MAGNANIMITY: MILTON'S CONCEPT
OF HEROIC MAN

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

That no serious student of Milton considers Satan the hero of *Paradise Lost* is no longer a debatable proposition. Milton's concept of heroic man, however, remains the subject of much critical discussion. The poet's iterated vaunts, he will sing of "deeds above heroic," has earned him the displeasure of a host of commentators, none of whom are at all certain of Milton's final attitude concerning what is is that makes men heroes.

This thesis, by focusing on Milton's Christianity, sets out to show that Milton's religious belief provided him with new and enlarged scope for the delineation of heroic virtue, to show that the new dispensation heralded by Christ made it possible, theoretically, for all men to heroes, and for men to be superior to, or better heroes than any of the worthies whose careers antedated *Paradise Lost*.

Accepting magnanimity as the single virtue that most closely corresponds to heroic virtue, I have attempted to demonstrate that magnanimity, what I have called perfect heroism, was not fully possible for man until Christ's advent. Milton, I have contended, deliberately sets out to show the inferior condition in which men lived before the Son manifested himself.

Basing my discussion on Milton's three major poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*, I have tried to show how Milton reveals the inferior condition in which men lived before the new dispensation. I have tried to show that perfect heroism is a manifest impossibility while man is innocent, while he obeys God's sole commandment. I have tried to show that man's lot after the fall and before Christ's coming similarly precludes perfect heroism, to show that man's imperfect comprehension of faith rendered him incapable of realizing his highest human potentialities.
Perfect heroism, magnanimity, is revealed in only one of Milton's three great poems: *Paradise Regained*. Milton's perfect hero, his exemplary model of what man can aspire to do and to be, is Christ himself. Innocent Adam's career is circumscribed. Fallen man's capacity for heroism is limited by his ignorance of God's grand design. Milton makes it very clear that the only *bona fide* hero is Christ, the protagonist of Milton's brief epic, a distinctively Christian hero. Milton's Christian faith permitted no real or viable alternative.
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The meaning of life here on earth might be defined as consisting in this: to unfold your self, to work what you have the faculty for. It is a necessity for the human being, the first law of our existence.

Thomas Carlyle

On Heroes and Hero-Worship
CHAPTER I
MAGNANIMITY: THE MEASURE
OF HEROIC MAN

Milton incurred the special disadvantages and responsibilities, as well as the privileges, of those who reject the ready-made structures of their time. The mode of his thinking is deeply libertarian and individualistic; its content, in many features, is broadly traditional. But it is always his own thought stamped with the seal of his own responsible choice and interpretation.

Robert M. Adams
Ikon: John Milton and the Modern Critics

Every age and culture fashion for themselves an image of what they conceive to be the noblest expression of human excellence. The hero is indigenous to human society. Because his career serves as a yardstick by which ordinary men can measure their achievement, he is, for all times and cultures, a model of what men can aspire to and to be. Indeed, if it is not for all men to be heroes, it is for all men to aspire to become heroes.

However differently he may be drawn by particular cultures, the hero is always a symbol of human nature trying to fulfil itself, to realize its highest human potentialities. He is a positive assertion of human worth and dignity. His career demonstrates to men what man can do, can create, can suffer, and can endure. He attests to the nobility of man.

The difference between heroes and other men is essentially a qualitative one. Everything the hero does or endures bears the mark of his superior nature. What he accomplishes or endures must be great, or grand, or larger than life, because what distinguishes him from other men
is that his accomplishments are greater, are grander, are more demanding and more noble than those of other men. He is a super-man.

The hero, however, must be human. His actions and his character must not place him beyond the comprehension of his fellow men. He must be neither invulnerable nor invincible; he must be man. And his struggle to assert himself must have meaning outside the personal context. Everything that he does must be significant and meaningful to others. The hero is a leader of men; he is man's representative and man's champion.

Courageous and valiant man's struggle to overcome his foes and the elements has traditionally been the province of heroic literature. To express individual man's determination, strength of purpose, conviction, valor, and fortitude is, indeed, the principal concern of all the epic poets. But heroic poetry is eminently a poetry of action. Though we may assume that the physical actions presented by the heroic poets were to mirror the heroes' inner qualities, the actions themselves came to be understood as the essence of the heroic. Milton's Christianity, however, dictated that actions not in themselves good could not make any claim to being named heroic, and his three major poems thus draw elaborate comparisons between apparent and actual heroism. Milton's method is to reveal the inadequacies of the conventional concept of the heroic by contrasting pagan heroic virtues with distinctively Christian ones. As John M. Steadman has demonstrated, Milton's strategy in *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes* is to construct a systematic critique of the conventional heroic formulae. Milton's hero, it is clear, is very different from his pagan counterparts. Moreover, in Milton's view,
his hero is more heroic than any of his predecessors in epic poetry, greater than any hero of the classical past. Milton's reasons for believing in the superiority of his own conception of heroic man comprise the principal subject matter of this essay.

The great tradition of heroic poetry Milton inherited had accepted Aristotle's judgment concerning magnanimity: "greatness of soul is the beautiful completion of all the virtues, for it adds to them its own greatness and is inseparable from them."2 Spenser's Prince Arthur, for example, represented magnificence (magnanimity) "which vertue for that (according to Aristotle and the rest) it is the perfection of all the rest, and containeth in it them all."3 But because it embraces and encompasses all the moral virtues, magnanimity defies simple definition or description. Though Milton succinctly defined it in the second book of his De Doctrina Christiana, acknowledging it as one of the duties man owed to himself, Milton's critics have had difficulty in clarifying the meaning of the concept. Accordingly, critics have examined magnanimity from a number of different points of view and have assigned various meanings to the concept.

In Milton and the Renaissance Hero, John M. Steadman discusses magnanimity as the individual's sense of merit, his consciousness of personal worth.4 Two other critics focus on Milton's Paradise Regained and consider magnanimity as the pursuit of honour or glory,5 and Merritt Y. Hughes traces the growth and development of a Christian version of magnanimity which emphasizes contemplation as the ultimate heroic achievement.6 Magnanimity in fact embraces all of these meanings, and
yet exists as the characteristic trait of heroic man. Indeed, despite the various meanings assigned by critics, magnanimity is consistently acknowledged as tantamount to heroic virtue. It is the mark of the superior man.

