 852.

nothing of such institutional weight as the humanism of Augustan letters. Still the pieces collected in Gregory Smith’s *Elizabethan Critical Essays* show an intense if usually naive and derivative concern with the state of contemporary letters, and the various apologies for poetry sketch a conception of the function of literature. Sidney’s *Defense* is the most distinguished statement of these concerns, and it seems to represent a genuine, if jejune, humanism. The *Faerie Queene* is a product of that early English humanism. For according to Spenser’s letter to Raleigh, “the generall end ... of all the books is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous or gentle discipline.” Here then is a poem that imitates a golden world and images virtues and vices for humanizing and civilizing ends. The interesting thing from our point of view, however, is that the first virtue of the gentleman is “Holinesse,” and remarkably the virtue touches the inner man. Christianity would naturally enough concern the public ideal of the gentleman and those public ideals of order that The *Faerie Queene* represents. And this would not be puzzling in a civilizing and humanizing poem. Indeed the Christianity would as easily fit into the public theme as it does in *Gondibert*. But Spenser’s "Holinesse" is attained through peculiarly private motions of the will in the Redcrosse Knight’s encounter with *Despaire* and his subsequent repentance in the House of Holinesse. Here then we have a humanist poem,

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at least in principle, which nevertheless includes those motions of the will that play a central part in *Paradise Lost* and generally seem to have been inaccessible to humane letters or uninviting. Perhaps then we should agree with a widely held view that *Paradise Lost* was an old-fashioned poem for its time and that its humanism looks back to the sixteenth century.¹³

And certainly *The Faerie Queene* through its allegorical treatment of virtues and vices shares with *Paradise Lost* a certain moral innerness that is unusual in epic. But this affinity does not really help us to place Milton’s treatment of his Christian subject matter. For one thing Spenser’s treatment of despair and repentance is not a very penetrating representation of the motions of the will. Despair’s temptation turns on fairly conventional topics and though memorable, is not very persuasive.¹⁴

And in comparison with Milton’s picture of the bound will in Book 10 of *Paradise Lost* Spenser’s treatment is fairly external. Again, Redcrosse’s repentance does not get beyond fairly conventional metaphors for the transformation from bound self to free. There is the charming allegory of Charissa’s being brought to bed in labour, her child being the rebirth of Redcrosse in the spirit.¹⁵ This is a representation of the operation of divine grace, which Spenser in the introductory stanza of Canto 10 says is necessary for dealing with spiritual temptations. But as a working out of what is involved in repentance and the delivery of the bound self

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¹⁵ Bk. 1, canto 10, sts. 29—31.
on the level of human volition Spenser's treatment has none of the moral analysis to be found in *Paradise Lost*, and as a religious account of the process it lacks the insights of Paul or Luther. Indeed the form of Redcrosse's repentance is fasting and mortification as a preparative for contemplating the new Jerusalem. And this, though evidently a picture of heartfelt contrition, has not laid hold of Luther's radical criticism of such forms of repentance, for all its insistence on the power of grace against the strength of the flesh or the merely human will. *The Faerie Queene* features a diluted version of the Pauline and Lutheran account of human volition.

The natural line of development from Spenser's study of the will is not *Paradise Lost* but Beaumont's *Psyche*. This is an Anglo-Catholic epic of spiritual pilgrimage which enormously enlarges upon Spenser's allegory of the soul's mortification, despair, and final entry into heaven. It is unprofitable to discuss in what attenuated sense we might talk of *Psyche* as a humanist production. But what it brings out and exaggerates is a kind of treatment of sin and repentance very different from Milton's. It demonstrates *a fortiori* that there is no radical discontinuity between Spenser's Christian and social and political concerns. Beaumont actually addresses his epic to composing the disorders of the realm. And however inner the concerns of *Psyche*, the spiritual discipline the soul is subjected to goes with the ecclesiastical discipline of the Laudian church and the political discipline of the divine right of kings. In one place indeed

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16 Bk. 1, canto 10, sts. 26–28.
Beaumont's allegory bears on all three concerns simultaneously. Spenser has, of course, a much broader and more reasonable grasp of social and political order. But there is no reason why Christian discipline as he pictures it should not fit into his picture of those virtues that civilize and order. Indeed the cast of the relations between "Holinesse" and political order recalls Jerusalem Delivered. Especially at the end of Canto 10 a Tassonian view of Christian endeavour comes in. On a mountain like Sinai, or the Mount of Olives, or Parnassus, a mountain then of divine inspiration, Redcrosse sees the heavenly Jerusalem, the end of human effort. At the same time it is made clear to him, as to Godfrey, that the way there lies through his heroic endeavours on earth, which are part of the design of the earthly city, Cleopolis. The Faerie Queene is a complicated epic, and I do not wish to press it further into the mould of Jerusalem Delivered. The point at issue is clear: Spenser's handling of Christian concerns in a poem concerned with the human order does not provide a useful parallel with Paradise Lost. In Michael's vision of history there is no human order, no earthly city in which holiness is established.

Milton's treatment of his central action, the fall and restoration of man, is not easily placed in the humanism of English letters, and the sense in which it belongs to neoclassical humanism is a matter I shall have to return to. For the moment it is enough to have suggested the singularity


18 Bk.1, canto 10, sts. 53—64.
of Milton's enterprise. That singularity is connected with another singularity. Of the neoclassical epics we considered in the last chapter, *Paradise Lost* was peculiar in not fitting satisfactorily into the scheme of ideal imitation. In this chapter I mean to show how Milton works out the action in terms of human volition, and how this accords better with Aristotle's account of imitation. The connection between the two singularities is the concern with human volition. Milton has involved the moral significance of his action in the motions of his characters' wills. His representation of these motions constitutes at once an imitation of a human action in an Aristotelian rather than ideal sense and a study of the will according to fairly thorough-going Protestant notions. The business of this chapter then will be to show how Milton makes a human action of religious ideas that neoclassical humanism generally left out of account. In my view the greatness of *Paradise Lost* lies in the analysis of the will to be found in its human action. It is a greatness that lies beyond the standard practice of neoclassical epic, and it seems to me that Milton would not have been led to attempt it if it had not been for his Protestant concentration on the will.

If then we say that Milton's treatment of the motions of the will goes beyond the scope of neoclassical humanism and if we can show that his going beyond arrives at a successful criticism of life, then, however we finally place him with regard to neoclassical humanism, we shall at least

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19 Milton's treatment of the motions of the will goes beyond anything Aristotle had in mind. Still his attempt at working out the fall and restoration of mankind as a human action rather than as a series of ideal representations justifies the use of Aristotelian imitation as a name for his practice. For analyses in terms of Aristotelian poetics, see John M. Steadman, "Recognition in the Fable of the Fall," *Studia Neophilologica*, 31 (1959), 159—73, and "Peripeteia in Milton's Epic Fable," *Anglia*, 81 (1963), 429—52; also Jun Harada's valuable article "The Mechanism of Human Reconciliation in *Paradise Lost*," *PG*, 50 (1971), 543—52.
be able to advance a claim for the poem in terms of the essential concerns of the humanist study of man. For we shall have said that *Paradise Lost* bears on human experience and to that extent humanizes the doctrines it revolves around. Surprisingly this is not so much in spite as because of the quality of Milton's religious concern with sin and restoration.

B. The Imitation of the Motions of the Will in "Paradise Lost"

1. Theology of Grace

What Milton has to say in his explicit theology about the will and its restoration is from the point of view of the criticism of life uninteresting. It lacks the sort of insight that we have found in Paul and Luther and might have found even in Calvin's *Institutes*. We may find Milton developing in the *Christian Doctrine* a generally Arminian position on predestination and certainly in comparison with Calvin's appalling doctrine of double predestination, the doctrine that all are predestined, some to be saved, others to be damned, Milton's position is perhaps humane. Yet however much we may wish to honour Milton for finding a place for the freedom of the will, the plan of salvation baffles as a scheme of justice. For it is surely hard to understand a justice that feels obliged to punish the human race because Adam and Eve have offended, that is, however, prepared to accept the sacrifice of an innocent victim as atonement for the offence and on those terms to offer mercy to those who at least in part have done something to avail themselves of it. For me at any rate Milton's poem does nothing to make those ideas of justice more comprehensible.

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The Arminianism of the Christian Doctrine dilutes but does not solve the mystery.

Man disobeying,
Disloyal breaks his fealtie, and sins
Against the high Supremacie of Heav'n,
Affecting God-head, and so loosing all,
To expiate his Treason hath naught left,
But to destruction sacred and devote,
He with his whole posteritie must die:
Die hee or Justice must; unless for him
Som other able, and as willing, pay
The rigid satisfaction, death for death.
(Bk. 3, 11.204—12).

This is one of the passages where God the Father speaks like a school divine, a passage singled out by Arnold to illustrate the sterility and legalism of seventeenth century puritan divinity. We may seek to exonerate Milton, or the Father, by saying that he is speaking with the severity of legalistic divinity only to elicit the fullness of love divine in the Son's response. And we may add that the Father has already been careful to make it clear that it is his will that "Man ... shall find Grace" (Bk. 3, 1.131). The Father's dryness is then a kind of eloquence directed to making the issue as sharp as possible and to bringing out the contrast with the moving accents of the Son's plea. All this we may grant. I should even go so far as to say that if we could swallow the Father's legal reasoning, if the Father's case seemed just, the dialogue between the Father and the Son would come over as a masterly play of contrasting tones all resolving in the Father's final promise that "God shall be All in All" (Bk. 3, 1.341). But we cannot, and no amount of

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rhetorical mastery can get round the difficulty. There are of course wonderful things in the dialogue, but its theology of atonement remains wrapped up in its theological language. 22

And if we turn to the explicit pronouncements about the part of the human will in the divine plan, we shall not receive much enlightenment there either. At best the explicit pronouncements are sensible and make the terms of the moral action clear: "I made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (Bk. 3, 11.98—99); or

What pleasure I from such obedience paid,  
When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)  
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoid,  
Made passive both, had served necessitie,  
Not mee. (Bk. 3, 11.107—11)

These statements let us know that the initial peripety of the action, the fall, will turn on a free act of the will. As for the second peripety, the repentance of Adam and Eve, what the Father has to say about fallen volition is ambiguous:

Man shall not quite be lost, but sav'd who will,  
Yet not of will in him, but Grace in mee  
Freely voutsaf't. (Bk. 3, 11.173—75)

And later:

I will cleer thir senses dark,  
What may suffice, and soft'n stonie hearts  
To pray, repent, and bring obedience due.  
To prayer, repentance, and obedience due,  
Though but endevord with sincere intent,  
Mine ear shall not be slow, mine eye not shut. (Bk. 3, 11.188—93)

In both passages the respective parts of the wills of God and man in deliverance are not clearly distinguished. If it is not of will in man that he is saved, how is it that those are saved who will? If stony hearts are softened by God, in what sense is repentance endeavoured on man’s side and what part does his intent play in it? The ambiguity comes into the action of the poem. Adam and Eve do repent in Book 10 and we follow the human endeavour they make to come to that point. Yet at the beginning of Book 11 we are told how this is not of will in them but of grace in God:

> for from the Mercie-seat above
> Prevenient Grace descending had remov’d
> The stonie from thir hearts, and made new flesh
> Regenerat grow instead. (11.2–5).

There are of course answers to this puzzle. Milton is probably working out the view that man’s will may cooperate with grace and that it may be one sort of cause while God’s will may be another. Yet even on this interpretation, and it seems acceptable to me, the theological doctrine does not help to understand the volitional peripety in Book 10. It comes as a theological explanation after the event and does not interfere with it. But I do not think we can be more positive than that.

The explicit theology does not get at the heart of the human action. At worst, and I think the passage I quoted beginning "Man disobeying, /
Disloyal breaks his fealtie ..." is worst, it puts the action in a frame of disturbing and mystifying theological concepts. At best it informs us

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of the broad terms in which the human action is conceived, without however offering very sharp analytic comments. Much the same can be said of other explicit comments on the action; they are broadly rather than finely true. Where Milton's concern with the fall and restoration of man is brought to bear on experience is in his imitation of the human action. It is there, not in his explicit statements that he is able to develop a serious account of volition.

2. The Son

There is another side to the poem I do not propose to make much of. That is the part of the Son. Clearly in the theological scheme of the poem the Son's part is of the utmost importance. For in addition to his part in creating the world, it is he who makes atonement for man and on this the whole scheme of salvation turns with man's restoration and Satan's final defeat. But it cannot be said that the Son is a repellently arid piece of theology like some of his Father's words. On the contrary some of the imaginatively most compelling parts of the poem are devoted to him. The two places for instance where he is infused with the might of the Father to dispel the forces of darkness, the riding forth in the chariot of paternal deity and the Creation, contain power poetry of a splendid kind, which refutes, if anyone wants a refutation, the notion that Milton's imaginative energy was essentially infernal. And equally fine are those parts of the poem where the Son accomplishes the Father's will through voluntary humiliation, becoming man and joining manhood to godhead. I have already spoken of his volunteering in Book 3. But Michael's narrative of the Son's duel with Satan (Bk. 12, 11.386—424), summary though it is of an event that in the perspective of Adam's view of history must necessarily appear a terse outline, is, amidst so much that is merely summary, austerely energetic:
so he dies,
But soon revives, Death over him no power
Shall long usurp; ere the third dawning light
Return, the Starres of Morn shall see him rise
Out of his grave, fresh as the dawning light,
Thy ransom paid, which Man from death redeems.

(11.419—24).

The discreet association of the Son with the dawning light and the pregnancy of the adjective "fresh," appropriate at once to the dawn and the resurrected Christ untainted by the grave are in their own way as impressive as the sublimely grotesque details of a more obvious tour de force:

And the third sacred Morn began to shine
Dawning through Heav'n: forth rush'd with whirlwind sound
The chariot of Paternal Deitie,
Flashing thick flames, Wheele within Wheele undrawn,
It self instinct with Spirit, but convoyd
By four Cherubic shapes, four Faces each
Had wondrous, as with Starres thir bodies all
And Wings were set with Eyes, with Eyes the Wheels
Of Beril, and careering Fires between;
Over thir heads a crystal Firmament,
Whereon a Saphir Throne, inlaid with pure Amber, and colours of the showrie Arch.

(Bk. 6, 11.748—59).

The chariot is, like Achilles' shield, a design of the world. Apparently the divine power takes one design creating or destroying. But not only are divine creation and destruction connected, the Son's humiliation and his assumption of power are connected also. For it is through his perfect obedience that the Son is filled with God and expresses the Father's will.

And his volunteering to become man and so act as his effectual might in a

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more delicate conquest of the powers of darkness than his driving them
out of heaven is the occasion of the Father's promise of the final
glorification of the Son and his investing him with all his power.

The question remains, though, whether the Son's deliverance of man-
kind is realized in the central human action of the poem. And for
obvious reasons that tremendous putting forth of divine energy in the
Son's human life necessary to redress the fall of man away from God towards
nothing, which is according to Adam,

more wonderful
Then that which by creation first brought forth
Light out of darkness! (Bk. 12, 11.471—73).

is a remote event. It is true it gives Adam and Eve faith to enter upon
history. But on the peripety that leads to that going forward to the
restoration of man, on their repentance in other words, its bearing is more
or less concealed. We know that they have been able to repent because of
the Son's sacrifice, otherwise prevenient grace would not have been
forthcoming, and an important motive in their working themselves out of
their despair is hope in the mysterious oracle about the bruising of the
serpent's head. But these things are only intimations, and obviously
Milton could not have Adam and Eve overcoming themselves through Christian
faith. And so that particular form of laying hold of the divine energy
is not analysed in the action.

On the other hand, the motif of abasement or abnegation of the self
only to be exalted much concerned Milton. This if it were not sufficiently

25 See Bk. 10, 11.173—192, 1030—40, for the part played by the oracle in
restoration of Adam and Eve and Bk. 11, 11.3, for prevenient grace. See
Patrides, pp. 203, 208—209.
obvious from Book 3 of *Paradise Lost*, one would gather from the *Second Defence*: "There is a certain road which leads through weakness, as the apostle teaches, to the greatest strength. May I be entirely helpless, provided that in my weakness there may arise all the more powerfully this immortal and more perfect strength; provided that in my shadows the light of the divine countenance may shine forth all the more clearly. For then I shall be at once the weakest and the strongest, at the same time blind and most keen in vision. By this infirmity may I be perfected, by this completed. So in this darkness, may I be clothed in light." 26 This speaks not merely of a divine movement, surely, but also of a human volition. If we wished to study this volition, the emptying of oneself in order to be filled with the divine, clearly we should go to *Paradise Regained* or *Samson Agonistes*. But in *Paradise Lost*, though at work in the Son's volunteering, it does not seem to have any obvious connection with the central action. It seems that the repentance of Adam and Eve is worked out simply on the human level. The divine cooperation is off stage. It is true that what happens in the repentance of Adam and Eve unassumingly answers to what Michael says is God's method "by small/ Accomplishing great things" (Bk. 12, 11.566-67). But there is no obvious intrusion of divine power delivering their wills at the moment of change. And while Christian notions of the bound will and deliverance bear on the human action and indeed thoroughly inform Milton's understanding of it, it seems to me that the Son's atonement figures as background in the poem

rather than agent in the transformation. In Michael's vision of history the case is different, for there the essence of heroism is patience and martyrdom, a waiting for the living strength to take over human agency to effect a divine act in history, and there we can see the Son as most complete pattern of the union of divine and human through human attentiveness to the divine will. But this is rather a far cry from what is shown in Book 10 and the human action I shall be dealing with.

3. Satan's Fall

On the other hand the continuous fall of Satan is instructive as a study of the will enthralled to itself. The divine disposal behind Satan's predicament is chilling. For while the Father is prepared to extend grace to man, he excludes the fallen angels from its operations (Bk. 3, 11.131—32). That means that Satan is incapable of repentance. He can only will to do evil. Man is at least free to turn. But Satan is in the position of those men who freely do not turn (except that he could not do otherwise). What the Father says of those men will therefore apply to Satan:

This my long sufferance and my day of Grace
They who neglect and scorn, shall never taste;
But hard be hard'n'd, blind be blinded more,
That they may stumble on, and deeper fall;
And none but such from mercy I exclude,
(Bk. 3, 11.198—202).

In extenuation of the Father's malice we might argue that what provokes Satan's rancour is the Father's goodness, and this is not only how Milton explains the hardening of sinners' hearts in the Christian Doctrine, but
also what he shows happening with Satan, as we shall see. But this, far from absolving the Father in the case of Satan, merely makes his malice more exquisite, for Satan cannot turn. Again we might argue that Satan having fallen out of creation into the infinite process of error, the Father merely lets things take their course. Short of abolishing things entirely he can alter the process of evil in man's case only through the puzzling transaction of sacrificing his Son. He is not obliged to put himself out in this way to restore the power of choosing goodness in the fallen angels, and besides they have already rejected their exaltation to godhead in the Son. It seems possible to me that Milton thought God might be justified by some such argument, though it makes his justice unattractive to say the least. But it is hard to understand the Father's positive reason for withholding from the rebel angels the grace he holds out to man:

The first sort by thir own suggestion fell,
Self-tempted, self-deprav'd: Man falls deceiv'd
By th'other first: Man therefore shall find Grace,
The other none. (Bk. 3, 11.129—32).

Moreover, what he says here apparently contradicts Raphael's account of how the temptation to rebellion is Satan's and of how his squadrons follow him with unquestioning alacrity. Possible the Father's point is that where man is tempted by another kind of being, the angels are tempted by one of themselves. But to deduce from that a special culpability simply does not

27 Christian Doctrine, 1, 8, Complete Prose, 6, 336: "In the same way when God incites to sin he is nevertheless not the cause of anyone's sinning, so when he hardens the heart of a sinner or blinds him, he is not the cause of sin.... The means he uses are just and kindly, and ought rather to soften the hearts of sinners than harden them." Cf. PL, 6, 11.789—91.
accord with rational notions of justice; indeed it mystifies in the same way as the argument that all men deserve punishment for Adam's sin. No doubt other considerations such as the angels' intuitive knowledge and AbdM's warning might be brought in to show that the angels, unlike Adam and Eve, acted in full and malignant knowledge of what they were doing. But even if these considerations help to explain the distinction the Father is making, his complaisance in the rebel angels' course of destruction appals. It should of course be borne in mind that Milton was not free to invent in these matters but was bound to the biblical account. Yet this does not make the Father's judgement more comprehensible, though it may suggest why Milton adopted it as theologically sound.

But however hard it is to accept the part of the will of God in Satan's course of evil, Satan remains a remarkable study of the self-enthralled will. The actual process of his first willing evil is something Paradise Lost does not work out. Raphael's account at any rate simply tells us of Satan's motives, pride and envy at the Son's exaltation, without going into the process of self-suggested temptation and fall in an originally innocent creature (Bk. 5, 11.657—665). And certainly it would not have been easy to show how a creature enjoying the bliss of heaven and endowed with angelic intelligence of God and of himself suddenly entertained crooked desires and made a fatal mistake about the chances of rebellion against the omnipotent and omniscient. For a fuller presentation of the swerving of the will we shall have to turn to the fall of man. But with Satan it seems to me the interest lies rather in the process of error once the original lapse has taken place.

There is, however, one important passage where Satan himself addressing the sun on Niphates recapitulates his fall (Bk. 4, 11.32—57). The first point to notice is that what Satan describes is an instantaneous fall:
lifted up so high
I sdeigned subjection, and thought one step higher
Would set me highest, and in a moment quit
The debt immense of endless gratitude. (11.49—52)

Satan's physical position in this soliloquy on the top of Niphates lends a peculiar force to the way in which he recounts his aspiration. Lifted up high he would take a further step higher, and yet to try to step up in that way from his bright eminence in heaven is, as it would be from Niphates, to step into nothingness. The lines with the strategic placing of "high," "higher" and "quit" catch a precarious sense of balance and a sudden tumbling out of it.