Magnanimity can be understood in three distinct ways, three manifestations of a single virtue. Taken together, the three elements define and comprise magnanimity. First, magnanimity is a process of self-discovery leading to self-knowledge and ultimately to conviction or will. Secondly, it is the pursuit of honour or glory. Thirdly, it is a fulfilment of the contemplative faculty of being. Magnanimity therefore implies a process. The magnanimous man must first justify his claim to that distinction; he must be worthy of the pursuit of honour or glory. That is, he must develop a measure of justifiable self-esteem. Having this, he is then worthy to pursue honour. But the honour he seeks must be the right honour. It cannot be, for example, the fame accorded by the multitude or titles bestowed by inferiors. In its highest sense, then, honour is the object the magnanimous man pursues. Moreover, because honour can be accepted only if accorded by peers or superiors, the superior man holds the world in small esteem; his mind aspires to higher things, ultimately to the contemplation of, and union with the divine. All of these manifestations of the single virtue must be considered. But because what constitutes heroic virtue is understood differently by different cultures, because magnanimity does not have the same meaning for Aristotle as for Cicero, for Homer as for Virgil, for Augustine as for Aquinas, or for Tasso as for Milton, we must also consider the tradition Milton inherited.
Milton's version of greatness of soul in fact represents a liberal borrowing from all of the writers whose work antedated *Paradise Lost*. To understand how Milton formulated his idea of heroic virtue, we must consider the different meanings assigned to the idea, and the different emphasis placed on particular aspects of the whole concept, by classical, Medieval, and Renaissance philosophers and poets. Magnanimity must, therefore, be examined in its three manifestations and from the points of view of three historical periods.

Aristotle's discussion of magnanimity is most remarkable for its apparent lack of concern with the superior man's grounds for judging himself to be worthy. In Aristotle's terms, the magnanimous man's self-knowledge does not involve any arduous process of self-discovery. The great-souled man's consciousness of his own worth is, in fact, a *sine qua non*; it does not entail any kind of examination for discovery. Aristotle's magnanimous man knows instinctively that he is superior to other men, and his life is really directed to making his superiority obvious to others. He thus adopts a certain code of behaviour and certain mannerisms. In the Greek ethos, then, self-knowledge is a comparatively simple task. Self-knowledge means acceptance of the fact that man has but one life to live. As Hector tells Andromache,

\begin{quote}
Fate is the same for the man who holds back, the same if he fights hard.
We are all held in a single honour, the brave with the weaklings.
A man dies still if he has done nothing, as one who has done much.
\end{quote}

(*Iliad*, VI, 318-320)
Thus, the great-souled man can prove his worth only by what he can accomplish in the short time allotted him. He is ennobled by accepting his fate and by continuing his struggle to live and to do in the face of irrevocable defeat. Man's life is fulfilled and his dignity asserted by the way he reacts to the grim truth of his own mortality. The hero demonstrates his self-knowledge, his magnanimity, by his acceptance of fate. His heroic spirit is revealed by his vitality, and his career is a celebration of life. He proves that he is in fact alive by killing other men. For the Greek poet the hero is thus a warrior, and the battlefield is a microcosmic view of life. Self-discovery leading to self-knowledge, magnanimity, means accepting as truth that "he is dead who will not fight; / And who does fighting has increase."

It is unlikely that the Christian argument that virtue is its own reward would have received a sympathetic hearing from Homer's audience. For the Greeks heroic virtue or magnanimity sought honour as its rightful due. Aristotle's superior man, for example, is one who claims high consideration from others. The great-souled or magnanimous man makes large, even the largest, claims and is entirely justified in doing so. But he must have a particular object in view. What is it? When we say somebody or something has 'worth' or 'value' we are thinking in terms of external goods. The greatest of these we shall take to be that which we assign to the gods as their due and which is desired by the eminent and awarded as the meed of victory in the most glorious contests, namely, honour. For honour is the greatest of external goods. The superior man, then, has the right attitude to honours and dishonours. Indeed, it goes without saying that he concerns himself with honour; it is what he claims, and claims justly, above all.\textsuperscript{8}

The paramount importance honour held for the Greeks is a logical corollary to the pagan world view, for when the lifespan is all, reputation or honour
becomes the end of life; to die without honour is to have never lived. The superior man is obligated, therefore, to leave an unblemished name and reputation to posterity. Claucus tells Diomedes:

Hippolochos begot me, and I claim that he is my father; he sent me to Troy, and urged upon me repeated injunctions, to be always among the bravest, and hold my head above others, not shaming the generation of my fathers, who were the greatest men in Ephyre and again in wide Lykia,

(Iliad, VI, 206-210)

Because darkness awaits the valiant and the cowardly alike, the hero's life is a struggle to prove he has lived worthily; to prove to the gods that he is fit to live.

In Aristotle's system of ethics the ultimate happiness for man was the contemplative life. To think, to contemplate, was to fulfil the highest aspect of one's being, because thought reflected the divine presence. As Aristotle contended,

the activity of God, which is blessed above all others, must take the form of contemplation. And from this it follows that among human activities that which is most akin to God's will bring us the greatest happiness. What also goes to show the truth of this is the fact that the lower animals cannot partake of this happiness, for they are utterly incapable of contemplation. The life of the gods is altogether happy; that of man is happy so far as it includes something that resembles the divine activity.9

Aristotle did point out, however, that the contemplative life was of too high an order for human attainment. If man could not live by bread alone, he could not live either by thought alone. But the principal emphasis is placed, as Arnold correctly noted, on becoming rather than on being. The truly superior man was one who attempted to transcend the merely
Whereas the Greek culture placed primary emphasis on the individual's duty to himself, the Roman considered man's greatest responsibility as owing to his society or state. The individual's sense of worth, then, was based on the contribution he made to the well-being of others. Magnanimity, with reference to self-knowledge, meant the acceptance and recognition of obligations to others. Despite the new emphasis on the hero's duty, however, and despite the fact that in the *Aeneid* (Book VI) there is suggested a dimension of being beyond the purely physical and mortal, the hero yet has but one life to live. His career, like his Greek counterpart's, is governed and circumscribed by the knowledge that

Every man's hour is appointed. Brief and unalterable
For all, the span of life.

(*Aeneid*, X, 467-468)

The concept of inward struggle, the process by which the superior man becomes magnanimous and aware of his own worth, does not occupy much space in either Virgil's *Aeneid* or in Cicero's *De Officiis*. The magnanimous man imposes his will—a will subordinate to both fate and to his state—on others, and his sense of worth is demonstrated by what he can physically accomplish. Aeneas is not seriously tempted to remain with Dido, and the notion that Virgil's poem is an allegorical relation of the soul's pilgrimage (implicitly involving a moral choice and struggle) is an interpretation imposed on it by Medieval Christianity.

Cicero called magnanimity "the greatness and strength of an invincible mind," and made it one of his four cardinal virtues. Though
Cicero expressed a strong antipathy to war, arguing that acts of peace were nobler, his magnanimous man demonstrates his virtue by actions. We do not find any suggestion in the De Officiis that the magnanimous man must struggle to recognize his own worth. The important point here is that the magnanimous man, for both the Greeks and Romans, seems to know his own worth and virtue by instinct, and he demonstrates his knowledge of personal superiority by acting accordingly. In classical epic, the hero is a man of action; he reveals his self-knowledge by acting rightly. Magnanimity as the pursuit of honour, was, however, understood quite differently by Greeks and Romans.

Cicero's superior man was ideally to avoid any craving for honour or glory. His magnanimity was revealed by his service to others, and his greatest claim to honour was his willingness to sacrifice himself for the commonwealth. Similarly, in Virgilian epic there is discernible a curious ambiguity regarding the precise meaning of honour.

On the one hand, we hear Jupiter's words: "To enlarge his fame by great deeds / Is what the brave man must aim at." (Aeneid, X, 467-469)

Yet, on the other hand, we recall the entire Nisus-Euryalus episode, which offers a view of honour quite different from its counterpart in Homeric epic. First, Nisus, though he admits to seeking glory, questions his own impulses and his motives.

Is it God that makes one burn to do brave things,
Or does each of us make a god of his own fierce passion to do them?
For long I've been itching to hurl myself into a fight, or venture
Some notable deed; inaction and calm do not appeal to me.
(Aeneid, IX, 184-187)

Secondly, though the two young men receive great gifts and praises from
their fellow warriors, they are told by Aletes, a man of "mature judgment", that "the first and fairest / reward will come from heaven and your own virtue." (Aeneid, IX, 254-255). Regardless of how particular readers choose to interpret the Nisus-Euryalus episode, it is obvious that Virgil's concept of magnanimity, the pursuit of honour, is ambiguous. Whether the poet relates the tale to show how youth is subject to the rule of passion, to show that without Aeneas in command the entire army is in danger, to portray human worth and dignity by examples of valor, or perhaps to criticize the pursuit of honour and reputation, one thing is sure: magnanimity has undergone a definite shift in meaning from Homeric to Virgilian epic.13

As Aristotle's superior man held the opinion of the world in small esteem and aspired to a higher mode of being, Cicero's magnanimous man, though it is not made clear whether he too aspired to a contemplative existence, did not concern himself with the praises of ordinary men. Cicero, like Aristotle, emphasizes the great man's disdain for externals, his contempt for all things worldly, and the best test of a man's greatness is this attitude. As Cicero argues, "the man who depends on the mistaken plaudits of the ignorant is not to be numbered among the great.14 Contemptus mundi is, then, an integral part of the pagan concept of magnanimity. The virtuous or great-souled man was one whose mind aspired to higher things.

From the classical point of view, magnanimity was regarded as the mark of the superior man. The magnanimous man demonstrated his superior nature in essentially two ways: first, he pursued honour and
glory; secondly, he rejected the way of the world. But as man's position in the universe was viewed somewhat differently by Homer and by Virgil, Christianity represented a radical divergence from both views. The result was that magnanimity took on a new and enlarged meaning.

The classical idea of a homocentric universe was now replaced by the Christian concept of a Deo-centric one. What this meant for man was that life ceased to be looked upon as a glimmer of light in an imminent and all-encompassing darkness. Rather, human life was now to be understood as a miniscule part of eternity. How one lived that short life, however, would dictate the kind of eternal life he would spend. For good men eternity would be a blessed state; for evil, a perpetual horror. The emphasis, therefore, came to be placed on right conduct: how should a man act in order to gain eternal happiness? Self-knowledge thus came to exist as the basis of Christian ethics, and magnanimity, in its meaning of self-knowledge, became a matter of crucial importance for the Christian poet who would attempt to portray heroic virtue.

C.S. Lewis has pointed out that the shift from the pagan to the Christian apprehension of man's position in the universe is accompanied by man's discovery of the "divided will," his recognition of the conflicting claims of the inner and outer worlds.

All our serious imaginative work, when it touches on morals, paints a conflict: all practical moralists sing to battle or give hints about the appropriate strategy. Take away the concept of 'temptation' and nearly all that we say or think about good and evil would vanish into thin air.¹⁵

One has only to consider a few of the major Christian poems which attempt to demonstrate heroic virtue to realize the truth of Lewis' statement.
Dante's *Purgatory* is one example. In order to experience the beatific vision, in order to experience heavenly bliss, the poet must scale the high mountain. The path is rugged and the climb is arduous, and though most English readers are tempted to conclude with Ruskin that the Florentine is simply a 'poor mountaineer', Dante is tempted—and must be tempted—to give up the struggle. Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* in the following century is another case in point. The drama and the conflict in the poem are the result of Angeline's temptation of the Christian knight. Orlando's madness represents his failure to resist temptation; he is a slave of passion. Similarly, in Tasso's *Jerusalem Liberata*, the conflict of the poem concerns the battle between reason and passion. The Christian champions are ensnared by passion and desert their cause. And, in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, the most interesting heroes, in the same way, are regularly faced with making a moral choice. The fact that Milton looked upon Sir Guyon as a model of heroic virtue reveals his own (Milton's) abiding concern with the theme of temptation. Indeed, the poetry which attempts to offer moral instruction and does not present a temptation motif is doomed to failure. Cowley's *Davideis* is a prime example. David's virtue and his faith make him invulnerable. When David, sleeping, is approached by Satan, Cowley assures his hero "though Thou sleep'st thyself, thy God's awake," and this, unfortunately, is the problem. There is no apparent possibility that David will weaken; there is no conflict, no drama.

I have mentioned each of the preceding works to clarify the importance of the element of choice in Christian portraits of the hero.
In Christian terms self-knowledge means understanding that one can be either weak or strong; one can resist temptation or one can succumb. The element of choice is crucial to an understanding of Christian heroic virtue. Between Medieval and Renaissance Christianity, however, there is a manifest difference of opinion concerning the meaning of magnanimity in each of the three manifestations I have outlined. This is especially evident with reference to the magnanimous man's sense of his own worth.

If the English Renaissance can be fairly looked upon as a rediscovery of man and his potentialities, then it is comparatively safe to call the Middle Ages a time in which man's relative importance in his universe was of small account. Though it is always a dangerous practice to make generalizations regarding cultural and literary periods, we can say that Medieval Christianity regarded man as more degenerate than noble. Virgil's question to Dante as he and the Florentine ascend the mountain of Purgatory is indicative of the Medieval attitude. Virgil asks,

*Don't you see*

*That we are worms, whose insignificance*
*Lives but to form the angelic butterfly*
*That flits to judgement naked of defence?*

*Why do you let pretension soar so high,*
*Being as it were but larvae--grubs that lack*
*The finished form that shall be by and by?*
*(Purgatory, X, 123-129)*

Man, to judge from the preceding passage, is indeed a wretched creature. Self-knowledge in the Medieval context really amounts to accepting that mortality is a painful case. Men are neither dignified nor noble. How then can they pursue honour?
Medieval Christian theologians and poets were unanimous in regarding pride as a mortal sin. As humility was recognized as the principal Christian virtue, its contrary would naturally be looked upon as the principal vice. Theoretically, if man were to be virtuous, he could not take pride in his ability to be so, and he could not accept recognition of his virtue. To do so would be to arrogate honour. Rather, he must transfer the credit (the honour or glory) to his God. In Medieval Christianity this was the prevailing attitude. Saint Augustine, for example, held that man, because of Adam's transgression, was inherently weak and depraved. Everything that a man could and did accomplish was the result of God's grace working in him. Thus, without God's grace, men were helpless and corrupt.