The soliloquy is, however, interesting not so much for what it has to say about the origin of Satan's fall as for how it shows that Satanic evil is not something in itself but an inversion of good. What strikes Satan, and strikes him continually thereafter, is the beauty of creation. Indeed he immediately apprehends it centred on the sun as an image of heaven centred on God (11.32—35). But whereas through Adam and Eve unfallen the creation utters itself in praise and so returns to its heavenly origin, in Satan the spectacle of creation moves hate, self-hate, despair and finally the will to destroy. 28 In most of Satan's soliloquies thereafter the motion is the same. His initial wonder and motion of love towards Adam and Eve arouse a sinister desire to be united with them in hell (Bk. 4, 11.358—92). The spectacle of their love turns on him as torment and provokes him to his envious and destructive plan (Bk. 4, 11.505—35). In Book 9 a renewed vision of the earth as his lost heaven comes to him as the hell within: "All good to mee becomes/Bane, and in Heav'n much worse

28 See Broadbent, Some Graver Subject, pp.76—8.
would be my state" (11.122—23), and hence the goodness of creation brings out in him the will to destroy (11.99—134). And finally the attraction he feels towards Eve's beauty becomes the seducer's wish to destroy her (11.479—93). In short, what comes out of Satan is the reverse of those exhalations tending up to God I dealt with in the last chapter. Indeed he is pictured as infecting the exhalations rising from the universal process: so he attempts to taint "Th' animal spirits that from pure blood arise/ Like gentle breaths from Rivers pure" (Bk. 4, 11.805—06) when he sits "Squat like a Toad, close at the ear of Eve" (11.800), inspiring her dream; so again he reenters Paradise through the channel of the river where it rises a fountain by the tree of life "involv'd in rising Mist" (Bk. 9, 1.75). But these are after all only images and we are concerned here with the inner motions of Satan. So it is more important to notice how Satan is incapable of making a return to God than to follow his entry into the picture: of the metabolic system returning to God. According to him, in heaven the goodness of creation"upbraided none" (Bk. 4, 1.45). Before he fell he did not think the Almighty had built for his envy. And so the return of praise did not stick in his throat (Bk. 4, 11.44—49). But once his will has been deflected from this return, the good elicits evil in him and he quits

The debt immense of endless gratitude,  
So burdensom, still paying, still to ow;  
Forgetful what from him I still receivd,  
And understood not that a grateful mind  
By owing owes not, but still pays, at once  
Indebted and discharg'd. (Bk. 4, 11.52—57)

And here the return of things to his creator does stick in his throat, and the infinite debt of gratitude becomes an infinite burden.29 What is

29 Cf. Empson, pp.63—64, on usurious debt.
remarkable is his apprehension of how the infinite debt may be repaid by
the return of a grateful mind. This is the law of creation while it is
still open to God and reflecting up to him the goodness it receives.
Satan's fall means his passing from what is surely a relation of love, of
poverty and plenty, to a state of mind in which the relation becomes a
usurious extortion.

Raphael's account of the fall of the rebel angels does not show the
switch from good to bad, from a mind enclosed in the process of goodness
to one that goodness provokes to evil. For we are not told exactly how
Satan was tempted nor what goes on in the minds of the other angels at the
council in Heaven. We gather that by the time Abdiel is dismissed the
fall is irrevocable, but it is fairly clear that before that point Satan
at least has entered into the negation of good. All we can say,
however, is that the transition has taken place. Once the initial error
is committed a whole train of error follows. The series of soliloquies
in which good brings forth evil in Satan are parts of a frequently remarked
degeneration of his nature. But even frightful things produce the same
result. When they see the Son mounted in the chariot of paternal deity
the rebels stand

obdur'd,
And to rebellious fight rallied thir Powers
Insensate, hope conceiving from despair.
In heav'nly Spirits could such perverseness dwell?
But to convince the proud what Signs availe,
Or Wonders move th' obdurat to relent?

(Bk. 6, 11.785—90)

Similarly when Satan puts his position clearly to himself on Niphates with
none of the grand confusion and noble self-deceit of his earlier rhetoric
to his troops, he is moved not to repentance but to his dire course. It
is only fair to say that his belief that repentance would be vain is true
since the Father has decreed that he will not pardon him (Bk. 3, 11.131—32).
On the other hand, Satan says the Father's pardon would be vain if offered, for he is incapable of true repentance (Bk. 4, 11.93—104). He is in consequence not merely bound to his course and incapable of turning back by his grim self-realization, but driven to further evil by it.

At first Satan's course looks morally more attractive. He stands in heaven as libertarian and in reply to Abdiel's orthodox argument about what is owed to the creator, as atheist in Heaven. And of course both the constitutional and atheist ideas Satan invokes belong to dignified traditions of human thought. Though he would have rejected his atheism, Milton as a republican could hardly have dismissed Satan's constitutional notions out of hand as politics, and in neither case could he have intended easy scorn for Satan's pretensions. On the contrary he gave the best arguments he could think of for a false position. And just as Adam and Eve later fall for sublime reasons so Satan attempts to justify himself with an appeal not to what is low in angelic nature but to what is high, their love of freedom, their consciousness of celestial virtue. Since there is no original corruption in the angels, what is good in them must be turned against their loyalty if they are to fall.

Of course the point is that the good has been displaced. Both the liberty and the celestial virtue are, according to Abdiel, properly attached to the obedience owed to God. Detached from that they become parts of an argument that Milton calls "counterfeted truth" (Bk. 5, 1.771).

Cf. Empson, p.74 ff.

Cf. Christian Doctrine, 1, 11, Complete Prose, 6, 391: "[Actual sin] is called 'actual' not because sin is really an action, on the contrary it is a deficiency, but because it usually exists in some action. For every action is intrinsically good; it is only its misdirection or deviation from the set course of law which can properly be called evil."
It seems to me therefore that we must take Satan's arguments as rationalizings of an original error: granted he has broken with God, how can the break be justified? We see almost as formidable intellectual powers misapplied by Adam and Eve at their fall. One of the difficulties Empson discovers in the orthodox view of *Paradise Lost* is that if Satan's arguments are absurd, we cannot be interested in him. Accordingly he supposes that Satan's arguments express a serious case. But it seems to me that Milton is interested rather in showing how great powers of mind may be employed in support of delusion and self-delusion than in presenting a reasonable case that is finally to be answered by an irrefutable demonstration of God's omnipotence. While God may be in a position to find such a process of error merely preposterous, humans for whom involvement in error and justification of error are a frequent and painful experience are in no position to jeer, not even at what in Satan's case is willful error. Satan's career is in fact a picture of a frightening possibility. His course is in some respects like Othello's. Once he entertains the false supposition, everything becomes evidence for the deceit. If Desdemona is clearly kind and loving, that is evidence of consummate hypocrisy. If God has made heaven mostly a matter of feasting and singing, that is evidence of his wish to keep the angels servile, "the Minstrelsie of Heav'n," "Ministring Spirits, traind up in Feast and Song" (Bk. 6, 11.167—68); and the whole story about creation through the Son becomes an imposture upon faith and loyalty.

Of course with Othello, we cannot doubt that he is deceived, whereas

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32 Empson, pp. 36—37.
with Satan we are always conscious of an element of fabrication, of a constant process of concealing from himself and his followers the original error. The *éclaircissement* on Niphates is only momentarily extorted by the shock of regaining the likeness of heaven, if earthly. And the recognition is unbearable and quickly concealed in the succeeding speeches. If there is something of Othello in his falling out of bliss, there is equally something of Iago in his manufacturing of arguments, even inconsistent arguments, to conceal from himself the nothingness on which he is centred. In tone of course Satan almost always sounds like Othello, for he appeals to a noble sense of himself and has none of Iago's low-mindedness. Still he shares with Iago the same ingenuity in inventing evidence for his point of view and concealing what one might call his original lie from himself. We can see this most clearly where Satanic grandeur begins to fall apart, and a noble and swelling emotion detaches itself from the meanness of the resolve.

League with you I seek,
And mutual amitié so streight, so close,
That I with you must dwell, or you with mee
Henceforth; my dwelling haply may not please
Like this fair Paradise, your sense, yet such
Accept your Makers work; he gave it me,
Which I as freely give; Hell shall unfould,
To entertain you two, her widest Gates,
And send forth all her Kings; there will be room,
Not like these narrow limits, to receive
Your numerous of spring; if no better place,
Thank him who puts me loath to this revenge
On you who wrong me not for him who wrongd.
(Bk. 4, 11.375—387)

There is evidently a disparity between the melancholy generosity involved with self-pity of Satan's tone and the grandeur he sees in the gesture of hell sending forth all her kings, on the one hand, and on the other, the grim actuality of seducing man to the hell he suffers. The self-deception
here is not simply that he invokes necessity, "the Tyrant's plea" (1.394), but that he presents a malignant and sordid action to his imagination and emotions in the rhetoric of self-enhancement.33

The passage is a rather tattered specimen. Satan's speeches in hell, though no less self-enhancing, compel admiration. In the circumstances the self-enhancement is a heroic act, and as yet its destructive course has not emerged clearly. The resolution in these speeches comes out also in a passage describing the march of the fallen angels; since it is the narrator's own comment, it cannot be dismissed as mere boasting or Satan's epic about himself.

Anon they move
In perfect Phalanx to the Dorian mood
Of Flutes and soft Recorders; such as rais'd
To hight of noblest temper Hero's old
Arming to Battel, and in stead of rage
Deliberat valour breath'd, firm and unmov'd
With dread of death to flight or foul retreat;
Nor wanting power to mitigate and swage
With solemn touches, troubl'd thoughts, and chase
Anguish and doubt and fear and sorrow and pain
From mortal or immortal minds. (Bk. 1, 11.549—59)

The passage moves admiration. It is perhaps fanciful to suggest that the polysyndeton in line 558 turns anguish, doubt, fear, sorrow and pain to music and converts them to values in the mind that overcomes them, but at least it will be granted that such a deliberate valour, though no doubt self-enhancing and enlisted in a bad cause, is admirable. And the same goes for Satan's speeches, his contempt for mere force, his lodging of resistance in the unconquerable will. There the rhetoric of self-enhancement

has a moral force or celestial virtue that only a poor reading would fail to respond to. Nevertheless the world in which this triumph is realized is the self bound to destruction. This is not surprising since if omnipotence rules creation, only uncreation and a mind not to be changed by place or time are left for resistance to occupy. The universe will press in on the self, which is forced to open up a space for itself by continuing negation. It is perhaps pressing the text too far to suppose that Satan's claim,

We know no time when we were not as now;
Know none before us, self-begot, self-rais'd
By our own quick'ining power, (Bk. 5, 11.859—61)

is really a grounding of the diabolic self on an original state of non-being, but it is certainly a connecting of the assertion of the self with the denial of things as they are. Such a self is in infinite regress of negation. Hence the grand assertion that "The mind is its own place, and in it self/Can make a H'v'n of Hell, a H'v'n of H'v'n" (Bk. 1, 11.254—55) turns out to be an all too accurate account of the Satanic state of displacement from things, the process of falling from the lowest deep into a lower deep, a journey into the self that discovers that "my self am Hell" (Bk. 4, 1.75).35

One should not of course exaggerate the subjectivity of Satan's course. His fall involves "Millions of Spirits for his fault amerc't / Of H'v'n,


35 Logically if the displacement is to be complete, Satan should be able to make a heaven of hell. This, however, Milton does not show, except for the counterfeit splendours of Pandemonium. Cf. Stein, pp.36 ff.; Isabel Gamble MacCaffery, "Paradise Lost" as Myth (Cam., Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), pp. 70 f.
and from Eternal Splendors flung" (Bk. 1, 11.609—10), and he delivers political speeches as well as soliloquies. Yet even where he addresses his legions, the assertion of the self is essentially a movement into privation. His speech from the throne opening the council in Pandemonium amounts to an assertion that he is the "ugly centre of infernal spirits." His argument is that in hell misery is in proportion to eminence and hence the degrees in hell surmounted by his throne are secured on firm consent, for who would want to rise to greater pain? (Bk. 2, 11.21—30). It is possible that we are meant to be impressed by the grand excess of this rhetorical gesture. But at the same time the content of the speech places Satan at the centre of a system opposite to God, round whom unvitiated creation revolves "Orb within Orb" (Bk. 5, 1.596). He has become a sort of anti-centre. Later Adam will explicitly speak of himself as a centre of death. It seems to me therefore that however sublimely meant, Satan's political speech sets up an inverted hierarchy, like the circles of Dante's hell, with himself at the centre of negation.

There is another respect in which Satan's political career reflects on himself. We are told that

His: count'nance, as the Morning Starr that guides
The starrie flock, allur'd them, and with lyes
Drew after him the third part of Heav'ns Host.

(Bk. 5, 11.708—10)

There is something strangely compelling in Satan's glory, and his legions respond with a peculiarly absolute obedience. Even if in real terms he has only affected "all equality with God" (Bk. 5, 1.763), he has in the minds

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of his legions succeeded in establishing a God-like position. And like God he sees his glory reflected in those who are obedient to him:

All these and more came flocking; but with looks Down cast and damp, yet such wherein appeard Obscuresom glimps of joy, to have found thir chief Not in despair, to have found themselves not lost In loss it self; which on his count'nance cast Like doubtful hue. (Bk. 1, 11.522—27)

The passage turns on the ambiguity of "looks" and "glimps", for both mean the appearance of the face and the act of looking. What is seen by a look is reflected in a look. So the Son looks on the Father and perfectly reflects him. And so here the looks of the angelic troops reflect Satan's and brighten obscurely with the glance. They find themselves in Satan. Later looking on his troops, "Thir visages and stature as of Gods" (1.570), he experiences an access of pride viewing the image of his power. The dubious half-light of the looks is magnificently taken up in the image comparing Satan's looks to the sun appearing through the mist or in eclipse (11.591—99). We are not meant, I think, to see this reflection of himself in others' looks as merely egotism, for the sight of the "fellows of his crime" moves him to "Tears such as Angels weep" (11.606, 620). Besides, the viewing of one's image in others is a recurrent motif in Paradise Lost. Indeed it is one of the most important ways in which the epic shows relations between persons. There is of course a certain vain attempt at self-authentication in Satan's viewing himself in his troops and magnifying himself in his speeches.37 No doubt Satanic rhetoric, like the summons to his prostrate legions, which was "so loud, that all the hollow deeps / Of Hell resounded" (Bk. 1, 11.314—15), comes

37 Cf. Stein, pp.47 ff.
back to him charged with infernal echoes and despair, but the trouble lies in his condition, in the fact that his self is bound, rather than in any heinousness in viewing himself in others or even in hearing himself in their response. It is because it is taken over by the process of error rather than because of any inherent evil that the reflexiveness of self and others becomes self-enthralled. The process certainly takes a sinister turn. We are not allowed to forget that when his troops find themselves "not lost / In loss itself", they find their selves in Satan, whose self has, so to speak, become the principle of loss. And Satan later acquiesces in Sin's account of the love affair in heaven: "Thy self in me thy perfect image viewing / Becam'st enamourd" (Bk. 2, 11.764-65). This is not merely a parody of the blissful relation in the Trinity, it is an allegory of Satan's self bound towards its unmaking. And I think the same motif is discernible in his encounter with Death. He runs towards Death and Death meets him as fast (Bk. 2, 674-75). Satan meets him with scorn and anger; Death answers him in kind. Death grows in fury as Satan confronts him with equal terrors. In short Death, the meagre shadow, confronts Satan as an unrecognizably deformed image of himself. And if this is allowed, then Death is an abstract of all those deformations of the self Satan will undergo in his course of destruction.

In the last chapter I tried to show how *Paradise Lost* imaged the universe as a monistic system derived from God's will and how in it evil could only arise in the shapes of negation. Satan's course works out the process of negation. He is an image of the bound will, the self involved in negation. But he is more than an image of a moral idea. His course of action is worked out as a chain of volition, and that goes beyond the scope of ideal imitation. It seems to me to approach the Aristotelian notion of an imitation of an action, though the analysis of the motions
of the will goes beyond most attempts to show what is probable or universal in human behaviour. Satan then is an imitation, with some mythical exaggeration, of the bound self, which is also imitated in the guilt of Adam and Eve.

It may be argued that a course of action such as Satan's while probable in the monistic universe Milton conceives, is improbable in the moral world we know. This is a problem that arises again with Adam and Eve and must be thought about carefully. It seems to me in the first place that Satan's negative regress has only to be seen to be recognized. No doubt some of his diabolical malignity is in rather grander style than is ordinary. But by whatever name we call it, error, guilt, despair, the course of theological sin or of the bound will in Satan corresponds to a familiar enough moral experience. And Milton does not imagine its course as magical. For while the final transformation into snakes in Book 10 may be a divine act, the other steps in Satan's career are conceived of as deliberate acts on his part. And though the divine pronouncements on Satan's case seem morally obtuse and move indignation against God rather than Satan, Milton's account of the Satanic bound will is morally perceptive. Still it may be asked how any error in the world of experience can be the origin of so total a lapse out of things. The answer that a fall into unreality need not hold any proportion with an original error is not good enough. That would mean that Satan's continuous fall was merely subjective and neurotic or mad, and we could not finally be seriously interested in such a course.

What is sought then is cases in the mixed experience of human life involving issues nearly as absolute as Satan's rejection of God. With most cases of choice we cannot arrive at such an absolute distinction of
good and bad. Usually both sides admit of argument and even a mistake is not unqualifiedly so. And it might be thought in consequence that only a relation with an omnipotent God could involve such a fatal issue and that such a case is too elevated or too absolute to reflect upon experience of the human world, for in the mixed experience of good and evil we have only reason and the weighing up of one argument against another, partial good and partial bad. But while this may be generally so, it is not always so. With matters of fact we can arrive at certainty and recognize a chain of error there. We find out that all the evidence that appeared convincing was in fact only the rationalizing of an original false supposition. Yet clearly the errors Satan and Adam and Eve are involved in are more than errors of fact but errors that involve their total moral beings. And it might be held that at least with moral right and wrong we cannot look for more than moral certainty and limited moral liability, a balance in favour of one view rather than the other. Yet here again it seems to me issues may be absolute in the same way that they are in *Paradise Lost*. A consideration of *Macbeth* and *Othello* should help to establish the point.

As with *Paradise Lost* the action in each play turns on a fatal choice. The choice, that is, implicates the entire moral integrity of Macbeth or Othello. And in each case the original wrong choice involves the hero in a chain of crimes and follies. On the other hand, it might be argued that Shakespeare convinces us of the sacredness of the bonds that Macbeth and

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Othello violate, whereas the bond of obedience in *Paradise Lost*, though to God, appears merely authoritarian. Allowing for a certain overwrought exaggeration we can believe that when Othello describes his love for Desdemona as the place "Where either I must live or bear no life" this is the truth about the bond he has broken in swerving to trust Iago's story.\(^{39}\)

We may agree that a more considered deliberation about Iago's arguments would have arrived at a more sensible view of the state of affairs, but essentially Othello should have known that the sort of questions that Iago put in his mind should never have been entertained and that to entertain them was in itself a breach of trust or love. But we can take this line because we have the evidence of Desdemona's speech to the senate, whereas the speeches of the Father in heaven arouse resistance.\(^{40}\) It is hard to feel that his is a voice to which anyone could respond with the Son, "by thee I live." (Bk. 3, 1.244). It is hard to feel that the obedience such a voice demands is the law of being in as intimate and vital a sense as Othello's love for Desdemona or even Macbeth's honouring of Duncan, though the theology of the poem insists that it must be so. With Adam and Eve the obedience is perhaps less arbitrary, for the intricate picture of creation is evidence of the goodness of God's laws. But in heaven we have to suppose that the Father's decree is part of the right ordering of things. Abdiel declares that


\(^{40}\) Act 1, sc. 2, 11.180—89, 241—59.
by experience taught we know how good,
And of our good, and of our dignitie
How provident he is, how farr from thought
To make us less,

(Bk. 5, 11.826—29)

but the experience is not shared with the reader. It is hard, consequently, to affirm that the Father should be owed the same implicit loyalty by what is best in the angels as seems properly owed to Desdemona or Duncan. Raphael's account of Satan's original lapse, in spite of its language of union and the feasting and dancing in heaven fails to engage our deepest intuitions of good and evil. We can say that given Satan has violated the law by which he lives, his ensuing career is a serious study of the will bound to the evil infinitude of error. The given has, however, to be taken on trust from the declarations of speakers like Abdiel or inferred from the rest of the poem.

4. Adam and Eve

a. First Peripety: the Fall.

Something of the same problem arises with the fall of Adam and Eve. But before coming to grips with it there we should examine the fall as an action, or rather as the first peripety of the poem's human action. The fall is peculiar in that it is not merely a fall from innocence but
the fall of beings created perfect.\textsuperscript{41} That means that we cannot account for the fall in terms of a pre-existing flaw or bias of character. The Father asserts of man that he "made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (Bk. 3, 11.98—99). The fall is a free choice. It is not the outcome of psychological make up, the working out of a fatal flaw in the characters' natures. It is a fatal error that flaws the natures. This accords with the theology. Of course an imposing body of criticism holds that theological coherence and the working out of the human action confuse each other or at least diverge.

It seems to me, however, that the fall of perfect beings is worked out coherently in moral terms and this constitutes a more serious action and a more interesting study of volition that the conventional working out of a temperamental flaw.

In Paradise, evil becomes a possibility through the prohibition, but as I argued in the last chapter, the possibility of evil locked up in the prohibition is part of the goodness of creation. The prohibition is the final act of creation because it makes man capable of an absolute moral choice and so endows him with rational freedom. Instead of a flaw in his nature, then, man has a free will.

Because evil is a possibility, Paradise has a certain ambiguity. Christopher Ricks points out how the use of "error" in the description of the waters of Eden that flow "with mazie error under pendant shades" (Bk. 4, 1.239) or "With Serpent error wandring" (Bk. 7, 1.302) is ominous of the temptation. Again the use of "wanton" in the description of the Garden's abundance ("for Nature here/Wantond as in her prime" [Bk. 5, 11.294-95]; "wanton growth" [Bk. 9, 1.211]) and in the descriptions of Eve's beauty ("Her unadorned gold'n tresses wore / Dissheveld, but in wanton ringlets wav'd" [Bk. 4, 11.305-06]) innocently points forward to the wantonness succeeding the fall. Similarly the tree and fruit that illustrate man's capacity for ascent in Raphael's talk remind us of the forbidden tree and fruit through which Eve hopes to ascend beyond the human condition. Such ambiguities do not mean that Paradise is an ambush or that evil is latent in it. The ambiguities are ways of making the total issues of the poem present at each point and giving us a God's eye view of the action. They may also show innocence by constantly making us aware of the difference between the original goodness of things and our fallen ways of looking at them. But at the same time they make the point that evil will not be the intrusion of some new reality but

the undoing of Edenic reality. Moreover, innocence is an ambiguous state because it is fallible, ambiguous not in the sense in which after the fall one knows good and evil and good-and-evil, but in the sense that evil is a concealed possibility, a possibility necessary to the rational goodness of man and so an invisible shadow of goodness.

There are, however, two serious grounds for arguing that the state of innocence is flawed before the fall; Eve's dream and the argument about working alone in Book 9. I shall not take up another supposed flaw in man's unfallen state, Adam's love of Eve. Raphael's rebuke,

Accuse not Nature, shee hath don her part;
Do thou but thine, and be not diffident
Of Wisdom, she deserts thee not, if thou
Dismiss not her, (Bk. 8, 11.561—64)

and Adam's reply, that he is still free and approves "the best, and follow what I approve" (1.611) make it clear that though Adam may be fallible, he need not fall. Moreover Adam's defence of his love makes it clear that it is good in itself (11.596—606). That Adam later falls through love does not alter his state before the fall.