For men are separated from God only by sins, from which we are in this life cleansed not by our own virtue, but by the divine compassion; through His indulgence, not through our own power. For whatever virtue we call our own is itself bestowed upon us by His goodness.16

Earthly glory and eternal glory, moreover, are not compatible. Augustine argues:

he who seeks to please himself seeks still to please man. But he who, with true piety towards God, whom he loves, believes, and hopes in, fixes his attention more on those things on which he displeases himself, or rather, not himself, but the truth, truth to anything but to the mercy of Him whom he has feared to displease, giving thanks for what in him is healed, and pouring out prayers for the healing of that which is yet unhealed.17

Augustine's opinion concerning man's pursuit of honour (glory) leaves little room for human dignity to assert itself. Man was, indeed, a
pathetic creature. However, because Medieval Christians held that human life was a painful condition, a miserable existence which had to be endured solely for the purpose of ensuring one's admission into eternal bliss, contemplation became the highest human achievement. Medieval Christianity, in fact, understood contemplation in a form not far removed from the meaning Aristotle had given it. For Christians, man's life was a struggle to attain the knowledge of God, to be united ultimately with the Creator as pure spiritual essence. Though before the fall Adam possessed the knowledge of good without the knowledge of evil, it remained for him to progress to the perfect knowledge of God (the Good) by diligent application and by strict obedience to God's commandment. He could ultimately become, like the higher orders of angels, a purely contemplative being. Adam's sin, however, had changed all of this. Man had now to overcome himself before he could hope to attain intimate knowledge of God; he had to prove himself worthy of becoming a wholly contemplative being. How man lived this life, of course, was the crucial point. He had to conduct himself properly in the world of men and yet he had, at the same time, to aspire to a higher mode of being. How was man to live?

In the City of God Augustine makes a very clear distinction between the two modes of being. Because Christ had claimed that His Kingdom was not of this world, Augustine reasoned that earthly life was a painful obligation—nothing more. The whole purpose of one's mortal existence was simply to prepare for heavenly and eternal life. The city of God (heaven) is the realm of pure contemplation, the location where all the saved souls can experience the divine presence. The earthly city,
on the contrary, is an evil existence which had to be endured but which could not be embraced or enjoyed by the true believer. Life, in fact, was a struggle in which men had to choose whether to live according to man or according to God. The two, we learn, are in no wise compatible.

Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves; the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men; but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God, "Thou art my glory, and the lifter up of mine head." Augustine's asceticism, his severe and austere view of the human condition, represents the viewpoint of Medieval Christianity. Life and the world are to be held in contempt. The great-souled or magnanimous man, the martyr in Saint Augustine's terms, is ready and willing to shake off the mortal coil. In Medieval Christianity contemplation, therefore, means the almost total rejection of life; it is other-worldly par excellence.

Though in its essential outlines Renaissance Christianity accepted Saint Augustine's attitudes, it reveals, nevertheless, a quite different apprehension of man's position and his role in the universe. In the Medieval context the sense of human worth and dignity is remarkable by its comparative absence; in the Renaissance there is a curious ambivalence of opinion.

The literature of the Renaissance is singularly remarkable for its two contrasting yet co-existing views of man, his dignity and his bestiality. Man can be dignified and can reflect the image of his Creator,
or he can be depraved and beast-like. Douglas Bush has called this particular view of man the "simultaneous double vision," and he illustrates the point by a quotation from Pico della Mirandola. The Italian poet portrays God addressing man and telling him:

Thou shalt have power to decline unto the lower or brute creatures. Thou shalt have power to be reborn unto the higher, or divine, according to the sentence of thy intellect.19

Man did sin, however, and declined unto a brute creature. But, by the grace of God, man can repent his sinful condition and can attain eternal bliss. The task, however, is not an easy one. Even Sidney, the Renaissance model of sprezzatura, can complain in his Apologie that since that first accursed fall of Adam . . . our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it.20

Man's life thus becomes a struggle to be virtuous, a struggle in which passion and reason contend for the mastery of the individual's soul. The important point is that man can be dignified; he can be a worthy being. Self-knowledge thus comes to mean the individual's awareness that he can be virtuous and therefore dignified, or that he can be evil and therefore ignoble. This will be made clearer by reference to Aquinas, a theologian whose writing bears the stamp of the Renaissance attitude.

Aquinas' treatment of magnanimity, his attempt to 'Christianize Aristotle', left somewhat more room for the assertion of human worth and dignity than had Augustine's. Aquinas accepted Aristotle's definition of magnanimity as greatness of mind and made it compatible with
Christian humility; he effected a kind of compromise between the pagan and Christian attitudes. Aquinas contended that man contained in him the seeds of greatness and dignity (the gift of God), and contained in him also the inherent weaknesses of his fallen nature. But magnanimity, he argued, "makes a man deem himself worthy of great things in consideration of the gifts he holds from God." The very important difference between Augustine and Aquinas in their respective opinions concerning the dignity of man is the difference between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In Augustine's view man is more depraved than noble; in Aquinas', he is, if not more noble than depraved, at least capable of asserting his human dignity. The latter view is the one Milton embraced.

Because Aquinas did not deny that man was without dignity, he could argue that man's pursuit of honour did not run counter to Christian ethics with its emphasis on humility as the greatest virtue. Because the Christian magnanimous man sought to be honoured by God, he could accept earthly honour, the honour of men, on God's behalf. As Aquinas asserted,

Magnanimity by its very name denotes stretching forth of the mind to great things. Now virtue bears a relationship to two things, first to the matter about which is the field of its activity, secondly to its proper act, which consists in the right use of such matter. And since a virtuous habit is denominated chiefly from its act, a man is said to be magnanimous chiefly because he is minded to do some great act.  

Magnanimity thus comes to mean what we might call conviction or will. The magnanimous man wills it that he shall pursue honour as
a servant of his God, and the pursuit of honour thus becomes perfectly legitimate for the Christian. Moreover, magnanimity as contemplation was also radically modified by Renaissance Christianity.

Although the Renaissance accepted Augustine's argument that this life was to be lived in a way that would prepare man to live the other life, _contemptus mundi_ does not stand as the governing ethic or attitude. Rather the Renaissance ethic that is most remarkable is that men have a binding obligation to provide something for their fellows. The English humanist tradition is, indeed, primarily an educational movement. The Christian has an obligation to teach others, to show them the path to righteousness while on earth. In short, ethics becomes as much a part of Renaissance Christianity as theology is. As Bush points out,

> The broad aim of Tudor humanism was training in virtue and good letters; the practical aim was training for the active Christian life, especially public life. For humanism was not only religious, it was also both aristocratic and utilitarian.²³

The good Christian, then, did not reject life. He sought, rather, to make the "city of God" a tangible reality on earth. Heroic poetry of the Renaissance attempted, therefore, to syncretize the active and the contemplative hero in a single person—a Christian hero. Two examples will serve to make my point.

In Tasso's _Jerusalem Liberata_ the heroes are engaged in a furious combat to rid the world of the pagan menace. Godfrey and his knights are compelled to do battle with the host of Aladine. The Sultan is presented as evil incarnate whereas Godfrey is divinely inspired.
Though Tasso makes it clear that the world of the spirit is the real and more important one, his poem concerns the activities of men, and relates their struggle to make God's kingdom prevail on earth. Hugo's prophecy reveals this.

Ere many years shall run,
Amid the saints in bliss here shalt thou reign;
But first great wars must by thy hand be done,
Much blood be shed, and many Pagans slain,
The Holy city by assault be won,
The land set free from servile yoke again
Wherein thou shalt a Christian empire frame
And after thee shall Baldwin rule the same.
(XIV, 57-64)

The contemplative aspect of being is, we must assume, to be understood from the motives on which Godfrey and his legions act. That they are more concerned with the heavenly city we may be sure, but their worth is demonstrable by how they conduct themselves in the earthly one.

Contemplation, to judge from Tasso's poem, is not the end the hero pursues on earth. He aspires, rather, to make God's will prevail on earth, to make the world of men a reflection of God's kingdom. Though at the end of Tasso's poem Godfrey and his knights remove their armor and gather in the temple to pray, their virtue is primarily exercised in the world of men.

Spenser's Prince Arthur, similarly, though he represents magnanimity and has been considered as the link which ties the twelve moral virtues to God, and though he is in pursuit of glory, is a man whose business it is to do good deeds on earth. His career does not reveal any trace of the contemptus mundi attitude. For Spenser, we may assume
that contemplation means continuing with the quest, and maintaining a firm resolution not to wander from the paths of righteousness; it means holding to one's faith and struggling, by accomplishing good things, to make oneself worthy in the eyes of God.

Contemplation did not, for the poets of the Renaissance, mean other-worldliness. It meant, rather, aspiring to the knowledge of God and attempting to obey his will. It meant, moreover, trying to make God's will known to others; it meant being a "true, wayfaring Christian."

Though magnanimity is fairly called "the most Hellenic of the moral virtues," it had also, as I have demonstrated, been accepted by Christian poets and by at least one of the major divines of the Christian Church, as a legitimate Christian virtue. It is not, therefore, unreasonable to consider greatness of mind as the basis of Milton's concept of heroic man.

In De Doctrina Christiana Milton classified magnanimity as one of the virtues "more peculiarly appropriate to a high station." It is not, then, for all men to be magnanimous. But with the virtue of magnanimity Milton coupled another, which he called "lowness of mind": "thinking humbly of ourselves and abstaining from self-commendation except where occasion requires it." Magnanimity, though in Aristotle's terms it means justifiable pride, is, for the Christian Milton, a companion to humility. He thus defines his terms.

Magnanimity is shown when in the seeking or avoiding, the acceptance or refusal of riches, advantages, or honors, we are actuated by a regard to our own dignity rightly understood.
Christian humility, then, does not preclude a sense of worth or dignity. The crucial point in Milton's definition of greatness of mind is the phrase "rightly understood", for the emphasis is placed on self-examination and self-knowledge. Indeed, Milton's heroes are, without exception, portrayed as engaged in a struggle to know themselves. Before they can aspire to the pursuit of honour and before they can aspire to a knowledge of higher things (contemplation), they must know themselves—their strengths and their weaknesses. For Milton the Socratic *nosce te ipsum* is the first step in the process of becoming magnanimous.

Self-knowledge, as understood by Christian poets and philosophers of the Renaissance, meant, as I have indicated earlier, that man could be either dignified or depraved. With the growth of puritanism in the seventeenth century, however, human dignity took on a new and enlarged meaning. Burton O. Kurth has demonstrated that the Christian hero's career was conceived by poets of the seventeenth century as representing a small part of the cosmic drama, a scene in the universal conflict between good and evil. Because the individual man's life had universal significance, his dignity was greatly increased. Men could now see themselves as active participants in God's battle against Satan. They, by conducting themselves virtuously and by defeating evil in themselves, could be, as it were, soldiers in God's army. Self-knowledge, then, implies a recognition of dignity and of duty. Men can be for or against God, and their lives thus take on tremendous significance and importance. To be dignified in God's eyes they must be actively virtuous; they must struggle to overcome evil as soldiers of God. Milton's emphasis on
"a regard to our own dignity **rightly understood**" (my italics), cannot, I think, be overstressed in dealing with his concept of heroic man. But magnanimity, according to Milton, is not for all men. It is the virtue, rather, which is usually manifest in, and more "peculiarly appropriate" to persons of a high station. Men of high station are of course those who are called upon to make decisions affecting the lives of other men. To act as befitting their position they must be magnanimous. Milton's magnanimous man is a person of superior nature; he stands above the rank and file of humanity. And Milton's superior man, like Aquinas', is one who is "minded to do some great act;" he is thus obligated to assert his own sense of worth.

Milton, though he accepts Augustine's argument that without God's grace man is helpless, understood Heavenly Grace as implying a covenant: God's mercy, his grace, had made it possible for fallen man to be regenerated; but the final choice whether to be regenerated or to remain depraved is man's. Regarding the pursuit of honour, Milton's view is that the virtuous man can pursue honour if it is the right honour: the service of God. A man can have satisfaction in what he can accomplish because he is an active worker on God's behalf. Indeed, man can achieve what Milton calls "imperfect glorification" while he remains on earth.