Eve's dream is a good example of how evil, if it should enter the mind of unfallen man, will appear as a disordering of the proper order of things rather than anything intrinsically base. Although the dream is inspired by Satan, Adam's account of the "mimic Falsie" "misjoining shapes" (Bk. 5, 11.110, 111) is accurate enough about the disordering form evil takes, if not a full answer to his question, "Yet evil whence? in thee can harbour none/Created pure" (Bk. 5, 11.99—100). The dream is a rearrangement of

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43 For physical theory of dreams, see William B. Hunter, Jr., "Eve's Demonic Dream," ELH (1946), 255—56.
her life in Paradise. So sauntering out by night takes up her innocent question to Adam about why they should spend the night in bed. The nightingale that is singing as she walks back to the bower with Adam is still singing in her dream. Oddly, it has become masculine (Bk. 5, 1.41). It is as if in this dream derangement the nightingale which sings the marriage song of Adam and Eve has become the amorist of Milton's hymn to married love (Bk. 4, 11.769—70) and curiously reduplicates Satan's role as serenader and seducer. Finally, the tree, which Adam and Eve discussed over supper, crops up, and the prohibition they had talked of honouring in real life is violated in the dream. The point learnt from the dream is that

Evil into the mind of God or Man
May come and go, so unapprov'd, and leave
No spot or blame behind. (Bk. 5, 11.117—19)

So in the prayer that follows Adam and Eve ask that any evil should be dispersed (1.208), and there is no reason to think that the metabolism of unfallen nature is not capable of dispersing such a distempered exhalation as Eve's dream. It is "like a tangled chain / Nothing impaired, but all disordered," a piece of nonsense, which disappears when things are straightened out. 44 And that Adam and Eve are able to do for themselves. The notion that eight days afterwards it is still working in Eve's thoughts seems to me groundless. Yet even if it were, I cannot see that it could have much influence on Eve's action. Certainly it does not allow one to say that it was a sufficient cause or that it means that Eve

44 Midsummer Night's Dream, ed. A. Quiller Couch (Cam.: Cam. Univ. Press, 1924), Act. 5, sc. 1, 1.25.
is incubating evil before she is technically fallen. These seem to me
totally unrealistic rationalizings back from the event.

When Eve after the fall uses a similar argument blaming Adam for
letting her go, Adam is justifiably indignant. And indeed it seems to
me that the argument that the disagreement and parting of Adam and Eve
shows sin already at work in Eden is equally groundless. Milton at any
rate insists on Eve's innocence even after the serpent's words have led
her to the tree (Bk. 9, 1.659). And if we look carefully at the dis-
cussion between Adam and Eve, it should be clear that the theory of a pre-
lapsarian emergence of sin is untenable there as well. As Adam points
out, perhaps patronizingly, Eve's suggestion that they would accomplish
more alone is a good one,

for nothing lovelier can be found.
In Woman, then to studie household good,
And good work in her Husband to promote.
(Bk. 9, ll.232—34)

And even if he has a truer vision of what is fitting, that in Paradise work
and conversation go together, "For not to irksom toile, but to delight /
He made us, and delight to Reason joind" (ll.242-43), it is absurd to think
Eve's suggestion a bad notion. It is Adam's further argument for sticking
together to counter his own sensible and considerate remark that "solitude
sometimes is best societie" (1.249) that gives Eve further grounds for
parting. Adam's argument is that they have an enemy and that Eve will be
safer with her husband "Who guards her, or with her the worst endures"
(1.269). Eve's wonderfully nettled reply is again a good argument
prompted by a proper consciousness of her unfallen dignity. She points
out that as they are immortal, Adam cannot fear violence done to her; he
must, therefore, fear fraud and that implies he distrusts her firmness of
mind. This is such a good argument that it forces Adam to some hasty
explanation. He did not mean, he says, that he distrusts her; he meant only to protect her from the insult of attempted seduction. But then he adds that he himself would be morally braced to have her by and she would be likewise morally strengthened. To this Eve's reply is again very much to the point. She argues cogently that "harm precedes not sin" (1.327); there is no dishonour in being tempted; if the evil is unapproved, the mind wins honour and the dishonour belongs only to the tempter. She adds a sublime consideration: she cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, adding that to think otherwise is to suspect they have not been made sufficient to withstand the evil that menaces them. Eve's argument provokes Adam to reply "fervently", "O Woman ...." He is nettled in his turn presumably because Eve has suggested that he has been implying a fault in their creation. Otherwise it is hard to see why he should insist so vigorously that God's

creating hand
Nothing imperfect, or deficient left
Of all that he Created, much less Man.
(11.344–46)

For Eve has not said that Eden is imperfect, only that his argument seemed to suppose so. At any rate impatience makes him clarify his position on their fallibility. It is no distrust of her nature or character that makes him fear for her. It is simply that the will is free and reason may be deceived by "some faire appeering good" and "misinform the Will" (11.354–55). And he sensibly replies to Eve's argument about uncloistered virtue that it is foolish to look for temptation since "Trial will come unsought" (1.366). The argument might have closed there. But Adam continues, saying that the first trial of her virtue is obedience to him. But of that obedience he does not make an issue. On the contrary, he leaves it open for her to go if she thinks she will be more prepared to meet temptation alone now that she has been put on her guard than she
would be in the security of each other's company. He adds another reason for not ordering her to stay with him: "thy stay, not free, absents thee more." (1.372). One might think that this was not to the point since the issue is no longer companionship but the danger of temptation. And perhaps a certain pique, perhaps a covert appeal to Eve to declare a free wish for his company creeps in here. But the truth is that Adam's logic and Eve's have brought the argument to the point where the reasons for staying together as far as temptation is concerned are more or less balanced by those for parting, and it is quite reasonable to return to the matter of companionship and find it also lacking in compelling grounds for staying together. In the event Eve picks up the moral issue rather than the one of companionship saying that her chief reason for going is Adam's "last reasoning words" (1.379) to the effect that warned as they are they might be more prepared to meet the enemy alone. I can see no reason for disbelieving her or thinking her behaviour particularly perverse. They have argued out the matter between them. Eve thinks the reasons for parting outweigh the ones for staying and Adam can find no reason for enjoining her stay. So that while Eve could hardly say here "What thou bidst / Unargu'd I obey" (Bk. 4, 11.635—636), Milton nevertheless remarks that her last words were "yet submiss" (Bk. 9, 1.377).

I have thought it worthwhile to summarize this argument at length first to make it clear that Eve's arguments are not sinful. On the contrary they are intelligent and show a good grasp of what standing in Paradise means. She shows herself well equipped to face temptations of reason, and the nature of her fallibility has been made clear to her. A second reason for summarizing the argument was to show that it is not weak or irresponsible of Adam to let her go. He realizes rightly that nothing
he has said would justify an order to stay with him. The only positive argument is that it is foolish to seek temptation alone. But this is justly balanced by the supposition that they might be more alert alone and that in any case they have been made sufficient to stand. To argue then that the fall begins with a failure in Adam to exercise a husbandly authority points to a Turkish contempt of females much in excess of Milton's. It is true that in Book 10 when Adam and Eve are coming to a realization of where the blame lies Adam says that

If Prayers
Could alter high Decrees, I to that place
Would speed before thee, and be louder heard,
That on my head all might be visited,
Thy frailty and infirm Sex forgiv'n,
To mee committed and by mee expos'd. (11.952—57)

But here Adam is trying to answer Eve's mea culpa with a gesture as gallant. In saying he exposed her he is not saying that he is to blame for her fall, though. By that logic God would be to blame for exposing "innocent frail Man" (Bk. 4, l.11) to Satan. Adam is rather saying that he would offer himself sacrificially and protectively. The reasons he gives are, in keeping with the gesture, quixotic, and he knows the gesture would not be taken seriously by heaven.

There are of course touches of domestic comedy in the "sweet austere composure" (Bk. 9, l.272) of Eve and in the haste of Adam's "healing words" (l.290). There is a touch of waywardness in Eve's quick-wittedness. And of course in view of the fall the whole scene is shot through with grim ironies. But none of this alters the fact that the arguments advanced on both sides are serious, that the discussion clarifies the nature of work, companionship, and moral trial in Eden, and that Eve's decision to go off alone is a rational one. It cannot even be said that Adam and Eve have quarrelled. They part with repeated assurances of quick return. And
later Eve is described among the roses stooping at her work, "mindless the while" (1.431). Whatever the overtones of "mindless," the basic sense of complete absorption in her task makes it clear that her mind is not filled with the sort of things that would have succeeded a quarrel. Moreover, after the fall, Eve tells Adam that he went so far as to "permit, approve, and fair dismiss" her (1.1159). It is unfair of Eve to bring this as an accusation against Adam. Indeed both of them avoid looking at the actual offence, the eating of the apple, preferring to look instead at the blameless parting. But Adam does not deny that Eve's account of the tone of their parting is true. I conclude then that the wrong sort of significance has been read into the scene of parting. Though it makes the fall possible, there are no grounds for thinking the fall already in process. Nothing has been committed that cannot be made up. No side of the natures of Adam and Eve has come out that cannot be accommodated in the liberal dispensation of innocence in Paradise. To think otherwise is first not to pay attention to the sinewy process of discursive reason that Milton took delight in showing. And second it is to think Paradise an insufferably narrow and boring existence in which there can be no serious rational discrimination. Indeed it seems to me that Milton's chief reason for working out the scene of parting at such length is to show not only that both Eve and Adam are fully aware that they have the freedom that makes rational discrimination possible but that they can exercise their

45 Of the many treatments of the separation, I know none that asserts the innocence of Adam and Eve as categorically as I do. Burden, 88—92, Safer, Revard, and Anthony Low, "The Parting in the Garden in Paradise Lost," PQ, 47 (1968), 30—35, assert Eve's responsibility and so exonerate Adam. Fish, who generally insists on prelapsarian innocence does not excuse the separation.
freedom to make rational discriminations.

The moral discriminations and choices Adam and Eve make before they have fallen do not mean that they know good and evil in duality. They know what is good because they are constant to the prohibition, the pledge of their goodness, which ties up the issues of good and evil in an unproblematic way. In obedience, they live from the prohibition as from a centre, and however irregular or eccentric their movements, their revolutions round that central possibility of evil resolve it in goodness.

Only in so far as evil is a mere possibility is it part of the system of goodness. It makes the wills of Adam and Eve free and their gardening in Eden an act of gratitude and love only in so far as it is unrealized and their freedom is constancy. From the standpoint of innocence, the possibility of evil is really an impossibility, an inconceivable choice or actuality. So it appears to Adam when Eve returns to him: the inconceivable has actually happened. Against all the innocent strayings and returns in Paradise that seem to make the fall accountable and against the plausible reasoning of the temptation we have to set the radical discontinuity of the choice of evil.

Given then this original state of innocence, how can the fall come about? The initial form of the temptation is an impossibility: "What may this mean? Language of Man pronounc'd / By tongue of Brute, and human sense exprest?" (Bk. 9, 11.553—54). The articulate serpent is a "wonder" (1.566), a "miracle" (1.562), which leaves Eve "not unamaz'd" (1.552), phrase suggestive of entry into the "surging Maze" (1.499) of Satan's

46 On unfallen knowledge of good and evil, see Blackburn, pp.122 ff.
For from a reason founded and nourished on the natural order of creation, only a miraculous suspension of natural order could secure belief in a lie against God. The natural wonders of creation lead up to the praise of God, but the serpent as wonder leads to a wonder whether in fact all things are derived from God. By the insertion of something impossible the serpent is able to establish not only his own credibility but to make the whole frame of natural possibility seem an imposture. The effect of the impossibility is to open a chasm in reality and turn things upside down. So the other impossibilities of the temptation are made possible by the first: God in forbidding the fruit "Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise" (1.759), and his threat of death is false. The prohibition that was a pledge of unity between man and God becomes a means of separating man from godhead. And supporting the topsy-turvy logic there is the fake evidence of the serpent who has not died, but died only to his bestiality to put on "internal Man" (1.711).

Such then is the temptation of Eve's "right reason, whose function it was to discern the chief good", a lie, which, entertained, turns all known probabilities upside down. It also turns her virtues upside down. For she does not fall moved by some inherent baseness of nature. On the contrary, she is moved by what is best in her. Her rational desire for knowledge, even the desire to ascend towards God, which Raphael encourages in man, her highest promptings, are turned against her. Her faculty of


48 Christian Doctrine, 1, 12, Complete Prose, 6, 395.
rational choice also seems turned against her, for she is faced with a dilemma, either to obey the prohibition yet assume God is bad, or to disobey on the assumption that if on the one hand God is good, he will be testing her, if on the other hand, he is not good, good is to be obeyed not God. She falls for sublime reasons because being good she can only be got at through her goodness. Even her appetite is naturally good.

The essence then of Eve's temptation is that it is a lie that entails an inversion of things as they are known in Paradise. That the inversion is so complete is paradoxically one of the strongest reasons for the temptation taking hold, for only a total overturning could have overcome the reasons Eve has for not eating the apple. Yet to say this is not to exculpate her. Clearly she should have known better. Her claim that she does not know better is self-deception (11.773—75). Her choice is unaccountable and wrong. It is similar to Othello's unaccountable swerving to Iago's truth. The dilemma he seems faced with, patience or revenge, like Eve's dilemma, arises from an illusion, which in turn arises from an unaccountable first swerving of judgement from its sound principle. And however good the reasons Milton gives Eve for falling, her preference of them remains inexplicable. We ought to accept this inexplicability, the hiatus in things where nonsense enters, for we can never rationally explain nonsense or a wrong choice by sense or the right choice. To the latter the former can only appear irrational.

50 Cf. Blackburn, p.132.
If this account of the instantaneous fall through a culpable deflection of the will and judgment towards unreality is accepted, we must ask what becomes of those other accounts of the fall, that it was owing to Eve's intemperance or curiosity. For intemperance or "inabstinence" we have Michael's authority (Bk. 11:112515—19) and for curiosity we have the evidence that Eve's rational aspirations are for forbidden knowledge. If these are to be understood as mechanical forces in Eve's nature, then we may dismiss them. They seem to me rather names for forms that the displacement or inversion of good in her takes, the shapes of the cracks made by the deflection of the will from its mark. The desire for knowledge is good in itself. It is only because the desire has become attached to a nonsense object that it becomes a form of intemperate hunger for sapience and a curiosity about a knowledge that does not concern her human being. There is one final motive that might be thought to have a bearing on her fall and that is vanity or egotism. And certainly the serpent's proem that found entrance into the heart of Eve speaks of her as the focus of the beauty of creation. He adds later that the speculative knowledge he has attained returns upon her as cynosure of the universe. But Eve's reply to this is marvellously tart: "Serpent, thy overpraising leaves in doubt / The vertue of that Fruit, in thee first prov'd" (11.615—16). In her soliloquy before she takes the fruit, there is admittedly an aspiration to a higher state than human. But while this is an error, it shows no trace of egotistical self-seeking. On the contrary her talk is almost all of "us", and only after she has eaten do

51 Cf. Fiore, p. 51.
calculations about her own advantage enter with the consciousness of the guilty self.

With Adam the pattern is much the same. He also is faced with an impossibility, not a lie, but the unaccountable fact that the "fairest of Creation, last and best / Of all Gods Works" (ll.896—97) has fallen: "How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost,/ Defac't, deflourd, and now to Death devote?" (ll.900—01). For him too, a chasm opens up in reality. He too is faced with a dilemma, either to obey the prohibition and desert Eve, or share Eve's fall and break his tie with God. He too is tempted through what is good in him, his love for Eve. The dilemma that faces Adam is, however, false, like the one that faced Eve. The "compleating of the mortál Sin / Original" (ll.1003—04) is his eating the forbidden fruit. So until Adam has eaten, man has not fallen and God could not justly execute a death sentence. And if he had left the fruit unate, God would have been put in a dilemma, in justice at once unable to punish and not to punish. Perhaps God cannot be put in a dilemma. But in any event, to fall with Eve makes no sense as a way of meeting the situation or of helping her. To Adam the situation "seem'd remediless" (l.919) and he believes that God and fate are alike bound by what has happened. At the same time he hopes in falling with Eve to put God in a different dilemma from the one I have suggested. On the one hand God will be bound by his threat, but on the other if God should uncreate his creation the devil would

Triumph and say; Fickle their State whom God
Most Favors; who can please him long? Mee first
He ruind, now Mankind; whom will he next?
(ll.948—50)

It is curious that Adam did not see that he was in a much better position to deal with God, unfallen, especially if he thinks of God as a stickler
for his rights. In Book 10, he boasts that he would be the first to importune God with prayers that all the punishment might light on his head. But the notion of making in the manner of the Son an innocent sacrifice of himself does not occur to him when it would have been appropriate. It is also surprising that he suddenly falls to distrust God. He has had the evidence of God's willingness to accept his independent and intelligent judgement that he needs a companion. And when after the fall Adam and Eve do repent, Adam is given a vision of what is supposed to vindicate not only God's mercy but also his power to overcome evil with good. But on the point of falling, he assumes that he is faced with an inescapable choice between his human duty to Eve and his religious duty to God. This assumption is groundless.

The sense then in which Adam has been "fondly overcome with Female charm" (1.999) is this: he has let Eve sway his judgement against God. As with Eve's error, the swerving is unaccountable but once committed, from the perspective of that lapse out of reality, the issue presents itself askew. Adam is not deceived into thinking he is doing right, but his failure of nerve, or trust, or independent judgement makes him take the point of view of Eve's bound or guilty self. He sees God threatening and Paradise a forlorn wilderness and can think of no way out but to die with her.

Adam's speech expressing this resolve is moving. It is also short. There is none of the vacillation between passion and reason that one might

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52 Cf. Fish, pp.269-70, who draws the parallel between Adam's situation and the Son's.

53 To say that Adam could have acted otherwise is not to say Milton could have shown him act otherwise. The fall of Adam was given. Milton has shown it as a free fall, and so placed Adam in a situation where other courses were open to him. Cf. C. S. Lewis, A Preface to "Paradise Lost" (London: Oxf. Univ. Press, 1949), p.127.
except of a hero of Restoration tragedy. The mind, though falling, is still certain of its choice. Adam's certainty is one of the finest things about his speech and shows as clearly as the love he expresses the nobility of unvitiated creation, even though the nobility is out of place. The following speech once he has sided with Eve is less admirable. It sounds as if he is trying to justify a choice he knows to be wrong. He insists that the situation is irremediable, entertains Eve's story about ascending to divinity, and takes a Satanic view of the motives that inspire God. Even his renewed declaration of love (11.952-59) has perhaps an air of excusing himself by insisting on the bond of nature. To say "to loose thee were to loose my self" (1.959) is fine enough. And yet selflessness and an objective care for the situation and for Eve would be a truer expression of love for his "other self" (Bk. 8, 1.450). At this point it seems to me a certain falsity has crept into his love, and this is echoed and magnified in Eve's speech immediately following applauding his heroic love.55

I shall take up the general corruption of man succeeding the fall in connection with the second peripety. At this point I want to reflect upon the fall of Adam and Eve as the imitation of a human action. Milton is treating the theological notion of the fall of the will from a state of freedom to a state of guilt and boundness. As for Luther in the Freedom of a Christian, so for Milton Eden is the state of the free will and the

54 For another account of Adam's haste, see Burden, pp.159-61.

fall is therefore an instantaneous lapse. Milton's representation of Adam and Eve is, however, not merely an imitation of a theological concept but an imitation of a human action that shows the process of volition. And what he shows seems to me a universal not merely Edenic experience. The best literary analogy for what happens is Othello's swerving to Iago's truth. Unfortunately for this analogy, it is widely held that Iago merely elicits what is already implicit in Othello, that Othello is more or less fallen before his fall, and so the analogy may fail to establish my meaning for some. I can only appeal then to the general experience of error. Anyone who does not believe that to commit an error is an original and free act of will or judgement will find himself following the preposterous logic of Larkin's "As Bad as a Mile":

Watching the shied core
Striking the basket, skidding across the floor,
Shows less and less of luck, and more and more

Of failure spreading back up the arm
Earlier and earlier, the upraised hand calm,
The apple unbitten in the palm.

It seems to me that the theological and Miltonic account is not only true to experience but intellectually preferable to the endless recession of error before the event.

But to say that Paradise Lost is an imitation of a fall into error is not merely to say that it is a passage of the will from freedom into a process of error. It is also to talk of a choice of objects, an ethical decision, and as with Satan the choice with Adam and Eve is an absolute one.

56 See Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings, ed. John Dillenberger (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1961), p.69.
involving the integrity of their being. The law they choose to break is peculiar because it enjoins unconditional obedience. "It was necessary that one thing at least should be either forbidden, or commanded, and above all something which was in itself neither good nor evil, so that man's obedience might in this way be made evident." 58

God so commanded, and left that Command Sole Daughter of his voice; the rest, we live Law to our selves, our Reason is our Law. (Bk. 9, 11.652-54)

This means that the prohibition is a symbol arbitrarily imposed and no reasons can be given for it. Consequently the prohibition differs in another respect from ordinary ethical imperatives, for being unconditional it determines right and wrong. In the mixed condition of human life, to decide between right and wrong requires a careful critical balancing of mixed good and evil. But the prohibition of the tree cannot be balanced against Eve's reasons for eating the fruit. Right and wrong are given in the prohibition,

of the Fruit of this fair Tree amidst The Garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eate Thereof, nor shall ye touch it, lest ye die. (11.661-63)

Satan's and Eve's reasons confuse the issue instead of approaching to a clear judgement of it through the weighing of good against good. In the final analysis we shall have to allow that the divine prohibition cannot be reduced to an ordinary ethical imperative. And still we should not exaggerate the peculiarities. Even though the prohibition is a divine

58 Christian Doctrine, I, 10 Complete Prose, 6, 351-52. See Grün, p.46, where he asserts God's command may not be discussed, and Gardner, p.93.
symbol or pledge, it abstracts many aspects of moral duty or presents them with paradigmatic simplicity. It intimately sets the terms of humanity. It must be honoured freely and indeed with it the possibility of moral freedom enters the universe. It is the law whereby Adam and Eve live as humans. So Satan's temptation of Eve is to put off her humanity and become a god and Adam, once he has heard Eve's story, puts the same temptation to himself (Bk. 9, 11.932—37).\textsuperscript{59} Though the content of the prohibition is peculiar — really it has no content but is all function — it demands much the same attention of mind and will that a moral duty does.

And if there are no reasons for it, apart from the general one that a pledge of obedience was necessary, in Paradise at any rate there are good reasons for honouring it. It is the bond of Adam and Eve with God and honouring it is part of that return of their being to him that is shown to be life. How such a symbolic duty would have stood up against the demands of another duty with moral reasons behind it need not trouble us, for that eventuality does not truly arise. It only seems to. Both Eve's reasons and Adam's are, as I have argued, confused. Their moral deliberations accompanying their falls are errors of that reason which is also choice.

And the error involves a violation of the pledge implicit in the prohibition, a swerving aside from "fealtie" (Bk. 3, 1.204) or trust where it is due. In short the fall involves both a wrong choice and a concommitant crookedness of mind and will originating in error, which corrupts the integrity of Adam and Eve.

It seems to me then that the instantaneous fall in \textit{Paradise Lost} works as an imitation of a human action. In spite of the peculiar issues involved, the elements of the mixed experience of human life are shown,

and the first peripety is a probable account of the commission of a fatal error. I have frequently cited parallels from Shakespearean tragedy to what happens in Paradise Lost. Milton is, however, much clearer than Shakespeare about the lapse into error partly because of his interest in moral deliberation and the "proairesis" of Aristotle. Macbeth does not really deliberate about murdering Duncan. He asks himself rather whether he is dire enough to commit a dreadful crime. But the positive reasons for murdering Duncan he never rehearses. Similarly Othello is apparently incapable of judicious deliberation in the face of Iago's insinuations. In both cases we are moved by their passions rather than their arguments. But in the fall in Paradise Lost all the action and passion are gathered into the movement of deliberative thought. And we are shown with great clarity the deliberative mind missing its mark and the collusion of mind and will in the process of wrong reason. It is perhaps surprising that though the action of Paradise Lost turns on a divine command, the poem comes up with a clearer moral demonstration than Shakespeare's tragedies, which turn on issues that belong to the human moral world. But in fact the religious concern is responsible for the greater clarity as much as Milton's training in classical ethics and his own and the contemporary interest in the rhetoric of debate. For his religious fable treats a fairly uncomplicated state of innocence in which the issues are sharply defined. And he had, besides, a tradition of commentary to draw on and particularly the protestant account of the will.

60 For "proairesis," see Of Education, ed. Donald C. Dorian, Complete Prose, 2, p.396, and note 126 for refs. to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics.

61 See Williams, in Thorpe, p.257, for a comparison to Macbeth.
If we change the terms of comparison from clarity to intimacy with human nature and Milton comes anywhere near Shakespeare in that respect, it seems to me that it is owing to Milton's Protestant inner concern with the motions of the will.

One final point about the treatment of the fall is that though the conditions of rational choice in Paradise are pure, what Milton brings out is the elements of the mixed experience of human life. The purity of the conditions makes the clarity of the analysis possible. The clarity goes with finesse. What is unsatisfactory about the division of good and bad in Jerusalem Delivered is that it is too simply worked out. The division in Paradise Lost is, if anything, more rigorous but it is applied with finesse and makes fine distinctions.

b. **The Second Peripety: Continuing Fall and Repentance**

The falls of Adam and Eve are instantaneous passages from innocence to error. In both the actual swerving aside is irrational and unaccountable. In both the swerving aside corrupts good motives. With Eve the aspirations of her mind become intemperate curiosity, and with Adam love for Eve becomes uxoriousness. Some of the consequences of the fall are magical. There is a series of sympathetic lapses and distempers in the universe beginning with the sigh nature gives when Eve first ate the fruit. Moreover, the fruit is an intoxicant for Eve on eating is "highth'nd as with Wine, jocand and boon" (1.793). It has also apparently aphrodisiac properties and is probably slightly poisonous since the effect on their digestive systems is that heavy fumes rise after the intoxicating ones and oppress their sleep (11.1046—51). But the disastrous effects of the fall on human nature follow a psychological or moral rather than a physical or magical process. The physical effects of the fruit accentuate rather than cause the chain of fallen volition.
The state of intoxication that overtakes Eve and later Adam is as much elation at having broken a law as the physical effect of the fruit. The law determined their being and to break it is to break out of their finite state. Although Satan was merely making up a story when he glossed the knowledge of good and evil as a taste that would make them as gods, the fancy of both Adam and Eve that they might grow up to godhead is not simply drunkenness but the notion that breaking the law that makes them human makes them more than human. Satan, immediately he hears about the tree, fabricates a story about the prohibitions being enjoined by envy and intended to keep man in subjection. So he puts it later to Eve, and so Eve chooses to believe once she has eaten (Bk. 9, 1.805). This is to think of the law that makes unfallen man human as a law restricting his being. And while there is nothing in Satan's story, the feeling of both Adam and Eve that it is true once they have broken the prohibition is not merely drunkenness or wishful thinking but a sense of self-enhancement arising from having broken what they now see as a restrictive law.

For Adam and Eve the only course open to self-enhancement is negation. But it must be said that this motive does not propel the humans to such lengths as it does Satan. The Satanic development is a process of self-love, whereas with Adam and Eve what is corrupted is first of all their love for each other. Their unfallen humanity, one might say, is their fellowship "fit to participate / All rational delight" (Bk. 8, 11.390—91) as much as anything in their individual natures. The image of God in man, the human face divine, is, one surmises, not merely the individual reflection of God but the reflection of one human in another.
Man by number is to manifest
His single imperfection, and beget
Like of his like, his Image multipli'd,
In unitie defective, which requires
Collateral love, and dearest amitie.

(Bk. 8, 11.422—26)

Adam here, asking for a fellow, argues that man is man through his image multiplied. With this God agrees and accordingly gives Adam his likeness, his "other self" (1.450) in Eve, remarking by the way that the divine image in Adam is expressed in the freedom of his spirit which had arrived at rational knowledge of himself. It seems reasonable to infer that the loving conversation of Adam and Eve, the participation in all rational delight, is not merely the right reflection of one self in the other, what Adam woos Eve to when he wins her from her reflection in the pool to himself, but also a reflection of the divine image because this is also an expression of the free spirit of man in its conversation with others.

Love in Paradise is "the happier Eden" (Bk. 4, 1.507) while it is an honouring of the divine image in each other. This human fellowship is the first thing to be corrupted by the fall.

For Eve first a notion of self-seeking becomes possible. Having broken the terms of her humanity, she has broken with her fellow, and she wonders whether to admit him to a new fellowship with her in the godhead she thinks she has acquired or will acquire. At the same time another and more sinister motive enters: the fear of death that goes with the new state that she thinks she has acquired decides her to bind Adam to her, and with

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62 Summers, pp. 97—98, remarks on the importance of viewing one's image in Paradise Lost. Burden, pp. 184 ff., makes it clear that the point of Eve's being drawn to her reflection is not to show her vanity but her rational choice of Adam. See Ira Clark, "Milton and the Image of God," JEGP, 68(1969), 426—28, for another line on Eve's "narcissism." On man's completion with the creation of Eve, see J. de Bruyn, Between Sea and Land: An Essay on Paradise Lost," pp. 133—34.
this the mortal taste of death enters into her love along with the passions of fear and jealousy. This is why she feels the "agonie of love" (Bk. 9, 1.858). While Eve's motives are understandable, if confused and self-deceiving, and while she is moved by love, it is at the same time clear that the love has fallen. For at the very least, it is a dishonouring not only of the divine image, for Eve has got rid of God, but also of humanity in Adam. Or to put it another way, having deceived herself she must now take in her likeness. So Adam's love, once he has decided to fall with her, answers to hers. I have already argued that his fall is a failure of responsibility to Eve his other self. His fear to lose his self here is really a form of self-seeking. His declaration, "we are one, / One Flesh; to loose thee were to loose my self" (11.958—59), implies not merely that he has been drawn to an ill thought-out course but that he has taken the fallen humanity of Eve as his own likeness in place of the freedom of spirit that might have stood up for himself and for the "Best Image of myself and dearer half" (Bk. 5, 1.95). This sounds perhaps a rather cold-blooded analysis. Adam's declaration is, after all, passionate and moving. But the issues have been set up far too finely for us to let it go at that. It is clear that Adam is seduced into complying with something his free judgement knows to be false; this infects his love, and he falls for a fallen humanity in himself and Eve. And at the same time death has entered into his love: "for with thee / Certain my resolution is to Die" (Bk. 9, 11.906—07); "if Death / Consort with thee, Death is to mee as Life" (11.953—54). These are of course noble declarations and if they were truly called for in the situation, no more could be said. But just as the "illustrious evidence, example high" (1.962) that Adam furnishes is not to the point and is therefore charged with gratuitous feeling, so the passion involved with the threat of death becomes part of a wilful assertion
of love. And just as Satan can only assert himself through negation so the assertion of the love of Adam and Eve turns to death.

These motives are the constituents of lust and sufficient to account for the scene of fallen love-making without the merely aphrodisiac effects of the fruit. For whether the scene is particularly voluptuous is neither here nor there. What is to the point is that it is the consummation of a guilty knowledge of each other. It is "of thir mutual guilt the Seale, /
The solace of thir sin" (11.1043—44) because it is the enjoyment of their fallen selves. And for Adam, Eve takes on the relish of forbidden fruit:

For never did thy Beautie since the day
I saw thee first and wedded thee, adornd
With all perfections, so enflame my sense
With ardor to enjoy thee, fairer now
Then ever, bountie of this vertuous Tree.
(11.1029—33)

What is the bounty of the tree? Eve, her enhanced beauty, Adam's desire? It does not matter, for the ambiguity aptly involves the love of Adam and Eve in the fallen will. As Eve after stealing the fruit wanted to steal Adam for herself so Adam here wants to steal Eve. And it is an easy step from his libertine remark,

if such pleasure be
In things to us forbidd'n, it might be wisht,
For this one Tree had bin forbidd'n ten
(11.1024-26)

to the discovery that the tree has further fruit to be plucked. Milton's treatment of the fall is soberly clear. C. S. Lewis who felt that Eve was a murderess when she turned from the tree to tempt Adam was evidently disappointed by the scene of fallen love making. But Milton had far too

63 Cf. C. S. Lewis, pp.125—28.
firm a grasp of his human material to imagine he was showing anything very
sensational. He was showing love invaded by a certain mutual breach of
trust and disrespect. Though he calls their excitement about their fallen
selves lust, he is still clear that it is a kind of love and that it is still
Paradise ("Flours were the Couch, / Pansies, and Violets, and Asphodel, etc." (11.1039-40). In this account, there is no exaggeration. Even though
he is dealing with an event as portentous as the fall of man, Milton has
worked it out plainly and firmly as a human action.

Their waking opens their eyes to what has happened, and again the
effects of the fruit, this time a hangover, are subordinate to the moral
or psychological development. What they wake to is their naked selves and
the naked self is the self as it appears to shame or guilt:

up they rose
As from unrest, and each the other viewing,
Soon found thir Eyes how op'nd, and thir minds
How dark'nd; Innocence, that as a veile
Had shadowd them from knowing ill, was gon,
Just Confidence, and native Righteousness,
And Honour from about them, naked left
To guiltie Shame: hee coverd, but his Robe
Uncoverd more....

They destitute and bare
Of all thir vertue: silent, and in face
Confounded long they sate, as strock'n mute.
(11.1051—1063)

Perhaps it seems almost magical that the creatures of Book 4 in whose
"looks Divine / The image of thir glorious Maker shon" (11.291—92), should
suddenly lose the divine image. But Milton's account of the matter in the
Christian Doctrine explains guiltiness, the first degree of death, not only
as a supernatural withdrawal of the divine effulgence but as a corresponding
state of the human consciousness.
Guiltiness is either accompanied or followed by terrors of conscience: Gen. III. 8: they heard the voice of God, and Adam hid himself: he said, I was afraid; ... also by the loss of divine protection and favor, which results in the lessening of the majesty of the human countenance, and the degradation of the mind: Gen. III. 7: they knew that they were naked. Thus the whole man is defiled.... Hence comes shame: Gen. III. 7: they sewed leaves together and made themselves aprons; Rom. VI. 21: for which you are now ashamed, for the end of those things is death.64

These are the bare bones of the human action. But even from them, it is clear that the sudden shame and consciousness of nakedness are a logical development of the process of error. And what follows from the guilty consciousness of the naked self, the making of fig leaf aprons and the mutual recrimination, is part of the process. It is the guilty concealment of error from oneself. Just as shame "coverd but his Robe / Uncoverd more" (11.1058—59), so "they in mutual accusation spent / the fruitless hours, but neither self-condemning" (11.1187—88).

But Milton's treatment of the first degree of death is not merely of the individual regress into the consciousness of the guilty self. This "partial death ... by which we are fettered to condemnation and punishment as by some actual bond"65 is worked out as something taking place in human volition, in the love and mutual consciousness of Adam and Eve.66 It is on seeing each other that they become conscious of their guilt: "Each the other viewing,/  

64 Christian Doctrine, I, 12, Complete Prose, 6, 394.
65 Christian Doctrine, I, 12, Complete Prose, 6, 393.
... silent, and in face / Confounded long they sate" (11.1052, 1062—63). 67

The sight of each other, one another's image, makes it clear to them how they have dishonoured each other and each becomes the image of the other's guilt. The process is carefully worked out in terms of the face. When Adam and Eve discuss the possibility of temptation before they separate, Adam defends

this sweet intercourse
Of looks and smiles, for smiles from Reason flow,
To brute deni'd, and are of Love the food,
Love not the lowest end of human life.
For not to irksom toile, but to delight
He made us, and delight to Reason joind.
(11.238—243)

The human face divine is the image of the self reflected in this rational and delightful conversation of looks. So Adam can later say he receives "Access in every virtue" "from the influence of thy looks" (11.309—10). Unfallen humanity is then this loving and trusting mutuality expressed in the exchange of looks. When Eve denies that to be tempted is an affront to their honour, she says that

only our Foe
Tempting affronts us with his foul esteem
Of our integritie: his foul esteeme
Sticks no dishonor, on our Front, but turns
Foul on himself. (11.327—331)

She puns on "affront", which means not only to "insult" but "set face to face". 68 The tempter's crooked mind then cannot cast its dishonourable reflection upon the "front" or face of man while he remains blameless.

67 See Ricks, p.140.
68 Carey and Fowler, n. to 11.328—30, p.873.
Instead it reflects upon himself. Eve is of course speaking metaphorically. Nevertheless when she returns to Adam fallen her face does take on a fallen image: "in her face excuse / Came Prologue, and Apologia to prompt" (11.853—54). The imagery of the excuse as prologue and "apologia" as prompter is theatrical and conveys how Eve's face has become a pretense. Once she "with Countnance blithe her storie told" (1.886), a guilty consciousness invades her appearance and "in her Cheek distemper flushing glowed" (1.887). And so when they wake to their nakedness, the consciousness of guilt is what they see reflected in the other's looks: "in our Faces evident the signes / Of foul concupiscence" (11.1077—78). Adam does not mean simply that he and Eve look rather worn after their love-making. Concupiscence means not merely lust but all the crooked desires that are part of the guilty will. In other words the human face divine is no longer a clear mirror of the other, but is set askew by guilt and is unable to reflect or behold God. Like Satan's glory, it has been eclipsed.

This sustained picturing of the fall in terms of the mutuality of looks not only elaborates the action but makes it clear that the fall of man is not the fall of two separate individuals. Humanity is their rational conversation of talk and looks, and until both have fallen, humanity cannot be said to have fallen. But more than that, although the prohibition is, as I have remarked earlier, a religious law involving man's relation with God, its honouring and violation involve relations between people and in that sense the fall of man is directly a moral fall. Indeed Milton's treatment of the fall is a vastly fuller moral treatment than Tasso's of a more obviously moral subject, the seduction of Rinaldo.

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69 On concupiscence, see Christian Doctrine, I, 11. Complete Prose, 6, 388—91.
by Armida and his restoration. For Rinaldo the viewing of the image of himself in another is the sophistical mirror-and-eyes conceit. The true image of himself is what he sees in the military shield. And this we saw was to reduce the issue of temperance to a matter rather of self-direction than of a choice made by someone among other persons. But Milton's grasp of the reflexiveness of the self is much sounder than Tasso's and his understanding of the field of moral action involves other humans. It is one of the paradoxes about Paradise Lost that though Milton insists on the inferiority of Eve, he should nevertheless take the fellowship of Adam and Eve as what makes them human. "Among unequals what societie / Can sort, what harmonie or true delight?" (Bk. 8, 11.383–84). Adam is asking how he can find fellowship in lower species. It remains puzzling how he could expect "to participate / All rational delight" (Bk. 8, 11.390–91) with an inferior gender. But the best insights of the poem go beyond the doctrine.

What I have traced so far of the process of error is chiefly the corruption of love and its involvement with death. In Bk. 10 the process works itself to a critical point where the peripety of repentance takes place. Adam and Eve separate and Adam's soliloquy pursues the line of the guilty self bound to death until Eve's return brings about a reconciliation and a turning away from death towards repentance. My reading of this second peripety is much in debt to Jun Harada's, "The Mechanism of Human Reconciliation in Paradise Lost." The point on which

70 See above, ch. 5, p.213.

we differ is more a matter of stress than a disagreement. It seems to me that the mirroring of one self in the other is less mechanical than Harada makes out. As I see it the essential thing that goes on between Adam and Eve is a transaction between people and so the human action of the poem is a moral as well as psychological action. Summarily what happens is that Eve repents of having brought Adam down with her and Adam forgives her. This cuts into the chain of recrimination and guilt originating in error and makes a new beginning possible between the human couple. A return upon the self takes place. The two selves, no longer bound to the process of error and death between themselves, are then able to turn and make matters up between humanity and God through repentance and forgiveness. The peripety then takes the form of a double repentance and forgiveness worked out first between humans and then between man and God.

Adam's soliloquy in Book 10 works out the Satanic course of the bound self. For though it is not at all a Satanically defiant speech but all despair and self-accusation, still the way in which Adam finds himself bound to death and pursues himself towards death is Satan's way. The conclusion of the speech,

O Conscience, into what Abyss of fears
And horrors hast thou driv'n me; out of which
I find no way, from deep to deeper plung'd!
(11.842—44)

imitates Satan's

And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threatening to devour me op'ns wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n
(Bk. 4, 11.76—78)

and summarizes the course of his communication with himself. Indeed Adam's soliloquy, like Satan's soliloquy on Niphates, arrives at a clear
view of his situation, but the guilty self-knowledge leads only to further self-condemnation and despair. In the process Adam comes to see himself as an infernal centre as Satan had earlier boasted himself a centre of pain:

is this the end
Of this new glorious World, and mee so late
The Glory of that Glory, who now becom
Accurst of blessed, hide me from the face
Of God, whom to behold was then my hight
Of happiness. (11.720—25)

The self-dramatization of "me" here and throughout the soliloquy is consciousness of the naked self. What Adam laments is the transformation of the world "all summd. up in Man" (Bk. 9, 1.113) to a world of woe in which he is the centre. And where originally the human face divine reflected the glory of God, it now turns away in guilt like the planets that are turned askew from reflecting the sun (Bk. 10, 11.656—64). The chief cause of his misery here is the consciousness that he has become the source of death.

O voice once heard
Delightfully, Encrease and multiply,
Now death to hear! For what can I encrease
Or multiplie, but curses on my head?
(11.729—32)

Adam is speaking of his children who will curse their "Ancestor impure" (1.735). And here the nature of man, who

by number is to manifest
His single imperfection, and beget
Like of his like, his Image multipli'd (Bk. 11.422—24)

undergoes an evil inversion. The consciousness that he has become the origin of a death-bound humanity brings Adam to see himself as a centre of execration and the evil that issues from him returning upon his own head:

all from mee
Shall with a fierce reflux on mee redound,
On mee as on thir natural center light
Heavie, though in thir place. (Bk.11,738—41)

The pun on light and heavy indicates that Adam's image is drawn from contemporary physics. The curses are "light at their natural centre, since the force that returned them is there null." At this point, Adam's consciousness of the bound self has become like Greville's "ugly centre of infernal spirits."

The rest of the soliloquy proceeds, "though through mazes" (1.830) to clarifying his realization of error and stating its moral implications. His first evasion vain (1.829) is to excuse his creation, driven by guilt to seek unbeing. This he answers rather legalistically by saying that he accepted the terms of his creation and that God, who made him, had the right to set the terms of punishment of disobedience as well as of reward of obedience. That evasion of guilt having been stopped and the terms of his existence having been found ineluctable, he turns to examine the punishment death. The puzzle is that the sentence has not taken effect. He has been condemned to die, and that means death of body and soul. God cannot let him live miserably for ever, since that would be a contradiction, "deathless Death" (1.798).

73 Carey and Fowler, n. to lines 740-41; cf. Harada, p.544.
But say
That Death be not one stroak, as I suppos'd
Bereaving sense, but endless miserie
From this day onward. (ll.808—ll)

Suppose, in other words, that "death" means living miserably for ever, that it is the process of guilt and punishment of guilt, which he is at present undergoing, then the sentence would already be in execution and there would be no puzzle about it. That would answer to Milton's own account of the first, second, and fourth degrees of death in the Christian Doctrine, and it is the view Adam adopts. 74 Death is the process of corruption in himself and in the world, "which I feel begun / Both in me, and without me" (ll.811–12), and as its origin, his self has become one with "the meager Shadow" (1.264). "Both Death and I / Am found Eternal, and incorporat both" (ll.815–16) in Paul's body of death. And that being so, all that proceeds from him must be evil and death-bound:

But from mee what can proceed,
But all corrupt, both Mind and Will deprav'd
Not to do onely, but to will the same
With mee? (ll.824–27)

He sees himself then not merely as the progenitor of children who will suffer misery and death, the sense in which he originally saw himself as centre of guilt. But now guilt has opened to a further realization. All the works that proceed from him are evil and it is death in this sense that he passes on to his children:

first and last
On mee, mee onely, as the source and spring
Of all corruption, all the blame lights due;
So might the wrauth. (ll.831–34)

74 Christian Doctrine, I, 12, 13, Complete Prose, 6, 393—414.
Here the movement from him as origin and the redounding upon him in blame recalls his earlier image of the centre, as does the verb "lights". But the realization has enlarged upon the earlier idea that he would be the ancestor of children, who would suffer for his crime, to the view that all that issues from him, works or children, is corrupt. In this sense, he sees himself as parent of sin and death and in despair concludes himself miserable

Beyond all past example and future,
To Satan onely like both crime and doom. (11.839—41)

Adam's course then follows Satan's in the process of the self bound to death. What rescues him is the intervention of Eve. But before she speaks he shouts at her

Out of my sight, thou Serpent, that name best
Befits thee with him leagu'd, thy self as false
And hateful; nothing wants, but that thy shape,
Like his, and colour Serpentine may shew
Thy inward fraud. (11.867—71)

Just as Adam saw himself incorporate with death, so here he sees his other self in the shape of his sin, serpentine, like the daughter in whom Satan viewed his perfect image (bk. 2, 1.764). He follows up with a depressing anti-feminist tirade including such topics as crooked ribs and women's "longing to be seen / Though by the Devil himself" (11.877-78). This is what human conversation in Paradise has fallen to, accusation full of hate whether in soliloquy as self-hate or as in this speech hate of the other self. In the face of this distressing outburst Eve's pleading shows magnanimity and firmness of mind about what matters: "While yet we live, scarce one short hour perhaps, / Between us two let there be peace" (11.923—24). She sees that humanity can be restored at least between them by her contrition and Adam's forgiveness. If we may suppose that her
inner colloquy has been like Adam's, what she is doing here is to die to the self that is turned to death and to turn to that "Whereon I live, thy gentle looks, thy aid, / Thy counsel in this uttermost distress" (11.919—20).

And in turning to Adam as to her living self, she turns him from hate of her, "his life so late and sole delight" (1.941) and to that extent has turned him from hatred of his own life bound to death. At the same time she suggests another object for his hate than himself or herself, namely the serpent (11.925—27). This enmity is to play an important part in the subsequent deliberation between them. For by thinking about the promise that Eve's seed shall bruise the serpent's head they grope towards an intuition of the divine acts that will deliver them from sin and death. But the initial movement is not itself an attempt to understand God's purpose but a deflection of hate away from the self, a movement rather like the one Harapha provokes in Samson. And still the movement is part of that chain of volition and deliberation that leads to repentance and the understanding of their human possibilities in the fallen world, an understanding filled out by Michael's revelation. At the very least, Eve in restoring love between herself and Adam has restored the possibility of rational conversation or "counsel", and the mind instead of pursuing the self with condemnation following the process of error turns now to the situation and what can be done between them.