**IMPERFECT GLORIFICATION** is that state wherein, being **JUSTIFIED AND ADOPTED BY GOD THE FATHER, WE ARE FILLED WITH A CONSCIOUSNESS OF PRESENT GRACE AND EXCELLENCE, AS WELL AS WITH AN EXPECTATION OF FUTURE GLORY INSOMUCH THAT OUR BLESSEDNESS IS IN A MANNER ALREADY BEGUN.**

Man, by believing in God, and by struggling to serve God, can achieve honour and glory. The superior man, minded to do some great act, lives
his life in the pursuit of that goal, and his pursuit obliges him to be actively virtuous. For Milton, man can pursue honour if the honour he pursues redounds to God. Man's faith instills in him the conviction that he is worthy or dignified; he is worthy to be a servant of God. The honour man pursues, in fact, is the highest honour; it is to be glorified or honoured by God. On earth, however, the honour remains imperfect, for it is only in eternity (in heaven) that perfect glory is attainable. But all men can share the kind of honour bestowed on Abdiel when the angel resists Satan's temptation. When God praises the faithful cherub for his strength, we learn that

To stand approv'd in sight of God, though Worlds 
Judg'd thee perverse (PL VI. 36-37),

is tantamount to the highest honour and glory. What is more, the same kind of honour, the same kind of recognition of worth, can be possessed by man. His conscience and his reason inform him that he, too, can be a good and faithful servant, and, for Milton, this is the highest honour. How well man understands his duty and how well he undertakes God's service are the measure of his magnanimity as I have defined the term in its second meaning. We may now turn to the ultimate end the Miltonic hero aspires to, magnanimity as contemplation.

It is hardly necessary to point out that contemptus mundi should not enter into any serious discussion of Milton's concept of heroic man. Michael's words to Adam on the latter's expulsion from paradise make this clear. The Archangel tells Adam:
Nor love thy Life, nor hate; but what thou liv'st
Live well, how long or short permit to Heav'n.
(PL XI. 553-554)

Human life, to be sure, is a proving ground. But it is not an unpleasant necessity. In Milton's view contemplation, the knowledge of God, was possible for men while they remained on earth. Just as man could be glorified, though imperfectly, in this life, so, too, could he acquire an imperfect knowledge of God. This, indeed, was the meaning of Christ's redemptive mission. If men accepted Jesus as the Son of God, if they had faith, they possessed an imperfect knowledge of God. They were, in fact, partially contemplative beings. They were not, however, either essentially or purely contemplative beings.

Merritt Y. Hughes has concluded that Milton conceived the heroic character as contemplative, i.e. as possessing an enlightenment which was intellectual in consequence of being rationally ethical and (thanks to a touch of the emotion which Matthew Arnold said turns ethics into religion) religious. At bottom, the conception remained that of the virtue which the Roman Catholic Church has long regarded as the beginning of sanctity, and proof of which is the first step in the process of canonization.

Milton's hero, however, is a Renaissance man. His career represents, if I, too, may borrow a phrase from Arnold, a mission "to make reason and the will of God prevail." In short, Milton's hero does not reject the world; he is, rather, an active worker in the campaign to raise Eden in the wilderness.

From the preceding discussion it is obvious that Milton's grounds for claiming his heroes are more heroic than any of the worthies in classical epic or Medieval romance are not entirely indefensible.
Magnanimity, the measure of Milton's heroic man, was, as Milton conceived it, the characteristic trait of a veritable super-hero. The magnanimous man discovered that he was worthy to be a soldier of God and was thereby dignified. He knew that he could be honoured by his God for his faithful service, and, equipped with faith, the imperfect knowledge of God, he could aspire to live on a plane of existence higher than the purely physical.

Milton's truly heroic man must be magnanimous, for magnanimity, as Milton contended in the *De Doctrina*, "is the spirit by which every true Christian ought to be guided in the estimate of himself." The superior man must recognize his own worth. He must actively pursue the glory of God. This is Milton's pattern for heroic virtue, and his heroic man must satisfy each of these requirements. The task, however, is not a simple one for any man. It requires, indeed, a perfect man. Milton's perfect hero, as I shall attempt to prove, is the perfect man himself; it is Jesus Christ. In Milton's three long poems, in fact, it can be seen that the only perfect hero until the coming of Christ could be the Son himself. It was, indeed, possible for men to be perfect heroes only after the advent of Christ.
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER I


4 pp. 137-60.


7 I use the term "classical" here with reference to both the ancient Greek and Roman cultures.

8 Ethics, p. 121.

9 Ibid., p. 307.

10 Aristotle's discussion of contemplation (Ethics, X) is probably the aspect of his philosophy that most closely resembles Plato's thought - the heavy emphasis the latter placed on man's struggle to attain knowledge of the Good (the ideal form) is really not far removed from Aristotle's concept of contemplation - Because Plato did not specifically discuss magnanimity in either the Republic or in the Symposium, I have not referred to him in my discussion of contemplation.


12 McNamee, Honor and the Epic Hero, p. 49.
The different meanings magnanimity held for Greeks and Romans are further demonstrable by comparison of Aristotle with Cicero. The Roman placed new emphasis on the moral virtues inherent in actions rather than, like Aristotle, assuming that the superior man was incapable of doing anything that was not good. Cicero argues that courage which manifests itself in dangers and crises is not deserving of credit "unless it is allied to justice and fights for common cause rather than its own advantage." See: *De Officiis*, p. 61.

*De Officiis*, p. 62.


Ibid., p. 174.

Ibid., p. 477.


Ibid., p. 250.

The Renaissance and English Humanism, p. 78.


27. Ibid., pp. 235-7.


31. Quotations from Milton's poetry are taken from: John Milton Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1957). All further references to the texts of the poems will be documented internally.


33. Works, XVII, p. 245.
CHAPTER II

INNOCENCE: FUGITIVE
AND CLOISTERED HEROISM

... the Master work, the end
Of all yet done; a Creature who not prone
And Brute as other creatures, but endu'd
With Sanctity 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 Supreme, who made him chief
Of all his works.  (PL. VII. 505-516)

Most readers of Paradise Lost are inclined to accept Douglas
Bush's opinion concerning the first parents: 'Adam and Eve are at first
artificial beings in an artificial world.' Though it is true that a
state of innocence is not comprehensible to most of us, and probably not
attractive to many others, there is another problem which the sympathetic
reader of the first eight books of Milton's epic must acknowledge: a
poet's attempt to represent a state of being will invariably be less
successful than the same poet's attempt to represent a state of becoming.
One has only to think of Dante's long poem to see the truth of this.

Paradise in the Divine Comedy does not have the same power of
attracting or involving the reader as either Hell or Purgatory. The
principal reason for this is that the third book of the Comedy represents
a condition of pure being. There is no progression the reader can follow
and no movement he can join. Because the reader has already arrived at
his destination when he begins the third book, it remains for him only
to experience a sense of fulfilment. That is, because there is no conflict in Paradise, the reader is not called upon to pledge allegiance or give support to any party; he does not have, as it were, to choose sides. The unfortunate result is that the reader finds himself standing at a considerable distance from the emotional center of the poem. Indeed, a situation which manifests no conflict is one with which the reader cannot identify or associate, and the reader of Dante's Paradise thus remains standing by the wayside. Milton, when he set out to portray the state of innocence, faced a similar problem.