Simply having someone else to talk to delivers the mind from its despairing communication with the guilty self. And besides Adam is able to see the motions of Eve, his other self, critically and objectively, and so "To better hopes his more attentive minde / Labouring ... rais'd" (11.1011—12). For what Eve suggests deals with matters Adam has already turned over despairingly. His conversation with Eve recapitulates many of the points of his conversation with himself but enabled in this return upon himself to work himself and her out of their plight. So when she
offers to take all the blame, Adam, who has already considered what that would have meant for himself, is able firmly if not very graciously to tell her that she could not bear the whole punishment, his tone having shifted from despair to resignation (11.947—65). Eve's next suggestions that sexual abstinence would "prevent / The Race unblest, to being yet unbegot" (11.987—88) or that suicide would free "both our selves and Seed at once" (1.999), "Destruction with destruction to destroy" (1.1006), recalls Adam's earlier plea for annihilation:

Why comes not Death
Said hee, with one thrice acceptable stroke
To end me? (11.854—57)

Only, where Adam merely asked for death, Eve proposes they administer it to themselves. Adam now, in criticizing Eve's motives and rejecting her suggestion explicitly, turns to hope away from the self for whom death is the only end. He argues that though Eve's proposal of self-destruction sounds like self-sacrifice, the vehement despair behind it comes from self-love. The destruction of destruction through self-destruction would in fact be the final paroxysm of the self bound to death. And seeing this in Eve, he goes beyond his own earlier despair to thinking about how the situation might be remedied. Harada suggests that in Eve's proposal of abstinence we have "one of the three lascivious scenes of Paradise Lost.

'Sexual perversity is precisely described in the lines "with desire to languish without hope, / Before the present object languishing / With like desire" [(11.995—97)]. But as Eve is in fact suggesting that this

75 Harada, p. 548.
"would be miserie / And torment less then none of what we dread" (11.997—98) and that it might better be avoided by suicide, it seems unfair to see her tempting Adam to a lascivious eternal languishing. Nevertheless there is, I think, an insight here. In rejecting Eve's suggestion, Adam overcomes his earlier desire to die with Eve and puts the death-seeking motives of his fall behind him. And this also is part of his turning from despair, from "Submitting to what seemed remediless" (Bk. 9, 11.919), to thinking objectively about the situation. This implies a movement out of the abyss of conscientious fears to hope and trust, hope that the humanity to spring from him might overcome the serpent, trust that this in fact is God's will, which despair had blinded him to. With this, their situation becomes clearer; it is life as we know it. The more he thinks precisely about the sentence that God passed on them the more his confidence rises that there is another way out than death. He sees the curse that he thought in despair centred on himself in fact "aslope / Glanc'd on the ground" (11.1053—54). His mind with astonishing resourcefulness realizes at a glance how primitive technology might repair their first ruins and the effects of the curse. And so assured, he is ready to complete the first movement with Eve from the bound self through repenting. Here the peripety set in motion by Eve's repentance meets the counter action of divine forgiveness, which brings about a new beginning for humanity in history.

The movement begun in repentance is completed in what Milton calls in the Christian Doctrine "saving faith". This is not to be confused

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76 See Harada, p.548.
77 Christian Doctrine, I. 20, Complete Prose, 6, 471—76.
with the "awareness of divine mercy which results in repentance." It is rather "The firm persuasion implanted in us by the gift of God, by virtue of which we believe, on authority of God's promise, that all these things which God has promised us in Christ are ours, and especially the grace of eternal life." This second effect of regeneration is the subject of Books 11 and 12 of *Paradise Lost*. It begins with Adam's conviction after they have prayed repentant that they have been heard:

\[
\text{perswasion in me grew}
\text{That I was heard with favour; peace returned}
\text{Home to my breast, and to my memorie}
\text{His promise, that thy Seed shall bruise our Foe.}
\]

*(Bk. 11, 11.152–55)*

And it is completed in Adam's rejoicing in the promises of God contained in Michael's account of the plan of salvation. I do not doubt the importance of this completion in the overall theological design of the poem. And even in terms of the human action it is important since without a belief in man's final restoration and an understanding of how man shall live, the peripety, the passage from the bound self to the delivered self, would be incomplete. Yet as a human action, Adam's instruction at the hands of Michael is not particularly interesting. Michael corrects some of Adam's unregenerate motions and Adam learns to rejoice in the coming of a redeemer, the overcoming of death, and the final return of man to God. But the machinery of this reconciliation of God with man belongs rather to a course of instruction in the Christian faith than to the representation of the motions of Adam's


spirit. In *Paradise Regained*, perhaps, Milton succeeded in working out the patience and attentive passivity of the human will to the motions of the divine as a human action. But in *Paradise Lost*, what is shown in Books 11 and 12 is meagre as a human action in comparison with what Book 10 has to offer. So to follow the further process of the restoration of humanity in Adam will not advance my argument about the connection between Milton's Christian concern and the human action his poem imitates.

What Milton has worked out as a human action is first of all the notion of the self bound to death. He has rendered the Pauline insights as a "probable" chain of action, showing with clarity and force the universal process of guilt working in Adam and Eve. And to the Christian understanding of the individual will, he has added the immensely important understanding of how the process of guilt corrupts humanity in the relation of individuals bound to each other. With the deliverance of the bound self Milton is in a peculiar position. For he could not show the Pauline trans-action of dying with Christ before the Son's human death. The sacrifice of the Son has been announced and accepted in heaven; later it is prophesied by Michael. But as far as the peripety of repentance is concerned, the atonement operates remotely. It secures for the human couple the action of prevenient grace and it is apprehended dimly in the sentence upon the serpent. But obviously Adam and Eve cannot lay hold of the Son's atonement with full understanding before it has been explained to them.

In consequence, as far as the peripety in Book 10 is concerned we have only the first motions towards deliverance. And since Books 11 and 12 are not conceived as a human action with the same fullness as Book 10, that means that only those first motions are fully worked out as a human action. After that the poem ascends in the visions of God and the human action is attenuated as the Christian plan is unfolded. Milton's treatment of these
first motions is enough, though, for our purposes. Again as with the process of guilt he shows the restoration as a matter of human mutuality not merely of the individual. This grasp of human mutuality Milton probably learnt from the exchange of persons Paul speaks of between believer and Christ. What sets Adam free from the self bound to death is a self-sacrificing movement of Eve, who in spite of his hate turns to him insisting on his love and, repenting, offers to take the blame on herself. To forgive here is to restore humanity between them, at least on the level of human relations, and the subsequent transaction with God follows from that. Of course the reconciliation of Adam and Eve is not so clear cut as the exchange between the sinner and Christ that Paul and Luther speak about. Yet in so far as both are moved to a sort of self-sacrifice, Eve in repenting and offering to take the blame on herself, Adam in forgiving and at least hypothetically offering to take the blame on himself, each offers himself unwittingly to his neighbour as Christ. To have represented prevenient grace operating in what is at once a probable and miraculous manner seems to me a remarkable feat of religious and moral imagination. And while it leaves much of the Christian doctrine of regeneration mysterious, it has at least humanized a vital part of Christian motions of the bound and the free will.

C. Conclusion

In so far as it represents Christian ideas about the will in the imitation of a human action, Paradise Lost is a humanist interpretation of Christianity. It brings Christian ideas into the literary study of man. Milton's success in this respect is remarkable, for, as far as I know, no other work of the period of neoclassical humanism succeeds in representing the central Christian ideas of sin, despair, and regeneration with his grasp of human probability, by which I mean what is universal in human
behaviour. Milton has not reduced Christian ideas to the human action. The supernatural mysteries of grace and atonement are clearly operative. But Milton has shown them working with human motions. We are therefore in a position to contradict Johnson's opinion that the weakness of the poem is its deficient grasp of human experience. On the contrary it is through its intimate understanding of human motions that the poem achieves solid greatness as distinct from mere sublimity. Moreover the understanding is not limited to the individual; it takes in the motions of human mutuality also. And this is unexpected. The poet of Samson Agonistes or Paradise Regained chose to treat heroes who were men apart from ordinary humanity, men "separate to God" (Samson, l.31). But the human action in Paradise Lost shows, in spite of occasional stridences and grating insistences on the hierarchical principle in marriage, the involvement of human beings in each other.

The treatment of the central human action with its two peripeties of fall and repentance is remarkably plain and unassuming for neoclassical epic. The action for all its sublime setting in Paradise at the beginning of time is not only domestic but intimate. And for this we may thank the seriousness of Milton's Christian concern with volition that forced him to the sober analysis and observation of matters that lay outside the scope of ideal imitation. Besides, Milton's treatment of volition undercuts the simple didacticism of Renaissance epic theory. The way in which the Lusiad, for example, engages the will through investing its heroes with epic glory goes with a rather naive view of volition. Milton's treatment of fallibility and the terms in which he imagines the will's restoration rules out such an uncritical acceptance of the moral function of epic idealizing. For Paradise Lost is more of a study of the will than a firing of the will, and its concern with moral choice belongs to a more sophisticated frame of
concern than Camoens' or Tasso's attempts to instil magnanimous desires. Moreover, Milton's treatment of the images presented by the persons in his poem goes beyond the self-regard of fame in Camoens' epic and of military virtue in Tasso's. Whether with the Son reflecting the Father's glory or with Adam and Eve reflecting each other and God or with Satan reflected in death, the images cast by Milton's characters involve more complicated moral relations than are easily accounted for in the epic theory of ideal imitation. Just as \textit{Paradise Lost} is a study of the will rather than a harnessing of the will so it is a study of the image of the self as a moral concept rather than a glorification of the self-image.

Yet even if \textit{Paradise Lost} goes beyond ideal imitation in its imitation of a human action, it is still a representation of moral ideas. However it involves the lesson with the motions of the human will, \textit{Paradise Lost} is nevertheless a demonstration that to obey is best. The values of the poem are unambiguous. The ideal structure is firm and clear, however elaborate. Only the treatment of the processes of the mind and will is subtle and unexpected. But this does not mean that in showing how humans behave it gives the lie to the moral framework I sketched in the last chapter. On the contrary the clear and firm scheme of moral ideas the poem works with is partly what makes the fineness of moral analysis in the human action possible. The one respect in which \textit{Paradise Lost} seems at first sight radically different from conventional ideal imitation is that it has put by the mechanical ethical appeal of glorifying its human heroes with epic splendour. The repentance of Adam and Eve, which is so important in the action of the epic, is an act of unassuming goodness. It has none of the epical pointing given to Rinaldo's repentance on Olivet. Epic decoration of the event would indeed be out of place, and Milton's method at the crisis of his poem is a kind of severe understatement. Yet
the scene carries a charge of moral appeal. For some more strongly than others perhaps the action here may take on a reflected glory from Book 12 where God's method "by small accomplishing great things" is shown at work in the human life of the Son. The repentance of Adam and Eve opens out onto that historical prospect, and in some primitive way foreshadows that pattern of voluntary humiliation and self-sacrifice. This religious transvaluation of heroic values still goes, of course, with the epic design upon the reader. And we may agree that Milton's design is put at the service of ethically more serious values, that it works with a deeper understanding of the will than what we can find in say Camoens or Tasso or for that matter Spenser. But it seems to me that the action Milton shows (particularly in the peripety of repentance) is instructive in a more valuable way than through such an arousal of epic admiration, however reformed. Milton's appeal is not first of all to our sense of the heroic and the powerful but to our rational ethical discrimination. To be moved by Milton's action we have first of all to understand it. And this means that epic eloquence has been put on a new basis. It means that Milton has lodged the persuasive force of his epic not in its power over the affections but in its clear and penetrating exposition of its human action. I should wish to connect this reform of epic eloquence with the Restoration reform of rhetoric, that reform from an art of affective persuasion to an art of rational persuasion. 80 It will be recalled that we found that in

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Absalom and Achitophel Dryden had brought the art of ideal imitation to the point where we could speak of an art of rational discrimination. Unlike Paradise Lost, Absalom and Achitophel worked entirely within the scope of ideal imitation. The rational discriminations were made rather by the narrator's tone than by his imitation of human behaviour. Yet allowing for that distinction, it seems to me that the common appeal to rational discrimination marks an important development in neoclassical humanism. And with Paradise Lost the advance has been made with a subject we should have least expected to be tractable to a neoclassical humanist treatment. In treating the Christian account of the will Milton has not only gone beyond the limitations of neoclassical humanism but also made advances that are in keeping with those developments within neoclassical humanism that brought with them an eloquence more finely adjusted to intelligence about life.
Chapter 7. FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE AND CONCLUSION

A. Forbidden Knowledge and Augustan Humanism

In the last two chapters I have reached what seems to me an answer to the question I set out with. I have tried to show in what sense *Paradise Lost*, though treating a theological fable, is at the same time a criticism of life. Indeed I have argued that it is precisely through its Christian account of the will that the poem is most adequately a criticism of life and it is here we may claim the poem for our humanism. Simultaneously I have argued that *Paradise Lost* is of and not of its contemporary neoclassical humanism, that it breaks out of the restrictions of ideal imitation and what I might call the religious prudery of neoclassical humanism, yet in doing so participates in what is best in neoclassical humanism, the critical movement that arrived at an eloquence more adequate to the criticism of life. In this chapter I shall take up the question of forbidden knowledge in *Paradise Lost*. I wish to relate it to neoclassical humanist criticism of vain learning. *Paradise Lost* is not a great critique of vain learning like Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* or Pope's *Dunciad*, inevitably, since learning is an ancillary topic in the poem. *Paradise Lost* is a great critique of human creatureliness, of what makes us human and of how we fall out of humanity. Its concern with vain learning is part of that critique. I have tried to show how the sense of human creatureliness in *Paradise Lost* is allied with the study of man to be found in *Absalom and Achitophel*. *Paradise Lost* gives great poetic expression to a view of the middle state of human life. And in this it not only grows out of the earlier tradition of Renaissance humanism but sounds one of the principal commonplaces of Augustan humanism, that any true learning must be in accordance with the nature and limits of human understanding.

And here various lines of my argument converge. In an earlier chapter
I tried to show how Milton's method as a theologian in the *Christian Doctrine* accords at once with a Protestant notion of the creatureliness of the human mind and a humanist critique of philosophic speculation. Elsewhere I tried to connect Milton's attitudes to eloquence and epic poetry with neoclassical humanist ideas on these matters, and I argued both in the chapter on eloquence and in the later section on *Absalom and Achitophel* that neoclassical eloquence finds itself as it directs itself to the study of man in his middle state. In Montaigne I found a great representative statement of humanism defining its study of man, and I remarked on the affinity between his insistence on human creatureliness and the importance of the notion of a middle state as a moral idea in the satire of Swift and Pope. Although the tone and imagery of *Absalom and Achitophel* are different from Swift's or Pope's, still Dryden's concern with a truly human temper accords with their moral concerns. It must not be thought then that as a fable about human creatureliness and forbidden knowledge *Paradise Lost* expresses a Christian obscurantism in Milton. On the contrary, the sense of the limitations of the human creature belongs as much to the humanist as to the protestant tradition, and more to the point, the sense, far from being a vestige of an earlier, more pious humanism, developed a singular acuteness in Milton's time and after.

Paul Fussell in his *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism* has remarked on the popularity among Augustan humanists of Raphael's admonishment to Adam against aspiring to knowledge unfitted to the human condition and how it rehearsed one of their favourite moral topics.¹ We may take

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Johnson's approval as typical: "Raphael's reproof of Adam's curiosity after the planetary motions, with the answer returned by Adam, may be confidently opposed to any rule of life which any poet has delivered."^2 And that this was no adventitious fit of enthusiasm on his part may be gathered from the judgement he gives to the learned astronomer in Rasselas: "To man is permitted the contemplation of the skies, but the practice of virtue is commanded."^3 Indeed so heartily did he approve of the tenor of Raphael's advice on human learning that he criticized the "wonder working academy" of Milton's Treatise, Of Education, on grounds at once Raphaelesque and humanist:

But the truth is, that the knowledge of external nature, and the sciences which that knowledge requires or includes, are not the great or the frequent business of the human mind. Whether we provide for action or conversation, whether we wish to be useful or pleasing, the first requisite is the religious and moral knowledge of right and wrong; the next is an acquaintance with the history of mankind, and with those examples which may be said to embody truth, and prove by events the reasonableness of opinions. Prudence and Justice are virtues, and excellencies, of all times and of all places; we are perpetually moralists, but we are geometricians only by chance. Our intercourse with intellectual nature is necessary; our speculations upon matter are voluntary, and at leisure. Physiological learning is of such rare emergence, that one man may know another half his life without being able to estimate his skill in hydrostatics or astronomy; but his moral and prudential character immediately appears."^4

I might add that Johnson's main criticism of Paradise Lost, that it treats matters too sublime to furnish a criticism of life, is the expression in

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^4 Lives of the Poets, I, 83.
literary criticism of the same principle: a poem ought to supply us with knowledge of our middle state. In the last chapter I have tried to show how the action of the poem does indeed represent the experience of the middle state and in the preceding one to show how the sublime or universal images of the poem centred on the human action. And if these demonstrations are allowed, we may reject Johnson's criticism of *Paradise Lost* on his own critical principles. His objections to Milton's educational project are another matter. Milton's scheme is indeed extravagant. Yet in principle Milton cannot be faulted for pursuing merely speculative knowledge: "The end then of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright... to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true vertue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection.... I call therefore a compleate and generous Education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously all the offices both private and publike of peace and war." These principles do not contradict Johnson's. And even if Milton finds a place for such useful arts as geography, meteorology, and medicine, we may feel sorry for his pupils, but we cannot accuse him of burdening them with knowledge that did not concern their human being. Like the primitive technology that Adam's mind rises to with his new hopes, their purpose is to repair the physical (not religious) ruins of our first parents. Even the astronomy he includes is practical, since along with mathematics it is the basis of the science

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6 See *Of Education*, pp. 391—94.
7 *Paradise Lost*, Bk. 10, 11.1060—85.
of navigation. Milton includes subjects not in themselves humanistic, and it is to this that Johnson objects. But the spirit in which Milton includes these subjects violates neither the principles of humanist education nor the tenor of Raphael's discourse.

But it is not only that Raphael's lecture commended itself to Augustan humanism. Paradise Lost rendered the story of the fall in a way that lent itself to Augustan moralizing on the human condition. It showed man aspiring to godhead and falling out of his humanity, reaching upwards for a knowledge beyond the limits of his being and entering into a process of error and nonsense. It supplied a fable about presumption. So Pope in his Essay on Man, which in setting out to vindicate the ways of God to man is largely an essay against presumption, supports his argument with what is almost a smart summary of Paradise Lost:

In Pride, in reas'ning Pride, our error lies; All quit their sphere, and rush into the skies. Pride is still aiming at the blest abodes, Men would be Angels, Angels would be Gods. Aspiring to be Gods, if Angels fell, Aspiring to be Angels, Men rebel; And who but wishes to invert the laws Of ORDER, sins against th' Eternal Cause. (Epistle 1, 11.124—130)

Pope's comparison of "this scene of Man" (1.5) to a "Garden, tempting with forbidden fruit" (1.8) in the opening of his subject is no random similitude.  

Or consider Arbuthnot's "Know Yourself". While Arbuthnot is not a

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figure of the first literary rank, he was an influential mind, the confidant of Pope and Swift and the source perhaps of much of their wit. And while "Know Yourself" is not a very good poem, in spite of interesting passages, and while there are no very close parallels between it and Paradise Lost, it has its place in this discussion because it solves the inscrutable mystery of man's double nature, his disproportionate union of angel and beast, by referring to the fall and giving as a rule of life the study of human finitude and creaturely limits.

Yet think not to regain thy native sky,
Borne on the wings of vain philosophy;
Mysterious passage! hid from human eyes;
Soaring you'll sink, and sinking you will rise:
Let humble thoughts thy wary footsteps guide,
Regain by meekness what you lost by pride.10

Even if the paradoxical antithesis "Soaring you'll sink, and sinking you will rise" owes nothing to Paradise Lost in particular, the poem shows how Augustan humanism naturally went to the fall of man for its understanding of the human condition.

The subject of Paradise Lost, the fall of man, far from receding into the general background of received but hardly generative ideas, was charged with moral significance for later humanism. It was the archetypal lesson in human finitude. And the sense of human finitude, of the precariousness of the middle state of humanity is what meets us everywhere in the writings of Pope and Swift. Paradise Lost has of course other things. Still one of the things it had to offer later humanism was a superbly articulated account of the myth of human creatureliness moralised in terms of presumption and vain learning.

10 "Know Thyself", Supplement, The Miscellaneous Works of the Late Dr John Arbuthnot (Glasgow: Carlile, 1751), 2, 28.
B. Forbidden Knowledge and Baconian Empiricism

But the treatment of the fall in *Paradise Lost* accords not only with later developments of humanism but also with the development of Baconian empiricism. I am not saying that *Paradise Lost* was a contribution to Baconian thought. That would be absurd. I am saying rather that in the Baconian critique of human learning the essential discrimination is between knowledge that fits the finite condition of our creaturely being and knowledge that disregards it, and that consequently the attitude to human learning expressed in *Paradise Lost* and its admonitions against the pursuit of forbidden knowledge belong rather to the advance than the retreat of the mind from the rational understanding of the world. It is true that Bacon’s critique of vain learning diagnoses other peccant humours than pride and finds other idols of the mind than can be accounted for by it. Still his critique of learning aims at the self-knowledge of the learned world of the defects, idiosyncrasies and illusions of the human mind and at a proposal for a method of learning fitted to human capacities. Baconian epistemology is founded on a delimiting of the sort of knowledge that is proper for mankind and an analysis of the errors consequent on a failure to observe the limits and limitations of the human mind.\(^1\) That, no doubt, rather than any positive contributions of the method he put forward, accounts for Pope’s respect for him.\(^2\) Bacon invokes the story of the fall to establish his own position. "The last or furthest end of knowledge" is "the glory of the

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\(^1\) For Bacon on vain learning and defects and limitations of the human mind, see *Advancement of Learning*, Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon, ed. John M. Robertson (London: Routledge, 1905), pp. 44–45, 53–60; *Novum Organum* xxxviii–lxxvii, Philosophical Works, pp. 263–78.

\(^2\) For Pope on Bacon, see e.g., "The source of Newton’s Light, of Bacon’s Sense!" where Bacon is a type of wise man with all the Augustan and empiricist force on the wisdom of sense (*Dunciad*, 3, 1.218, ed. James Sutherland 3rd ed. [London: Methuen, 1953]).
Creator and the relief of man's estate." Learning, that is, is to direct man "to acknowledge whence his good / Descends" (Bk. 7, 11.512—13) and to repair the effects of the fall. It is easy to suppose that in seeking to counter the "zeal and jealousy of divines" Bacon quoted and glossed scripture with more ingenuity than candour. It seems to me, however, that not only were his arguments distinguishing a right and Christian spirit of inquiry advanced in good faith, they established in terms of creaturely limits the epistemological principle of his scheme of learning. He remarks that "it was not the pure knowledge of nature and universality, a knowledge by the light whereof man did give names unto other creatures in Paradise, as they were brought before him, according unto their proprieties, which gave occasion to the fall; but it was the proud knowledge of good and evil, with an intent in man to give law unto himself and to depend no more upon God's commandments, which was the form of the temptation." Here then is a distinction of quality in learning, between a pure natural knowledge such as was man's in Paradise and an impure or proud knowledge whereby man sought to go beyond his humanity and fell out of Paradise. Citing further passages from scripture he concludes: "Let those places be rightly understood, and they do indeed excellently set forth the true bounds and limitations whereby human knowledge is confined and circumscribed; and yet without any such contracting and coarctation, but that it may comprehend all the universal nature of things." The bounds he specifies are as follows: "The first, that we do not so place our felicity in knowledge, as we forget

13 Advancement of Learning, p.60.
14 Advancement of Learning, p.43.
15 Advancement of Learning, p.44.
16 Advancement of Learning, p.44.
our mortality. The second, that we make application of our knowledge to
give ourselves repose and contentment, and not distaste or repining. The
third, that we do not presume by the contemplation of nature to attain to the
mysteries of God. To transgress the third bound is to be "spoiled by
vain philosophy". "For the contemplation of God's creatures and works
producest (having regard to the works and creatures themselves) knowledge;
but having regard to God, no perfect knowledge, but wonder, which is
broken knowledge. ... And hence it is true that it hath proceeded that
divers great learned men have been heretical, whilst they have sought to
fly up to the secrets of the Deity by the waxen wings of the senses." Of the three bounds the last two are taken up in Paradise Lost. The
first, man's mortality, has no bearing on the existence of unfallen man.
Bacon's various peccant humours of learning variously disregard these
limitations and the way learning should fit inside the creaturely human
condition.

We should not imagine that in the later 17th century when the Baconian
project was institutionalized in the Royal Society that the epistemological
principle of human limitation disappeared. Far from it: Cowley has a
splendid Baconian gloss in his "To the Royal Society."

Bacon has broke that Soar-crow Deitie;
Come, enter, all that will,
Behold the rip'ned Fruit, come gather now your Fill.

The suggestion in these lines that Bacon has played the part of Satan and
delivered man from bondage to an idol of authority is inescapable. But

17 Advancement of Learning, p.45.
18 Advancement of Learning, p.45.
19 The Poems of Abraham Cowley, ed. A. R. Waller (Cam.: Cam. Univ. Press,
the suggestion is calculated to disturb in order to enforce a distinction between true authority and false. Cowley uses the libertine suggestions in much the same way as Dryden does in Absalom and Achitophel, only to elicit a distinction from the seeming confusion. For the succeeding lines immediately make clear the difference between rightly and wrongly forbidden knowledge, the difference between Bacon's true liberation of the mind and the false liberation of vain philosophy:

Yet still, methinks, we fain would be
Catching at the Forbidden Tree,
We would be like the Deitie,
When Truth and Falshood, Good and Evil, we
Without the Sences aid within ourselves would see;
For 'tis God only who can find
All Nature in his Mind.

Cowley's forbidden knowledge is the contentious learning Bacon speaks of in the Advancement of Learning, the learning of the schoolmen elaborating their authority, Aristotle. "For the wit and mind of man, if it work upon matter, which is the contemplation of the creatures of God, worketh according to the stuff, and is limited thereby; but if it work upon itself, as the spider worketh his web, then it is endless, and brings forth indeed cobwebs of learning, admirable for the fineness of thread and work, but of no substance or profit." 20

Cowley holds with Bacon that contentious learning is vain philosophy because it disregards the limitations of the human mind. For the human mind knowledge of itself is knowledge of its limitations. Knowledge of things must come from the study of external nature. Only God's mind contains the true ideas of things within itself. Only for God would

20 Advancement of Learning, p. 55.
scholastic method be proper, and hence scholastic method aspires
presumptuously to godhead. Similarly in "The Tree of Knowledge", Cowley
turns the fable of the fall of man into a witty conceit about contentious
learning:

The sacred Tree midst the fair Orchard grew;
The Phoenix Truth did on it rest,
And built his perfum'd Nest.
That right Porphyrian Tree which did true Logick shew,
Each Leaf did learned Notions give,
And th' Apples were Demonstrative.
So clear their Colour and divine,
The very shade they cast did other Lights out-shine.

Taste not, said God; 'tis mine and Angels meat;
A certain Death does sit
Like an ill Worm i' th' Core of it.
Ye cannot Know and Live, nor Live or Know and Eat.
Thus spoke God, yet Man did go;
Ignorantly on to Know;
Grew so more blind, and she
Who tempted him to this, grew yet more Blind then He. 21

A further development of the empiricist epistemological principle of
human limitation can be found in the Introduction to Book I of Locke's
Essay Concerning Human Understanding. He does not allude here to the
Genesis story. But he founds his system on the creaturely limits of the
human mind and his admonitions to sobriety and temperance recall Raphael's.

If by this inquiry into the nature of the understanding, I can discover
the powers thereof; how far they reach; to what things they are in
any degree proportionate; and where they fail us, I suppose it may
be of use to prevail with the busy mind of man to be more cautious in
meddling with things exceeding its comprehension; to stop when it is
at the utmost extent of its tether; and to sit down in a quiet
ignorance of those things which, upon examination, are found to be
beyond the reach of our capacities. We should not then perhaps be so
forward, out of an affectation of an universal knowledge, to raise
questions, and perplex ourselves and others with disputes about things
to which our understandings are not suited, and of which we cannot
frame in our minds any clear or distinct perceptions, or whereof (as
it has perhaps too often happened) we have not any notions at all.

21 Poems of Cowley, p.45.
If we can find out how far the understanding can extend its view; how far it has faculties to attain certainty; and in what cases it can only judge and guess; we may learn to content ourselves with what is attainable by us in this state.

5. For though the comprehension of our understandings comes exceeding short of the vast extent of things, yet we shall have cause enough to magnify the bountiful Author of our being, for that proportion and degree of knowledge he has bestowed on us, so far above all the rest of the inhabitants of this our mansion. Men have reason to be well satisfied with what God hath thought fit for them, since he has given them (as St. Peter says) Πάντα προσόντως ἔνας ἐπίσημον, whatsoever is necessary for the conveniences of life and information of virtue; and has put within the reach of their discovery, the comfortable provision for this life, and the way that leads to a better. How short soever their knowledge may come of an universal or perfect comprehension of whatsoever is, it yet secures their great concerns, that they have light enough to lead them to the knowledge of their Maker and the sight of their own duties.22

That both the Baconian and the humanist critique of vain learning concur in stressing the principle of creaturely limitation may help to account for the Miltonolatry of the 18th century.23 Of course far from all 18th century writing belongs to Augustan humanism. Augustan humanism is indeed as Fussell notes characterized by an embattled mentality.24 Nor is the tradition of Bacon and Locke the sole current of Augustan philosophy, nor do all those who draw on it sound the note of pious submission to the limits of human creatureliness. Still a feeling for the precariousness and narrowness of the middle state of humanity lies behind the writing that most seriously attempts to gather to mind what it is to be human as well as behind the resounding platitudes of the period after the publication


24 See Fussell, pp.142 ff. The embattled mind is most obvious in Pope and Swift, far less so in Johnson. But even if Fussell exaggerates, he reminds us that eighteenth century letters was a divided estate.
of *Paradise Lost*, platitudes such as the following, in which Pope probably had a hand:

> Reason like virtue in a medium lies.
> A hair's breadth more might make us mad not wise,
> Outknow even knowledge, and outpolish art,
> Till Newton drops down giddy — a Descartes.  

All this is not to say that *Paradise Lost* is at heart an Augustan poem. It is rather to suggest that Milton's treatment of forbidden knowledge belongs with the growth rather than the conservatism or retrogression of the mind.  

C. The Dispensation of Knowledge in "Paradise Lost"

The scope of unfallen man's reason and the extent of his knowledge in *Paradise Lost* are generous. Paradise is in no sense an anti-intellectual retreat. Ignorance is not its enormous bliss. It is as if Milton had taken particular pains to show that though God forbade the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he provided in every way for the liberal exercise of the unfallen mind and that nothing was further from his purpose than to keep man low by keeping him ignorant as Satan supposes, or suggests to himself and Eve.

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26 Hobbes is, I think, an eccentric figure in the line of Baconian empiricism. Admittedly his critique of the language of metaphysical speculation (*Leviathan*, chs. 4, 5, and 46) is an important extension of Baconian principle of human limitation. But his mechanical conclusions are extravagant.

Adam possesses remarkable mental powers. He is endowed at birth with language and the faculty of discursive thought. He shows himself immediately

a Creature who not prone
And Brute as other Creatures, but endued
With Sanctitie of Reason, might erect
His Stature, and upright with Front serene
Govern the rest, self-knowing, and from thence
Magnanimous to correspond with Heav'n,
But grateful to acknowledge whence his good
Descends, thither with heart and voice and eyes
Directed in Devotion, to adore
And worship God Supream, who made him chief
Of all his works. (Bk. 7, 11.506—16)

For with immediate self-knowledge he grasps the finite and so derivative nature of his being. And this together with the contemplation of God's other creatures leads him to suppose a Creator worthy of praise. In this its first exercise, the mind of man displays its rationality in discerning its creaturely standing. Similarly in a later colloquy with God, Adam shows, in distinguishing his creaturely need for the conversation of his likeness from the divine self-sufficiency of the Creator, a rational discernment based on the self-knowledge of his finite nature.28

The knowledge Adam displays on these occasions is arrived at by discursive means. Raphael distinguishes for Adam the two sorts of reason:

Discursive, or Intuitive; discourse
Is ofttest yours, the latter most is ours,
Differing but in degree, of kind the same.
(Bk. 5, 11.488—90)

In the last chapter I tried to show the importance of rational conversation in unfallen humanity, the part it plays in the dispute about gardening

separately, how it is corrupted at the fall, and how it is restored with
the recovery of humanity in the repentance of Adam and Eve. Discourse then
is the process of human reason. And indeed one of the great things about
Paradise Lost is Milton's mastery of the processes of discursive reason, of
reason engaged not in the elaboration of fixed positions but in the shifts
of debate. This is something Milton shares with Dryden, a sense of how
reason engages in human affairs in the process of argument with others.
Dryden was evidently struck by Raphael's distinction between angelic
intuition and human discourse, for in his operatic redaction of Paradise
Lost, The State of Innocence, he has Satan memorably expand on the
discursive limits of human reason:

The soul pure fire, like ours, of equal force;
But, pent in flesh, must issue by discourse;
We see what is; to Man truth must be brought
By sense, and drawn out by a long chain of thought
By that faint light, to will and understand;
For made less knowing, he's at more command. 29

The passage brings out strikingly the condition of "incorporated minds" in
their middle state. 30 In his "Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy"
Dryden remarks that he is "of opinion, that they cannot be good poets, who
are not accustomed to argue well." 31 But argument of the sort to be found

29 John Dryden, The State of Innocence, Act 1, sc. 1, The Dramatic Works of John

30 Samuel Johnson, Essay 110, The Rambler, ed. W. J. Bate and Albert B.
"Johnson's phrase, 'incorporated minds' beautifully suggests man's 'middle
state' between the extremes of pure mind (angels) and pure corporal matter
(brutes), his paradoxical location in a larger scheme of value, which
obliges him unremittingly to define his own nature."

in Absalom and Achitophel, or Religio Laici, or The Hind and the Panther, or in Paradise Lost, in the debates in hell, for example, or in the exchange between Satan and Gabriel or the conversation between Adam and Eve, or again in Paradise Regained, or I might add in Hudibras in burlesque form, is a rare thing in poems. Others have a gift for exposition, Cowley, or Pope, or Johnson, others like Donne for sophistical or figurative argument. But a sense of argument as reason drawn out into a chain of thought, a feeling for the occasion and tactics of debate, are strikingly the possession of the three Restoration poets. In Milton's case the sense of argument goes with his concern with the human condition of reason, reason whose most serious calling is to distinguish the better from the worse in the ambiguity of experience. Dryden's case is in a general way the same, though his concern is rather with public than with private reason. As for Hudibras, it is hard to feel that the arguments of Hudibras and Sidrophel are merely a satire on the inveterate contentiousness of the Puritans. The argument develops with such virtuosity that it seems to burlesque discursive reason in general, arousing a mixed attitude of contempt and admiration for the human powers employed in interminable controversy. Why the art of argument should have evolved to such a pitch in Restoration poetry is a subject I do not propose to enter on. It is clear that it is a special development of the concern of humanist eloquence with a reason adapted to human discourse, a subject I treated earlier. And while the art of argument seems after Dryden to have been replaced by an art of perspicuous exposition, we may reasonably point to the affinity between the Augustan feeling for the vastness of error and the narrowness of human wit and Milton's and Dryden's highly developed apprehension of how reason in man is lodged in the fallible process of argument.

In addition to discursive reason, however, Milton assigns some
intuitive powers to Adam, something Raphael after all leaves room for when he says "discourse / Is oftèst yours." (Bk. 5, 11.488—89). For not only is Adam able to speak at birth, but shown the animals by God, he pronounces their names. Eve apparently named the flowers.\(^{32}\) Yet further provision for man's knowledge is made through revelation either directly from God or through angels. Although natural reason leads Adam to suppose an origin for himself, it is insufficient to acquaint him with God. Given his creaturely and finite mind, it is necessary that God should make himself known, for "how can finite grasp infinity."\(^{33}\) God asserts his identity: "Whom thou soughtst I am" (Bk. 8, 1.316), a form recalling the "I am that I am" (Exod. 3, 14) in which he chose later to be known. In the colloquy with Adam, however, he relaxes some of the mystery he later surrounded himself with. Like Raphael, God speaks with man "as with his Friend" (Bk. 9, 1.2). It must be added, though, that it is only in Paradise, his garden, that God is able to appear to Adam directly. In the lower earth, where Adam was made, God could only make himself known through a trance (Bk. 8, 11.287—311). And besides, however gracious, even jovial, God is in accommodating himself to the limits of his creature, the gulf between finite and infinite makes itself felt:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{for now} \\
\text{My earthly by his Heav'nly overpowerd,} \\
\text{Which it had long stood under, streind to the highth} \\
\text{In that celestial Colloquie sublime,} \\
\text{As with an object that excells the sense,} \\
\text{Dazl'd and spent, sunk down, and sought repair} \\
\text{Of sleep. } \\
\text{(Bk. 8, 11.452—58)}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{32}\) Adam names the animals, Bk. 8, 11.343—54; Eve names the flowers, Bk. 11, 11.277. See Schultz, p.179.

\(^{33}\) Dryden, \textit{The Hind and the Panther}, 1.105.
In the colloquy with Raphael there is no such absolute distinction of being, and the talk, far from overpowering Adam, seems to invigorate his faculties. Yet Raphael makes it clear that in relating the war in heaven, and we may assume the creation of the world, he is forced to accommodate his material to the human mind:

how last unfould
The secrets of another World, perhaps
Not lawful to reveal? yet for thy good
This is dispens't, and what surmounts the reach
Of human sense, I shall delineat so,
By lik'ning spiritual to corporeal forms,
As may express them best. (Bk. 5, 11.568—73)

Here Raphael is careful not only to accommodate heavenly matters to human sense, he is careful also to point out that the heavenly matters he is dealing with concern the human condition. He is thinking about the war in heaven and how it teaches a lesson in obedience. Unlike the astronomical "matters hid" that he later warns Adam from soliciting his thoughts with, the war in heaven bears on how human life should be led. He reveals "Things above Earthly thought, which yet concern’d / Our knowing, as to highest wisdom seem’d" (Bk. 7, 11.82—83). Finally there is Michael's revelation of the divine plan of history. There can be no doubt that this knowledge closely concerns Adam and Eve. It supplies them with the knowledge of how man is to be reconstituted in the fallen world and so tells them how to live and what virtues are called for from man going forward to the redemption of man in history. What Michael shows is not the secrets of another world. Yet the visions of human history are properly visible only to God's foresight. They are "the visions of God". They have therefore to be revealed. But instead of being accommodated to Adam's understanding (they take the form of signs to men by being made history), Adam's now fallen understanding has to be raised to the divine plan. By
the fall his vision has been darkened and his rational apprehension further limited, not by his creaturely state but by the impairment of it. The purifying of his "inmost seat of mental sight" (Bk. 11, 11.418) is the preparation to receive new principles:

Michael from Adams eyes the Filme remov'd
Which that false Fruit that promised clearer sight
Had bred; then purg'd with Euphrasia and Rue
The visual Nerve, for he had much to see.
(Bk. 11, 11.412—15)

The knowledge of the relations between God and man in history is not of the sort that natural reason could reach towards on its own account. It has to be imparted from above and, since it consists of divine promises, has to be received by faith. The contents of faith replace the prohibition of the tree in Paradise as knowledge given by God of the human vocation. They are divine knowledge and at the same time, as in the passage above, contrasted with the sort of divine knowledge and clearer sight the Serpent says is contained in the forbidden fruit, for they concern man's human being. So in a later passage, once Michael has completed his survey, Adam declares that he has

my fill
Of knowledge, what this vessel can containe;
Beyond which was my folly to aspire.
(Bk. 12, 11.558—60)

And Michael caps this admission with a further admonition to study only matters within the human scope. Having summarized the contents of Christian faith he continues,

This having learnt, thou has attained the summe
Of wisdom; hope no higher, though all the Starrs.
Thou knowst by name, and all th' ethereal Powers,
All secrets of the Deep, all Natures works,
Or works of God in Heav'n, Air, Earth, or Sea.
(Bk. 12, 11.575—79)
In all three cases of revelation, divine knowledge is imparted to man in such a way that it insists on the limits of human faculties. The revelation, whether it is the visible appearance of God to Adam, or the prospect of the War in Heaven opening backwards in time and outwards beyond the visible universe, or the prospect forwards in time into human history, violates the human perspective in order to insist on it. The truly human perspective is the epistemological principle of the epic and as I shall show later the principle governing some of its characteristic poetic effects.

Forbidden knowledge violates the truly human perspective in an unprincipled way. But this is a very general characterization. The sort of knowledge Satan holds out and Adam and Eve hope to steal is imaginary or vain learning. And clearly Milton could not remain human and give access to knowledge that would truly make men godlike. According to God, the operation of the forbidden fruit "brings Knowledge, of good and ill" (Bk. 8, 11.323—24). The idea that the knowledge enclosed in the fruit is godlike is Satan's:

Knowledge forbidd'n?
Suspicious, reasonless. Why should thir Lord
Envie them that? can it be sin to know,
Can it be death? and do they onely stand
By Ignorance, is that thir happie state,
The proof of thir obedience and thir faith?
O fair foundation laid whereon to build
Thir ruin! Hence I will excite thir minds
With more desire to know, and to reject
Envious commands, invented with designe
To keep them low whom Knowledge might exalt
Equal with Gods. (Bk. 4, 11.515—26)

It is hard to decide whether Satan believes or merely rehearses this story about forbidden knowledge. But in either case it is nonsense. The

knowledge Adam and Eve get from the tree is knowledge in the sense of experience, the experience of good and evil exchanged for the experience of good only. As Milton put it in The Christian Doctrine, "It was called the tree of knowledge of good and evil because of what happened afterwards: for since it was tasted, not only do we know evil, but also we do not even know good except through evil." Adam reproaching Eve after the fall makes the same point, though he exaggerates in his misery, saying they have gained only the experience of evil: the serpent's words were

true in our Fall,
False in our promised Rising; since our Eyes
Op'nd we find indeed, and find we know
Both Good and Evil, Good lost, and Evil got,
Bad Fruit of Knowledge, if this be to know,
Which leaves us naked thus, of Honour void,
Of Innocence, of Faith, of Puritie.
(Bk. 9, 11.1069—75)

The serpent, according to Adam, has taught the way to knowledge, but it is knowledge of their guilt and in no sense godlike. But if this is so, what can we make of God's speech in Book 11?

O Sons, like one of us Man is become
To know both Good and Evil, since his taste
Of that defended Fruit; but let him boast
His knowledge of Good lost, and Evil got,
Happier, had it suffic'd him to have known
Good by it self, and Evil not at all.
(11.84—89)

We must I think take it that this is one of God's sarcasms in the same vein as his speech to the Son in Book 5 (11.721—23): "Nearly it now concernes us to be sure / Of our Omnipotence." He is mocking the aspirations of

35 Christian Doctrine, I, 10, Complete Prose, 6, 352.
36 See Burden, pp.7—8.
the rebellious in his usual crashing way. On the other hand his tone is straightforward when he answers the riddle of the knowledge of good and evil after the fashion of Adam as "the knowledge of Good lost, and Evil got". Adam and Eve had an innocent knowledge of good and evil before the Fall. If they had been unable to distinguish these, they would not have been moral agents. And Milton takes great pains, as I showed in the last chapter, to make the innocent knowledge of good and evil a moral possibility. The forbidden knowledge is therefore knowledge only in a bitter and ironic sense; in every other sense it is an illusion.

But even if the promise of knowledge in the forbidden fruit is a hoax, the temptation to forbidden knowledge is taken seriously. It is the temptation to which Eve succumbs. It is necessary that the forbidden knowledge should seem worth having. And while it was not necessary that there should have been anything wrong in the benefits the serpent dangles in front of Eve, since plucking the fruit for any reason would be sin, Milton has chosen to represent them as wrong. Eve's rational desire for knowledge is good in itself; even the aspiration to rise in the scale of being cannot be wrong in itself, for Raphael speaks of the tempering of man to a more spiritual standing. What is wrong is that the desire is attached to the wrong sort of knowledge and that with this wrong sort of knowledge a wrong sort of aspiration to godhead is intimately connected. The knowledge held out to her does not concern her creaturely being and she aspires to enlarge herself not through attending to her human nature but through violating it. Both in Raphael's gradualist programme and Michael's eschatological one the human return to God is brought about through man's attention to his creaturely state. Both the sort of aspiration and the sort of knowledge Eve is tempted with deceive about the means of the ascent and return to God. Moreover, in transgressing her creaturely standing
Eve also transgresses the condition of human knowledge.