Eden was "the blissful Seat," and Milton had, therefore, to describe innocence in such a way that his readers could immediately recognize man's first condition as being both beautiful and meaningful. If man's disobedience were to be correctly understood as the source of "all our woe," then Eden had to be an ideal, almost perfect condition. Milton's genius informed him, however, that an ideal state (being) was not intrinsically interesting, that a state happiness which was wholly secure and did not require the active exercise of will for its maintenance, was poetically vapid. Milton therefore chose to define innocence as a state of being and becoming.

Our introduction to Adam tells us that he is formed for "valor" and for "contemplation" (IV. 297). Significantly, Milton did not accept Saint Augustine's argument that Adam was created by God as a wholly contemplative being. Augustine's view, as Thomas Merton in his introduction to The City of God points out, was that:
God created Adam as a pure contemplative. Material creation was subject to Adam's reason, and the soul of Adam was perfectly subjected to God. United to God in a very high degree of vision and love, Adam would have transmitted to all mankind his own perfection, his own liberty, his own peace in the vision of God. In Adam all men were to be, as it were, "one contemplative" perfectly united to one another in their one vision and love of the One Truth.²

That Milton chose, rather, to portray Adam as both an active and a contemplative being is indicative of Milton's firm belief that innocence embraced the struggle to do and to know. Adam and Eve thus have certain duties to perform in addition to the keeping of God's commandment.

Not accidentally the first parents are drawn by Milton as laborers. The fact that they must tend the garden is meaningful in an actual and a symbolic sense. Paradise cannot be held without labor, and innocence and happiness require an active assertion of the will. Thus, when Adam views the non-purposeful activity of the other creatures which inhabit Eden, he is informed of his own dignity and responsibility as man. He explains the situation to Eve.

Man hath his daily work of body or mind
Appointed, which declares his Dignity,
And the regard of Heav'n on all his ways;
While other animals unactive range,
And of their doings God takes no account.

(IV. 618-622)

Adam is, and must be, an active being.

Milton also makes it patently clear that Adam and Eve's innocent condition is not the *sumnum bonum* for man. Adam and Eve are informed of a higher, more spiritual form of existence, and are told that this will be the reward for a virtuous life. Thus, in answer to Adam's
question regarding the diet of the angels, Raphael admits that angels,
like men, require nourishment, and suggests to Adam and his wife that:

... time may come when men
With Angels may participate, and find
No inconvenient Diet, nor too light Fare;
And from these corporal nutriments perhaps
Improv'd by tract of time, and wing'd ascend all to spirit
Ethereal, as wee, or may at choice
Here or in Heav'nly Paradise dwell;
If ye be found obedient, and retain
Unalterably firm his love entire
Whose progeny you are. (V. 493-503)

Adam and Eve have a greater good to pursue, a life superior to their
paradisal state of innocence.

Milton's genius enabled him to create a state of innocence that
was not beyond the comprehension of his readers, and one that was recog­
nizably beautiful and meaningful. However, Milton's solution, to make
innocence an intermediate state, a condition of being and becoming,
caused him other problems.

Milton had to show that something rich and meaningful had been
lost by Adam's transgression. The fall had to be recognizable as a great
catastrophe. But Milton's Christian faith held that the fall was,
paradoxically, a fortunate event, an evil phenomenon which generated
a greater good. Milton had, then, to show that innocence was less happy
and less perfect than the new human condition heralded by the advent of
Christ. Innocent Adam, as a result, had to be an admirable figure, one
who, theoretically, had the capacity for heroism. But innocent Adam
had, at the same time, to be a man whose existence was less happy, and
whose career was potentially less heroic than fallen man's. In short,
though Milton deliberately defines Adam's innocent condition as a beautiful yet imperfect one, though, ostensibly, he provides innocent Adam with the opportunity to fulfil himself and to realize his highest human poten-
tialities, innocent Adam is not—and cannot be—the ideal heroic man as conceived by Milton. I shall attempt to show that Adam's innocence in fact precludes his being what I have called a perfect Miltonic hero, to show that innocence is, indeed, a fugitive and cloistered heroism.

The pattern of heroic magnanimity I have outlined in the first chapter of this essay involves three distinct elements: self-knowledge, the pursuit of honour and glory, and contemplation. Milton's magnanimous man must first correctly understand himself; he must be aware of his own humanity, his strengths and his weaknesses. To the process by which Adam comes to know himself we must now turn. How does innocent Adam learn of his own dignity and worth, and of what does he deem himself worthy?

By nature Adam is an inquisitive being. He has a natural dis-
position to question and to seek to know. Thus, when he wakens to become a sentient being, it is only a matter of minutes until he begins to question. He wants to know who he is, where he is, and how he came to exist.

... who I was, or where, or from what cause,
I knew not; to speak I tri'd, and forthwith spake,
My Tongue obey'd and readily could name
Whate'er I saw. Thou Sun, said I, fair Light,
And thou enlight'n'd Earth, so fresh and gay,
Ye Hills and Dales, ye Rivers, Woods, and Plains,
And ye that live and move, fâir Creatures, tell,
Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?
(VIII. 270-278)
Adam's exultation in his own vitality and his delight in the beauty which surrounds him (VIII. 259-269) soon, however, give place to pensive-ness (VIII. 283-287). He is baffled by the mystery of his existence. But in addition to his natural curiosity, Adam, we discover, has an innate capacity to reason.

Adam knows intuitively that he exists and that he is happy, and he concludes from this that he must, therefore, have been created by a benevolent power far greater than himself.

... how came I thus, how here?
Not of myself; by some great Maker then,
In goodness and in power preeminent;
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 than I know.
(VIII. 278-283)

Adam's recognition of the fact that he owes his being to a greater power is the result of a reasoning process. Whether the reasoning is simple or complex, Adam's "proof" of God's existence is substantially the same as the one Milton put forward in De Doctrina Christiana, and it is essentially the same 'proof' as that offered by either Descartes or by Leibnitz. We see, then, that innocent Adam is a distinctively human being—before he is informed of his own humanity—before God speaks to him. Thus far, Adam's knowledge is the result of the active exercise of his will to know and his power to reason. And, indeed, by far the greater part of what Adam learns is the result of his own activity.