The epistemological principle at issue seems to be more important than the actual contents of the forbidden knowledge. About what Eve will learn the serpent is vague. This is peculiar since his story is that he has ascended only to human who was a snake, while she, a human, will see as a god, so there ought to be no reason why he should not be definite about what he has discovered. It is, however, not the least of the inconsistencies in the serpent's tale that he says that on eating the fruit,

Thenceforth to Speculations high or deep
I turnd my thoughts, and with capacious mind
Considerd all things visible in Heav'n,
Or Earth, or Middle, all things fair and good.
(Bk. 9, 11.602—05)

And again, moved to hypocritical indignation, he apostrophizes the fruit,

O Sacred, Wise, and Wisdom-giving Plant,
Mother of Science, now I feel thy Power
Within me cleere, not onely to disoerne
Things in thir Causes, but to trace the wayes
Of highest Agents, deemd however wise.
(11.679—83)

In these passages he lays claim to more than human insight as if he himself, far from stopping at merely human understanding, had ascended the whole way to divine. For the causes he speaks of in line 682 recall those Uriel speaks of in Book 3, where he praises Satan's desire to know the works of God because its end is "to glorifie / The great Work-Maister" (11.695—96):

But what created mind can comprehend
Thir number, or the wisdom infinite
That brought them forth, but hid thir causes deep.
(11.705—07)

Possibly Satan felt this as a slight upon his mind; at any rate as the
serpent, he implies he has access to such infinite wisdom. What he holds out to Eve, however, is not so much any definite sort of learning as the attainment of a god's eye view of things and a general speculative liberation from the conditions of human knowledge. In the dream he had earlier inspired, the sort of knowledge is quite unspecified; a taste of the tree of knowledge is enough to set Eve free from the confines of the earth to fly upwards to heaven and take a place among the gods. Here again the temptation is to violate the conditions of human knowledge, a violation whose image is the cosmic flight. The image of flight is less patent in the later temptation. Though the serpent may speak, he has not grown wings. Though both Adam and Eve hope to reach a higher state of being, they do not actually experience a flight up through the universe. Adam, as well as Eve, however, expresses a hope to attain a higher state of being, and both

fansie that they feel
Divinitie within them breeding wings
Wherewith to scorn the Earth. (Bk. 9, 11.1009—11)

The bearing of Raphael's discourse on the motions of the heavens should now be clear. Throughout the meal Adam has been very careful about the questions he asks. His speech is "wary" when he asks about heavenly feasts (Bk. 5, 1.459). And again when he inquires about the creation, he hedges his inquiry against rebuke with a condition and qualification that show he is studious only of the proper sort of knowledge:

37 On causes, see Schultz, pp.182—83. Cf. Bacon, Advancement of Learning, Philosophical Works, pp.45, on study of second rather than first causes.
And Raphael not only approves of Adam's caution but underlines the qualification that the knowledge is given so that Adam may "glorifie the Maker" (l.116). To this he adds the important provision that the knowledge within bounds shall show Adam his good fortune, a provision that recalls Bacon's second bound upon learning: "that we make application of our knowledge to give ourselves repose and contentment, and not distaste or repining." Pope's couplet, "The bliss of Man (could Pride that blessing find) / Is not to think or act beyond mankind" (Essay on Man, 1, 11.189—90) sums up Raphael's caution. To go beyond those bounds is intemperance, to take in what is indigestible by the human system "and soon turns / Wisdom to Folly, as Nourishment to Winds" (Bk. 7, 11.129—30). Here Raphael has turned the master metaphor of Milton's account of creation, the universal metabolism, to make what is really an epistemological point about knowledge fitted to the creaturely condition. He makes the same point at the end of the account of creation when, inviting further questions, he stipulates that they should be "not surpassing human measure" (Bk. 7, 1.640). It is also the point about his lecture on astronomy. Johnson took the lecture as a rebuke. Certainly the tone of Book 8, lines 85 to 90, is scoffing

38 Advancement of Learning, Philosophical Works, p.45.

39 In Areopagitica, Milton uses the same digestive imagery in connection with temperance in learning: "I conceive therefore, that when God did enlarge the universall diet of mans body, saving ever the rules of temperance, he then also as before, left arbitrary the dyeting and repasting of our minds" (ed. Ernest Sirluck, Complete Prose, 2, 513).

when Raphael laughs at Adam as the father of those astronomers whose conjectures God will laugh at. And the conclusion pointing the moral (11.167—78) would be intolerable among equals. But Adam, far from being snubbed, is grateful and expands on Raphael's moral. Moreover, we are told that Raphael's reply to Adam's question, which he has invited, is "benevolent and facil" (1.65). A superior and admonitory tone in an angel addressing a man must therefore be in order and taken in good part. Nor does it imply that Adam's question is a transgression. Raphael's lecture teaches Adam the bounds of human knowledge. It does not correct a wilful error. Indeed with Baconian limits, Raphael approves of the study of the sky. Adam may study God's works there, content with wonder, "which is broken knowledge" and which indeed he has expressed in the prayer at the beginning of Book 5. 41 And he may learn the useful knowledge of God's "Seasons, Hours, or Days, or Months, or Yeares" (Bk. 8, 1.69). I do not know how there can be seasons in Paradise, but clearly Raphael is encouraging the practical study of astronomy that appears also in the curriculum of Milton's treatise Of Education. There remains, however, another study of things above the earth which is not proportioned to the human condition, the study of heavenly motions as they really are in God's eye, and not as they are proportioned to human capacities. Consequently Raphael plays off the claims of rival systems in order to show that the dispute between them is as irresoluble as the puzzle whether or not the man goes round the squirrel that goes round the tree trunk. Raphael's exposition passes rapidly from the geo- to the heliocentric hypothesis and

41 Bacon, Advancement of Learning, Philosophical Works, p.45.
the effect is of a confounding of perspective. He deliberately leaves
the heavens in this dislocated posture, refusing to resolve the contradic-
tory perspectives in terms of the question about heavenly motions, only to
settle the matter by affirming the centrality of the human and creaturely
perspective. This is both a good example of the play with perspective in
the poem and a sophisticated way of asserting that "Heav'n is for thee too
high" (1.172) and so of admonishing Adam to "Think only what concerns
thee and thy being" (1.174).

To say that Raphael's lecture bears on the temptation to forbidden
knowledge is not to say that the serpent holds out the prospect of divine
astronomical knowledge but that, like the godlike knowledge the serpent
speaks of, the speculative study of heavenly motions lies beyond the human
measure of knowledge. The serpent's knowledge includes all knowledge
that lies beyond human measure, and speculative astronomy is only one
example of it. There are, however, good reasons why astronomy should serve
as Raphael's example of forbidden knowledge, for the study of things above
the earth had been associated with the cosmic flight to divine knowledge.
Pythagoras, in Ovid's Metamorphoses,

        tho' from Heav'n remote, to Heav'n cou'd move,
        With Strength of Mind, and tread th' Abyss above;
        And penetrate with his interiour Light
        Those upper Depths, which Nature hid from Sight:

        ....
        ... he discours'd of Heav'n's mysterious Laws,
        The World's Original and Nature's Cause;
        And what was God, and why the fleecy Snows
        In silence fell, and rattling Winds arose
        What shook the stedfast Earth, and whence begun
        The dance of Planets round the radiant Sun.42

42 "Of the Pythagorean Philosophy," 11.81—84, 89—94, The Poems of
Pythagoras was that "very god among philosophers" of the gnostic and hermetic tradition, whose revival in the poetic theology of the Renaissance I touched on in Chapter 4. There also I dealt with the cosmic flights of the tradition and contrasted them with the assertion of human creatureliness in what I argued was the true line of neoclassical humanism. One such flight at once representative and singular I shall adduce here because it shows how contemplation of the heliocentric system might issue in as mystical flights as those inspired by the contemplation of the geocentric one.

Behold now, standing before you, the man who has pierced the air and penetrated the sky, wended his way amongst the stars and overpassed the margins of the world, who has broken down those imaginary divisions between spheres— the first, the eighth, the ninth, the tenth or what you will— which are described in the false mathematics of blind and popular philosophy. By the light of sense and reason, with the key of most diligent enquiry, he has thrown wide those doors of truth which it is within our power to open and stripped the veils and coverings from the face of nature. He has given eyes to blind moles, and illuminated those who could not see their own image in the innumerable mirrors of reality which surround them on every side; he has loosened the mute tongues which cared little for intricate discussion; he has strengthened the crippled limbs which were too weak to make that journey of the spirit of which base matter is incapable.

In Milton's universe such flights are flights into nonsense. Man's heroic vocation is to stand in the fullness of his creatureliness not to fly. Mounting the universe is Satanic. In man the flight is Icarian as in Eve's dream or in the bathos that overtakes the rising promised by the serpent.


In this way Milton's critique of learning fits into the universal image of the human condition we traced in Chapter 5.

D. Cosmic Flights in Milton

1. Early Work

Yet it will be recalled that the cosmic flight is a recurring motif in Milton's early poetry. It is there for instance in "At a Vacation Exercise" where the prospect of the deep transported mind is much the same as Pythagoras's, the vision of God, the weather, and the origins of nature. It also recalls Cowley's Pindaric ode, "The Extasie," where the transported mind ascends through the weather and the celestial spheres to God. At this point in his career Milton was capable of writing in a platonizing vein and seeking in poetic rapture visions of things above the earth. The same sort of platonizing ascent into the heavens appears in "On Time" and at the beginning and end of Comus. Indeed the contrast of "the smoke and stir of this dim spot" with the habitation of the attendant spirit in the "Regions mild of calm and serene Air" (ll. 5, 4) recalls the diminishing heavenly perspective on the human scene in Jerusalem Delivered. The phrase, "dim spot" (1.5), is moreover picked up by Benlowes in Theophila, an account of the mystical transports of the soul, where it stands among many other thefts selected to convey the views of a soul escaped from the human condition. It must be said that neither "On Time" nor Comus treat


46 Edward Benlowes, Theophila, or Love's Sacrifice, Canto 3, st.xiv, in Minor Poets of the Caroline Period, ed. George Saintsbury (Oxf.: Oxf. Univ. Press, 1905), vol. 1: "Hence earth a dim spot shows; where mortals toil / For shot-bruis'd mud-walls (childish broil); / For pot-gun cracks 'gainst ant-hill works; oh what a coil!"
the sort of mystical transports to be found in *Theophila*. The motif of heavenly ascent is combined rather with doctrines of Christian temperance after the manner of Tasso than with the impulses of religious love after the manner of Benlowes. Still the use of heavenly perspectives in *Comus* is the opposite of the use of the perspectives in *Paradise Lost* to assert human creatureliness. And in "Il Penseroso" we have not merely the motif of ascent of "The immortal mind that hath forsook / Her mansion in this fleshly nook" but an ascent connected with "the Cherub Contemplation" and the gnostic love of "thrice great Hermes" or "the spirit of Plato" probably conjured from his sphere by hermetic arts. On top of this, the "Seventh Prolusion" speaks of contemplation as that "by which the mind is uplifted, without the aid of the body, and gathered within itself so that it attains, to its inexpressible joy, a life akin to that of the immortal gods." 47

Perhaps this is something of a rhetorical flourish, for the subjects Milton proposes to defend are those that tend "to the glory of the Creator and the relief of man's estate," and the transport of the mind is accomplished through a not un-Baconian course of studies. Still there is more than enough evidence in Milton's early work of platonizing tendencies that jar with the protestant and humanist picture of the human condition in *Paradise Lost*. We need not include in this evidence the eagle of *Areopagitica*. For though the image of the flight towards the sun and the mob of timorous and light-avoiding birds recalls the passage from Bruno, Milton is talking about an enlightenment of useful religious, economic and political knowledge, which he thinks will issue from free discussion. He is not talking of a gnostic flight beyond the human sphere but decorates his account of a

47 *Prolusion, VII, Complete Prose, I*, 291; and 295—96, and n. 9 for Baconian studies.
scheme intended to realise practical civic ends with a sublime image. It must be said that in those years when Milton came forward with schemes for a universal academy, the reformation of the church, marriage and the press, he took on a character to which a later age would give the name of "projector." But in those projects of his there is nothing to contradict the creaturely epistemology of *Paradise Lost*. None of Milton's reforms sets out to raise man beyond himself. In *Of Reformation*, the divorce pamphlets, and *Areopagitica* Milton argues as a restorer of Christian liberty from the impositions of false institutions. He intimates no new knowledge brought down like Promethean fire from an ascent beyond the human condition, and his method of argument appeals to exoteric authorities. The discrepancy between Milton's early platonizing and his later insistence on human creatureliness lies between his early and later poetry and barely involves his prose.

The obvious explanation of the discrepancy is that Milton changed his mind about ascents beyond the human world. The causes of this change can only be conjectured. Possibly his study of Protestant theology made him critical of the platonizing tradition. Possibly his youthful platonizing, which he seems rather to have entertained for its poetic possibilities than to have studied as an ascetic discipline, lost interest for him. Possibly revolving *Paradise Lost* in his mind and the subject of forbidden knowledge made him suspicious of godlike understandings. Whatever the cause, and I am not suggesting a sudden or complete conversion, the whole weight of *Paradise Lost* turns on the creatureliness of human capacities. About the angelic names and hierarchies Milton is discreet, about alchemy sceptical, and about the celestial system deliberately non-committal.  

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those matters that absorbed theosophical speculation he is studiously
vague, insisting on the glory of the infinite mind and the limits of the
finite one. We can add that Milton's change of mind is line with the
critical movement of the seventeenth century that reformed the style of
verse and prose and set in motion a new sort of rational inquiry.

Yet there remains in *Paradise Lost* an apparent exception to all I
have said about Milton's critique of knowledge in terms of the middle state
of man. The grandest of Milton's cosmic flights is his flight as epic
poet. In the invocation to Book 1, he speaks of his intention "to soar /
Above th' Aonian Mount" (1.15). In the invocation to Book 7, he speaks
not only of soaring "Above the flight of Pegasusan wing" (1.4) but boasts,
"Into the Heav'n of Heav'ns I have presum'd, / An Earthlie Guest, and
drawn Empyreal Aire" (11.13—14). And in the invocation to Book 3 not
only does he speak of his epic flight but he invokes the power to "see and
tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight" (11.54—55). It seems then
that *Paradise Lost*, far from turning from those early ambitions to fly up
through the universe, is their fulfilment. And in some sense this is
certainly true. Undeniably the epic poet succeeded in bodying forth
those universal visions that the youthful poet merely entertained. The
general impression of *Paradise Lost* is of how the imagination has been
set free to expatiate about the universe and beyond. If there is a
change in Milton's treatment of ascents beyond the human world, there is
still a continuity in his imaginative predilection for them.

If there is no change in Milton's treatment of cosmic flights, then
*Paradise Lost* is strangely inconsistent. Satan and Adam and Eve fall
because they attempt to rise beyond their creaturely state. The other
cosmic flights in *Paradise Lost* are Satan's up from hell to the world of
light and Eve's dream of ascending to the stars. Milton's poem describes
the universe and the condition of man. Discussing the inspiration of Jerusalem Delivered, I remarked that the power Tasso invokes as a poet is the same as the one that the poem celebrates. He imagines Jerusalem Delivered as the work of the same universal power that delivers Jerusalem. Similarly the Holy Spirit and Holy Light that Milton invokes to inspire his poems are agents or aspects of the divine power whose acts his poem celebrates. Invoking the aid of the Spirit, he asks for an infusion of power similar to the one that brought about the creation of the world out of the formless mass of chaos when the Spirit brooded on the vast abyss. And the Holy Light he asks to illuminate his mind was also an agent of creation and through its sovereign vital lamp, the sun, sustains creation. And as we saw, the unbounded divine energy put itself into creation by separating and bounding things and sustaining them in their created distinctness. It would be anomalous then if the operation of the Spirit and Holy Light were to displace the poet from his human condition. As for the Heavenly Muse, the same consideration would apply if it is, as some suggest, the Logos which informs at once the universe and the mind of man with divine power. If on the other hand as seems better to me we take Milton's Muse simply as a figure for God's way of inspiring the human mind rather than as a disguise for a theological being, it would still be odd if in its informing the human mind, the outgoing of the divine power should operate in a way that contradicts its way with other parts of creation.

2. The Invocation to Book Three

To resolve this puzzle it will be useful to examine the invocation to Book 3. The problem arises here in a particularly acute form, for the poet seems to pose as mystagogue possessed of special truths. It looks as though Milton is dealing in a theology of light connected with the theosophical notions of Renaissance platonism. The epic flight he speaks of sounds like a Nolan or Mirandolan ascent through the spheres of the universe. We might entertain the notion that at this point in the poem, the poet surveying his literary universe, as Frye's student of literature surveying his literary one, is rapt by a vision of galactic manhood transcending the human condition. We might put the problem in a more general form: the invocation seems too sublime for rational human communication; it seems elevated at the expense of meaning: it does not talk to us as a man with other men. The invocation would then seem the enthusiastic discourse of a Renaissance mystagogue not only because the epic bard presents himself in that guise but also because what he says surmounts the reach of human sense. It would follow that what Milton was offering us was a sort of poetic theology to be grasped by angelic intuition rather than the discourse of human reason. It seems to me that such a reading is entirely mistaken. I shall accordingly try to show that Milton has taken the greatest care to assert the humanity of the epic poet in the invocation and that not only has he established this essential condition of clear communication (that the poet speaks as a man among men) but also that the poetry, however elevated and pregnant, speaks within the scope of discursive

There is in the nature of a prayer for inspiration an element of mystification. It seems to ask for an access to a special kind of truth. And we might suspect that the things invisible to mortal sight, which the poet asks to be empowered to see and tell of are of the sort Raphael forbids to Adam, the secrets of another world the Renaissance magus sought to divulge in mysteries. But if we consider the conduct of the epic, this view looks less plausible. The poem in the first two books having treated hell and followed Satan up into the precincts of light is about to enter heaven and the solar system in Book 3. And simply in order to imagine heaven it is reasonable for a human mind to ask for a special privilege. In other words while the mystagogue might claim special inspiration, the prayer for inspiration as Milton uses it insists on the human being of the poet and the need for revelation if his merely human faculties are to be capable of the subject. The prayer for inspiration does not presume upon a poetic divinity. On the contrary it goes through the peculiarly Miltonic motion of voluntary humiliation in order to be exalted, of emptying himself for his sublime subject. And as we shall see he insists on his human weakness, his individual blindness, to become the vessel of more than human power. The invocation insists not only on his creaturely limits but also on his personal share in the impairment of the fallen world. The essence of Miltonic inspiration is not the ascent to another level of being through the liberation of a divine faculty within him but the raising of his human finitude by an infinite power from without. The same motif:

appears in the invocation to Book 1, where the infusion of the formless void by the spirit is the model of the infusion of power he seeks from the Spirit. And in the invocation to Book 7 he says that the ethereal air has been tempered to his human being by the Muse. So at exactly those points where the poet appears to forsake his humanity he is most careful to stress it.

He treats Holy Light in the same spirit. He is careful not to advance a private poetic theology of light. About the identity of Holy Light he is studiously vague. He suggests three possibilities, but is as non-committal about which should be received as Raphael on the alternative systems of the heavens. Only one thing is clear: that the light comes from God. If the light is "offspring of Heav'n first-born", it may be the Son as Word of God. If it is "Bright effluence of bright essence increase," it may be the indwelling light of the eternal and undivided godhead. If it is a "pure Ethereal stream," it may be the flowing forth of God into creation, for the mysterious fountain of line 8 is probably a periphrasis for the unknowable One. But in any event what is invoked is the active principle of God's wisdom. To be more definite than that would be to pretend to knowledge of secrets which have not been revealed to the human mind. All that is known is that in some sense God is light and that Holy Light must therefore have existed before the creation. Indeed even created light, as we learn in Book 7, was before the sun and


the heavens. As I have remarked in Chapter 5, created light is imaged as a physical continuation of Holy Light in the created universe. These things could have been assumed by Milton without presuming on any special admission to divine secrets.

Even though Milton asks for a special illumination of Holy Light, cut off as he is by blindness from its natural illumination of the world, the contents of this illumination are not esoteric. He does not ask for access to a special sort of revelation not made to mankind in general; he asks rather for a special access of divine power to treat what has been generally revealed in a spirit worthy of its dignity. Anyone who goes to Book 3 hoping to find a hermetic theology will be disappointed. The description of heaven and the colloquy between Father and Son may be inspired and some of the theological ideas expressed may even be in some respects idiosyncratic. But most of the ideas are common ground among Christians, and all are delivered discursively and clearly, the work of straightforward theological reasoning. One wonders then why Milton should make so much ceremony of introducing them. One reason is that he laid enormous store on the dignity and imaginative power of plain truth and particularly of the plain truth of Christianity. The eagle of Areopagitica soars because plain truth has been restored to him. It is the mystical and occult that darken wisdom and theology. So Milton invests the unmystical truths of general revelation and plain discursive reasoning about it in the imagery of Holy Light that the theosophical and platonizing tradition had usurped. Though the truths are plain and common, they are also sublime. After all Milton is writing the history of a miracle.

54 See above, pp. 248—50.
But Holy Light is the revelation of God's wisdom so far as it concerns man. So the prayer is for illumination and inspiration by what God has made known about himself and particularly about his ways to man through scripture and the guidance of the Spirit, for these constitute the non-natural modality of Holy Light in the fallen world. When the poet has to deal with the theological identity of Holy Light, which is beyond human reason and only darkly revealed, he makes it clear that it is "dark with excessive bright" (Bk. 3, 1.380) and because mysterious not something he can explain. That Milton asks for inspiration to deal with the divine truths of Book 3 shows that he has an exalted notion of the power of Christian truth to illuminate the human mind, not that he wishes to be lifted out of human nature to a realm of special truth.

But the invocation is important not merely as it defines the human position of the poet vis-à-vis his divine subject matter but also as a narrative device for bringing the issues of the poem to mind. Indeed one of the reasons for the elevation of the passage is that it is a point of vantage from which the conduct of the epic, behind and before, can be surveyed. Much is brought to mind in short compass, and this gives a sensation of heightened powers. But more important than this tremendous sense of enlargement is the opportunity the invocation gives for standing back from the course of the narrative and reflecting upon it. Far from being an empty or a mystifying ceremony, the invocation is a device for making the narration intelligent. It breaks the illusion that the epic is a literal record of sublime and supernatural things, and the dislocation from the course of the narrative forces us to consider in what sense the epic fiction is an image of truth and of matters that concern human experience. It insists that the epic is not meant merely to induce wonder and admiration but also to arouse thought and reflection about its meaning.
Until this point the narrative has moved from the infernal regions up through chaos to the realm of light following Satan. After the invocation the perspective abruptly shifts to heaven and the prospect of the Father looking down into the universe. In Book 4 the narrative finally focuses on the earth. Many epics contain some such traverse of height and depth. The first book of the Davideis for example has scenes in hell and in heaven. But the initial unbroken sweep from one extreme of the universe to the other and the coming to rest on earth is peculiar to Paradise Lost. The extraordinary shifts of perspective assert the centrality of the human action. And as with Raphael's play with perspective in his account of the solar system so in the larger scope of the poem the mind is enlarged to take in the bounds of the universe, only to discover itself on "this punctual spot" (Bk. 8, 1.23). In the invocation the movement from one extreme to another to assert the central concern with the middle state is caught briefly. Between the satanic perspective of the first books and the heavenly one of the first part of Book 3 there is an effect of dislocation and for the period of the invocation the universe is located inside the human mind. For the time we stop following Satan's progress and the opening out of the universe and see these things revolving in the poet's mind.

This internalizing and gathering to mind of the epic in the invocation takes place in two related ways. First, the course of the narrative becomes the poet's task of rising to deal with heavenly matters. The poet himself is undertaking an epic journey and hence the prayer for inspiration, a subject I have already discussed. And second, the universal images of

55 See MacCaffery, "Paradise Lost" as Myth, p.60, on change of perspective.
the epic at large become figures of the poet's own situation. Obviously the two ways are related since the journey through the universe involves universal images and the poet's situation as a man faces him with the problem of making a poetic journey up to heaven.\textsuperscript{56} I shall briefly look at how the images work in the invocation. This will make clear what I mean by the internalizing and gathering to mind of the epic at this point. It should also make clear how the discourse, though dense with sublime figures, is rational not esoteric or enthusiastic. It is true that the invocation does not develop through a logical exposition of the sort one finds in the Father's speeches, say. But the figures convey a train of thought, and what seems inconsequential or associational is in fact gathered towards the last sentence. And finally the examination of the images should make clear how the invocation is concerned with the human condition of the poet.

The chief universal image is of course Holy Light itself, which is not only heavenly but involved in the creation of the world and the sustaining of life through the sun. The divine effulgence of Holy Light goes forth, as I explained in Chapter 5, into creation.\textsuperscript{57} In the natural world the sun is its sovereign vital lamp, and the forms of creation, the vernal bloom, summer's rose, flocks, herds, and human face divine, are not only illuminated by the sun but reflect the light of the creator's wisdom. Nature is "the Book of knowledge fair" (1.47) because the mind that looks on the works of creation is enlightened by the reflection of Holy Light (as Adam is on waking from creation). The poet, however, is blind, cut off from the

\textsuperscript{56} On Milton's consciousness of human position, see Ferry, pp.24—25; William G. Riggs, \textit{The Christian Poet in "Paradise Lost"} (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1972), passim.

\textsuperscript{57} See above, pp.48—50.
natural source of divine illumination. But its operations are not confined to the light of nature, and the poet therefore prays that Holy Light should illuminate his mind by a direct spiritual illumination. He is trying to put his poem in touch with a power that the universal images of the poem show to be the lifemaking force in the world, and he does so by shifting from the outward physical continuation of holy light in nature to its inward spiritual operation. But even the spiritual operation picks up one of the images of the physical operation of light. The poet asks Holy Light to disperse all mist from the mind as the sun disperses the exhalations in Eden. In a quite direct way then the universal power of Holy Light seems at this point operative in the poet's mind. More indirectly, the anticipations of how light will unfold in the later images of creation are a way of bringing the whole course of the poem to mind and showing that the poem and its universal images are the product of a human mind.

The image of flight through the universe is inevitably involved with the image of Holy Light. The flight is a conventional image for the conduct of an epic. But here it seems peculiarly apt, since the epic is at this point shifting from hell to heaven. The first 21 lines of the invocation recapitulate the enormous universal vista that the epic opens out, for they take in Holy Light in the height of heaven and the Stygian pool in the depths of the underworld, and between, as if mediating height and depth is the light investing the world rising from the void and the poem rising from the void into the world of light. The vast hell of the first two books, by a startling shift of perspective, has diminished to a mere Stygian pool of the classical Hades. This is a way of showing that hell, utter darkness, is the privation of Holy Light. And so here at the poem's entry into the world of light it appears as a tract of darkness and a mere pool. Yet however suppressed in the presence of light
or tempered to a classical figure the regions of darkness may be, the lines convey an extraordinary sense of height and depth and of flying between these extremes. The image of the universe here copies the image of the universe as it unfolds in the surrounding poem. But in the invocation the image of the universe is not to describe the universe but to describe the task of describing the universe. It represents the spaces that the epic as it revolves in the poet's mind has to undertake in its course through the universe. But this is not the only way in which the image of flight shifts the epic inside the mind of the poet. Until this point the poem has been dealing with Satan's epic flight. The shift from the flying fiend to the flying poet is remarkable and even disturbing. Although the invocation surveys the course of the epic, there is no mention of Satan. I am not suggesting a demonic identity of Satan and Milton, obviously. The connection to be made is a contrast. Satan's epic flight takes him to Niphates, where he finds himself exiled from light; the poet's to this invocation, where it is true he finds himself exiled from the sun but also where he opens himself to the operation of Holy Light. 

The poet does not speak of his flight continuing up to heaven. Though in line 13 he speaks of revisiting the world of light with bolder wing, he is not so bold as to describe a flight up to heaven but breaks his flight at the natural world. And from line 21 onwards the invocation turns from flying through the cosmos to considering the poet's earthly situation. The succeeding images are of the world we know. So in

58 Cf. Biggs, pp.15—26, for contrast between Milton and Satan. Prof. de Bruyn points out that Bk. 3, opens with Holy Light and ends with the word "lights," which announces the arrival on earth of "darkness visible." Although Satan stands in the sun and then addresses it from Niphates, it fails to illuminate his darkness, whereas Milton, whose eyes can "find no dawn" is illuminated by Holy Light.
miniature the invocation copies the epic's sweep to each extremity of the universe to settle on the earth and the world of man. And for the poet to break his flight in this way is to make it clear that whatever is to be divulged of heaven will not be through a Satanic breaking of bounds, nor will it be through the sort of heaven-storming that lands up in the Limbo of Fools. It lodges the imaginative scope of the poem firmly in the condition of the poet's humanity. And more than mere human creatureliness is involved, for the blindness he laments is his individual share in the condition of fallen humanity and the world of woe brought by the fall. The condition of man the poem shows as the result of its action is here internalized as the poet's own condition. It is tempting to suggest in this connection that the images of the "dim suffusion" (1.26) that prevents the sun's rays from meeting the rolling orbs of his eyes and of the cloud and ever during dark that surround him are intimations of the inclement weather that surrounds the terrestrial orb after the fall (Bk. 10, 11.692-695). But however that may be, it is clear that the consideration of his blindness brings home with the greatest immediacy the limitation of the poet as an earthly creature and of his faculties.

What I have traced of this invocation shows Milton's masterly inturning of the epic fiction to the concerns of the mind making the fiction. The flight through the cosmos settles on the poet's earthly condition. The images of the universal action of Holy Light not only intimate the next stage of the poetic task but poignantly bring out the poet's blindness, which is also the particular mark of his earthly condition. His concluding

prayer for a spiritual influx of Holy Light asks for a privilege that will enable him to overcome the limits of his human condition without violating them.

In this account of the invocation I have said nothing about the beautiful passage on poetry in blindness that interrupts the lament for his blindness (lines 26—40). Here the invocation modulates into something mysterious and touching. The extraordinary periphrasis, "Yet not the more / Cease I to wander," (11.26—27) introducing the passage, a negation of a negation, transposes outward blindness into an inner world, where thoughts move voluntarily in what seems like free association from pagan muses to the brooks of Sion and back to pagan poets and seers and to the nightingale. The free association is a skillfully maintained illusion in keeping with the apparent interruption; the thoughts are in fact all about poetry and they do move harmonious numbers. The illusion is studied, I think, in order to seem like an inner groping when the outward sight has gone out. The passage gropes towards the final prayer without arriving at it. The shift from sunlit pagan muses (their haunts, "Cleer Spring, or shadie Grove, or Sunnie Hill" [1.28] are all seen as functions of sunlight) to the brooks of Sion he visits by night (where "Nightly I visit" [1.32] counter-echoes the "thee I revisits" [11.13, 21] addressed to Holy Light) hints at the sacred transformation of darkness through divine illumination. But the next clause with its double negative introduction recedes into pagan types of Milton's blindness, poets and seers who, unlike the poets and prophets of Sion, drew their inspiration from the Muses of the light of nature. The movement towards supernatural enlightenment appears as only one impulse in the train of thought and the nightingale that sings in darkness is a type merely of blind singer, though it beautifully inverts the invisibility of the world to the poet
into the invisibility of the singer to the world. The passage is inconclusive and looks forward to the last lines of the invocation for a resolution of the issues it has rehearsed.

The passage interrupts the vigorous course of implicit argument. It converts a certain generality in the treatment of the human condition, even of the individual image of blindness, into a tentative inner movement. It suggests more intimately than the other parts of the invocation the involvement of the poet's faculties in his poem. The purpose of the invocation is in part to gather the conduct of the epic to mind. The passage, though it seems to meander, is gathered into the argument of the invocation. Its peculiarly personal modulation, however, assures us that the gathering to mind takes in the inward processes of the mind, even its apparently wayward and curvy ones, as well as its more deliberate arguments.

In discussing how the conduct of the epic is gathered to mind in the invocation my aim has been to show how Milton's conception of poetic inspiration fits inside the creaturely human condition that his poem images. Like other forms of human learning in *Paradise Lost*, poetry is a human art, vain or sound as it ignores or studies the mixed condition of humanity. Although the prayer for inspiration and the exalted imagery of the invocation might suggest that Milton forgot the condition of "incorporated minds", it turns out on inspection that it images this condition with peculiar fullness. And in revolving the universal images of the epic in the mind, the invocation makes clear not only that the epic is the product of a human mind and so subject to the limits of the human mind, but also that it is an act of mind, a work of human rationality and not of visionary enthusiasm.
E. Humanist Use of Universal Perspectives.

Earlier in this chapter I tried to show that Milton's theory of knowledge accorded with humanist and empirical attitudes to human learning that became particularly influential in the later seventeenth century. What has emerged from the study of the invocation shows that Milton's idea of poetry accorded with the critique of learning in terms of the finitude of human understanding. Perhaps one of the chief recommendations of *Paradise Lost* to the succeeding age was the way in which its universal scheme asserted the centrality of human concerns for human minds. I have spoken of the way in which Milton plays off one universal perspective against another in order to affirm the human perspective. This is quite unlike the play with perspective in hell, whose effect is merely dislocation, the sense of having fallen out of things. The play with perspective I have discussed in this chapter is rather a finding of the human place in things, a defining of human finitude against infinitude. This became a common device of Augustan humanist reflections upon the great chain of being. There, it is a special version of the antithetical play of extreme against extreme in order to assert a central human mean that we saw at work in *Absalom and Achitophel*. The dislocation from his humanity to which Gulliver is subjected by the various lands he visits is another example of the same literary tendency, an ironic one because the final return of Gulliver to his humanity is left suspended. To conclude my argument for thinking that one of the important affinities between *Paradise Lost* and Augustan humanism is the epistemological principle of human finitude I shall look at a passage from the *Essay on Man*. A contrasting passage from Donne's "Second Anniversary" will clinch the point I wish to make, namely that what links Milton with the Augustans is not merely an attitude to the proper study of mankind but a literary method of using universal perspectives to assert the limits and at the same time the
centrality of the human perspective.

This to thy soule allow,
Think thy sheall broke, thinke thy Soule batch'd but now.
And thinkethis slow-pac'd soule, which late did cleave,
To's body, and went but by the bodies leave,
Twenty, perchance, or thirty mile a day,
Dispatches in a minute all the way.
Twixt Heauen, and Earth; shee staises not in the Ayre,
To looke what Meteors there themselfes prepare;
She carries no desire to know, nor sense,
Whether th'Ayre's middle Region be intense,
For th'Element of fire, sheedoth not know,
Whether sheepast by such a place or no;
She baits not at the Moone, nor cares to trie,
Whether in that new world, men liue, and die.
Venus retards her not, to'enquire, how shee
Can, (being one Star ) Hesper, and Vesper bee;
Hee that charm'd Argue eies, sweet Mercury,
Workes not on her, who now is growen all Ey;
Who, if shee meeteth the body of the Sunne,
Goes through, not staying till his course be runne;
Who findes in Mars his Campe, no corps of Guard;
Nor is by Love, nor by his father bard;
But ere shee can consider how shee went,
At once is at, and through the Firmament.
And as these stars were but so many beades
Strungeon one string, speed undistinguish'd leads
Her through those spheres, as through the beades,a string,
Whose quick succession makes it still one thing:
As doth the Pith, which, least our Bodies slacke,
Strings fast the little bones of necke, and backe; 60
So by the soule doth death string Heauen and Earth.

Donne is describing the cosmic flight of the soul when it is released from
the body through death. Many of the features of the journey will be
familiar by now, but the treatment is peculiarly Donne's. The dilatory
and curious description of the spheres the soul passes through paradoxically
suggests the spiritual speed of the journey, for only the utmost rapidity
could have prevented a mind like Donne's from entering into the inquiries

60 "The Second Anniversary of The Progress of the Soule", 11.183—213,
John Donne: The Anniversaries, ed. Frank Manley (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins
each tract opens out as the soul passes. In these lines, spiritual speed appears as motion. In the following lines, however, two conceits imagine the speed of the soul as so great that motion ceases almost. In the first, the motion is likened to a thread stringing the planets like beads, and in the second to a spinal cord stringing the vertebrae. "So by the soule doth death string Heauen and Earth." Here heterogeneous things are truly yoked together by violence, heaven and earth by death. This is a characteristic effect of Donne's verse, extremes brought together or things existing on incongruous levels of being united with a startling effect of dislocation. And here (and often elsewhere) the dislocation that goes with the paradoxical union is the separation of body and soul. Nothing could be further from the way in which Paradise Lost takes in the extremes of the universe to establish the earthly perspective. Nothing could be further from its affirmation of human creatureliness than Donne's violent undoing of the creature to link earth and heaven through the transport of the soul. The "Anniversaries" are of course extravagant poems even for Donne. They are poems of the contempt of the world. It would be rash to suggest that the admonition in the "First Anniversary", "Be more than man, or thou'rt lesse then an Ant" (1.190) expresses a serious and considered opinion opposite to Montaigne's:

"O what a vile and abject thing is man," [Seneca] says, "if he does not raise himself above humanity!"
That is a good statement and a useful desire, but equally absurd. For to make the handful bigger than the hand, the armful bigger than the arm, and to hope to straddle more than the reach of our legs, is impossible and unnatural. Nor can man raise himself above himself and humanity; for he can see only with his own eyes, and seize only with his own grasp.
He will rise if God by exception lends him a hand; he will rise by abandoning and renouncing his own means, and letting himself be raised and uplifted by purely celestial means.

61 Manley, p. 73.
It is for our Christian faith, not for his Stoical virtue, to aspire to that divine and miraculous metamorphosis.\textsuperscript{62}

What we can say, though, is that the passage represents a mode of enthusiastic poetry frequent among writers in the metaphysical style and that its play with polar extremes is entirely different from Milton's and expresses an entirely different attitude to the human condition.

Why has not Man a microscopic eye?  
For this plain reason, Man is not a Fly.  
Say what the use, were finer optics giv'n,  
T' inspect a mite, not comprehend the heav'n?  
Or touch, if tremblingly alive all o'er,  
To smart and agonize at ev'ry pore?  
Or quick effluvia darting thro' the brain,  
Die of a rose in aromatic pain?  
If nature thunder'd in his op'ning ears,  
And stunn'd him with the music of the spheres,  
How would he wish that Heav'n had left him still  
The whisp'ring Zephyr, and the purling rill?  
Who finds not Providence all good and wise,  
Alike in what it gives, and what denies?  

\textsuperscript{(Essay on Man, I, 11.193—209)}

The passage from the \textit{Essay on Man} considers the chain of being explicitly to teach in the concluding couplet contentment with the middle state. Pope supposes first man endowed with the finer senses of a creature vastly below him in the chain of being and the abyss graduating to the infinitely small. He then considers man endowed with the senses of a creature above him in the chain of being and the abyss of infinite magnitude.\textsuperscript{63} And having passed from one universal extreme to the other, he comes to rest in human


proportions and the limits of the human condition. The play with universal perspectives as well as the attitude to the human mind are, for all the difference of manner, comparable with what is to be found in *Paradise Lost*. Where the passage from "The Second Anniversary" sought apprehensions beyond the human condition by paradoxically joining centre and pole of the universe, Pope like Milton, displays the extremes of the universe to affirm the limited apprehensions of the human perspective. This is true at least of the broad movement of the passage. But in detail there are wonderfully incongruous unions which recall Donne rather than Milton. For Pope imagines man's limited nature with a fly's senses. The conceit of the human creature endowed with a fly's sense of smell dying of "a rose in aromatic pain" is as bizarre a union as the union of heaven and earth by means of the soul in Donne's conceits of the spinal cord and string of planetary beads. But whereas the union of heterogeneous things in Donne aims at an enthusiastic derangement of our human apprehensions, Pope's aims to ridicule the apprehension of things we would have if we slipped out of our human middle state. And the same point is made in the amusing notion that the music of the spheres would stun a man. So even where Pope violates the human perspective as Donne does, he does so to make the Miltonic point that our knowledge of things must be adjusted to our creaturely standing.

Milton and Pope use universal perspectives to establish what is human because they wish to bring out the precariousness of human finitude, the difficulty with which it is maintained. The abysses of space and being on either side of the middle state make it clear how easy it is to fall out of creaturely standing. The critique of vain learning and forbidden knowledge I have spoken of in this chapter is an application of the notion of human creatureliness to the mental and perceptual powers of mankind.
It is possible that Pope did not learn from Milton how to use universal perspectives to image the delicacy of the human position. He could equally have caught the trick from Montaigne or perhaps from Pascal's two abysses. I have been attempting to establish not an influence but an affinity, a common way of conceiving what it is to be human, and what I have said in this chapter corroborates what emerged in Chapter 5 of the common concern of Milton's and Dryden's epics with human creatureliness.

Of those accounts of man that speak of human finitude, Ricoeur makes the following criticism. "It is finite man himself who speaks of his own finitude. A statement on finitude testifies that this finitude knows itself and expresses itself. Thus it is of the nature of human finitude that it can experience itself only on the condition that there be 'a view-on' finitude, a dominating look which has already begun to transgress this finitude. In order for human finitude to be seen and expressed, a moment which surpasses it must be inherent in the situation, condition or state of being finite.... The complete discourse on finitude is a discourse on the finitude and infinitude of man." But I think we can clear Milton and Pope from his objection. For one thing, the "view-on" human finitude is something both Milton and Pope are fully conscious of; that is the significance of their play with universal perspectives to assert the human perspective. For another the human creatureliness or finitude that is asserted in Paradise Lost or Augustan humanism is something achieved by that reason which is also choice or by finely discriminating judgment. For such an endeavour, infinitude is "inherent in the situation" in the


possibility of error and absurdity that makes the standing within creaturely limits an act of free choice and intelligence.

**Conclusion.**

A full treatment of the affinity between *Paradise Lost* and Augustan humanism would require a far fuller consideration of the seventeenth century reform of learning. I have touched very generally on only two of its most important lines of development, the empirical critique of learning and the humanist study of man, pointing out that both are founded on the principle of human finitude. I have tried to show in this chapter how Milton's treatment of forbidden knowledge elaborates the same principle and here and in Chapter 5 how *Paradise Lost* is not the end of a line of humanism but stands in a line of development that continues into the next century. And this may be said without absurdly asserting that *Paradise Lost* is a Baconian manifesto or a work of Augustan humanism. It is rather to claim for *Paradise Lost* that it was written not as a monument to already dead ideas but in the vigorous current of the best that was being thought in its time. It is also to claim that Milton's attitude to knowledge was essentially rational and liberal. This is a conclusion that Howard Schultz arrives at in the course of considering Milton's position amidst the vast body of Renaissance and seventeenth century contentions about forbidden knowledge and vain learning, ranging from the pious obscurantism of a puritan like Webster to the sceptical obscurantism of men like Cornelius Agrippa or the more moderate scepticism of Fulke Greville. 66 Against this

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background the limits Milton imposes on learning appear liberal and critical.

Behind the seventeenth century reform of learning lie the efforts of the Protestants and Renaissance humanists. Calvin's *Institutes* start with the epistemological limits of human creatureliness: knowledge of God is based on the recognition of human finitude and the infinitude of God, and in consequence all theological reasoning that ignores the scope of the human mind and the peculiar way in which God has revealed himself to the human mind is vain learning. In this the *Institutes* rigorously develop Luther's insights. Similarly, as we saw, Renaissance humanism developed simultaneously as a critique of vain learning and a criticism of life. The study of man asserted itself against studies that were not for man. And here also the creatureliness of the human condition was the principle of human learning.

The principle is at work in *Paradise Lost*. It receives magnificent but not final expression there. The work of the Augustan humanists further elaborates and refines upon it. In this respect *Paradise Lost* stands in the main line of neoclassical humanism. And yet as I argued in Chapter 6 *Paradise Lost* is in its treatment of the Christian doctrines of the will eccentric as far as neoclassical humanism is concerned. The development of neoclassical humanism in its study of the human condition left the study of the will to divinity. What is remarkable about *Paradise Lost* is not that it treats divinity in epic form but that it manages to represent the Christian doctrines of the will in such a way that they become part of the study of man. In this *Paradise Lost* seems to me unique. No other work of neoclassical humanism breaks through to showing

what human truths are contained in the Pauline doctrine of the bound will and deliverance. On human creatureliness Protestant and humanist concerns might meet. But with the motions of the will no neoclassical humanist account apart from *Paradise Lost* managed so far as I know to penetrate the religious language they were involved in. Augustan humanism left them outside its scope. And yet though *Paradise Lost* has gone beyond the usual scope of neoclassical humanism in showing the Christian doctrines as a human action, it is there that its greatness as a humanist work lies. It is a great criticism of life because it manages to represent the motions of the will.

We seem left then with a two-stage account of the humanism of *Paradise Lost*. Historically speaking it at once works within the concerns and literary modes of a highly developed form of neoclassical humanism and goes beyond them. But it is precisely where it goes beyond that *Paradise Lost* is most valuable to humanism in its permanent concern with the criticism of life. In this it is unlike *Absalom and Achitophel*, which is a valuable criticism of life entirely within the concerns and literary modes of neoclassical humanism.

It is important to insist on the oddity of *Paradise Lost* in this respect. To think of *Paradise Lost* merely as a characteristic work of neoclassical humanism would be either to overlook what is most interesting in it or to distort the characteristic shape of neoclassical humanism. And still there is a sense in which the concerns of neoclassical humanism do bear on Milton's study of the will. It is true that it is the inward seriousness of Milton's Christianity that gives him his grasp of the will. But equally we might say that it is the neoclassical humanist study of man that leads him to represent the motions of the will as a human action. He might have written a merely divine epic like Beaumont's *Psyche*, if his
concern with the will had been merely religious. Although elsewhere neoclassical humanism did not succeed in humanizing the Christian understanding of the will, or withdrew from the concern, nevertheless it must have directed Milton to work out his Christian material in terms of the study of man. Given the neoclassical humanist shape of Milton's ambition and training in literature, he could not have written an epic about the Christian understanding of the will without humanizing it. *Paradise Lost* is an extraordinary work as far as neoclassical humanism is concerned. But then it is an extraordinary work by any reckoning. Perhaps then the best way to speak of its relation with neoclassical humanism is to say that in *Paradise Lost* neoclassical humanism made a break-through. The break-through was not followed up by anyone else and *Paradise Lost* stands by itself. Nevertheless if the most serious enterprise of neoclassical humanism was the discovery of the world and of man then Milton's study of the will is one of its most valuable discoveries.
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