When God first visits Adam, he gives only a modicum of information. God tells Adam his (Adam's) name, that he is man, that the garden is
the gift of empire over which Adam alone shall rule, that the fruit of
the tree of knowledge is forbidden on pain of death, and that Adam is
superior to all other creatures which inhabit earth (VIII. 319-341).
This knowledge is revealed to Adam without any request on his part.
Everything else that Adam comes to know, however, is a result of his
own propensity to question, his ability to reason, or his own experience. 4

After naming all the animals that populate the earth and remarking
that all are paired, Adam asks his Creator why, as the superior being
in God's creation, he alone should be without a mate. Adam knows, for
God has told him, that he is a higher being. But he reasons for himself
that he can find no fit companion for himself, that the higher faculties
he possesses separate him from the rest of creation (VIII. 381-389).
He realizes, moreover, that he is not self-sufficient; he requires a
companion, a rational being like himself (VIII. 389-397). Knowing this
much, Adam has recognized his own worth and his limitations. He under­
stands that he is a being superior to the other creatures in Eden. Yet,
at the same time, he recognizes that he is not as powerful or worthy as the:
entirely self-sufficient God. Thus, when God suggests that because He
does not require a companion and that Adam should not then require one
(VIII. 403-411), Adam replies:

Thou in thyself art perfect, and in thee
Is no deficiency found; not so is Man,
But in degree, the cause of his desire
By conversation with his like to help,
Or solace his defects. No need that thou
Shouldst propagate, already infinite;
And through all numbers absolute, though One;
But Man by number is to manifest
His single imperfection, and beget
Like of his like, his Image multipli'd,
In unity defective, which requires
Collateral love, and dearest amity.
Thou in thy secrecy although alone,
Best with thyself accompanied, seek'st not
Social communication, yet so pleas'd,
Canst raise thy Creature to what highth thou wilt
Of Union or Communion, deifi'd;
I by conversing cannot these erect
From prone, nor in their ways complacence find.
(VIII. 415-433)

Knowing that God created the world and man, Adam reasons for himself
that he is not God's peer. Adam's sense of worth is thus accompanied
by an awareness of his own weakness. What is of special importance here
is that God praises Adam for his questioning spirit and reasoning ability
(VIII. 437-444). Adam's worth is first tested, then acknowledged by his
Creator.

Shortly after waking from his dream in which he had witnessed
God's creation of Eve, Adam first experiences the power of passion
(VIII. 530-559). Though he understands that Eve is not his mental equal,
that he is the superior being (VIII. 540-542), Adam also recognizes his
vulnerability. As he admits,

... so absolute she seems
And in herself complete, so well to know
Her own, that what she wills to do or say,
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best;
All higher knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with her
Loses discount'nanc't, and like folly shows;
Authority and Reason on her wait,
As one intended first, not after made
Occasionally ... (VIII. 547-556)

Eve's charms and graces are, Adam discovers, potentially more powerful
than his reason and his knowledge of personal superiority. Again Adam
has recognized his own worth and his limitations--from personal experience. He has not been warned that passion is a powerful force with which the superior man must learn to contend. Rather, he discovers it for himself.

When Satan reconnoiters Eden in an effort to evaluate the difficulties he will encounter in trying to corrupt Adam and Eve, we are introduced to an Adam who is not yet equipped with any further measure of divine instruction. Adam is substantially the same figure now as he was at the time of Eve's creation--except that he has had more experience and more time to use his reason. Adam and Eve, as the Adversary witnesses, joy to be alive. Recognizing that their "one easy prohibition" is a small price to pay for the happiness they enjoy, Adam reasons that the God who freely gave them their bliss must be good and liberal. As Adam explains to Eve,

... needs must the Power
That made us, and for us this ample World
Be infinitely good, and of his good
As liberal and free as infinite,
That rais'd us from the dust and plac't us here
In all this happiness, who at his hand
Have nothing merited, nor can perform
Aught whereof hee hath need ... .

(IV. 412-419)

Once more Adam manifests his capacity to reason. He is an active, thinking being. We also discover that Adam and Eve are aware of their own human dignity.

Eve has learned by experience that Adam is her superior (IV. 445-447), and yet she had intuitively recognized that she was a worthy mate for him. Adam is aware that man, alone of all created beings, has dignity
Endowed with reason, and therefore with a larger capacity for enjoyment, man, as Adam recognizes, has dignity in the eyes of his Creator. Theoretically, he can be magnanimous "to correspond with Heav'n" (VII. 510).

When Raphael makes his visit to Eden it is significant that Adam goes out to meet him (V. 350-360). Adam's manner is natural and dignified. He is not "aw'd", but he recognizes the superiority of the angel. Adam is conscious of his own worth and, thus, talks to the angel "as friend with friend." It is Adam who invites the angel to dine with man. It is Adam who desires to know what passes in heaven and how the world was created. It is Adam who inquires concerning the motions of the planets, and Adam who offers to tell the angel of his (Adam's) own creation. In short, everything that Adam learns from God's messenger is given in answer to Adam's questions. To be sure, God had told Raphael to draw Adam to discourse (V. 233-234), but the fact remains that Milton makes it expressly clear that Adam's acquisition of knowledge is the result of his own desire to learn and to know. Indeed, of all the information Raphael gives to Adam concerning the universe and the history of the beings which inhabit it, the most important knowledge Adam acquires is that which informs him of himself, of his own strengths and weaknesses.

Raphael's account of the war in Heaven and his relation of God's creation of the world are directed to this purpose. From Raphael's account of the battle in heaven Adam learns that he, like Abdiel, can "stand approv'd in sight of God," or, like Satan, he can be consigned to misery and damnation. From the story of creation Adam learns that he
is the "Master work", that, though vastly inferior to God, he is dignified and worthy—if he remains obedient. These are the most important elements of Raphael's teaching, and if Adam has learned his lessons properly, he will have a regard to his "own dignity rightly understood." One final illustration will serve to make my point.

When Adam tells Raphael of his vulnerability to Eve's charms, the angel reminds him that he must not lose sight of his own superiority. Adam fears that there is a flaw in his character, that he is not made perfect as he has been told, because his wisdom and his superior gifts are powerless before Eve's delightful gifts (VIII. 547-556). Raphael tells him:

... Accuse not Nature, she hath done her part; 
Do thou but thine, and be not diffident 
Of wisdom, she deserts thee not, if thou 
Dismiss not her, when most thou need'st her nigh, 
By attributing overmuch to things 
Less excellent, as thou thyself perceiv'st. 
For what admir'st thou, what transports thee so, 
An outside? fair no doubt, and worthy well 
Thy cherishing, thy honoring and thy love, 
Not thy subjection: weigh with her thyself; 
Then value: Oft-times nothing profits more 
Than self-esteem, grounded on just and right 
Well manag'd; of that skill the more thou know'st, 
The more she will acknowledge thee her Head, 
And to realities yield all her shows. 
(VIII. 561-575).

There can be no doubt that if Adam understands and accepts what Raphael tells him here he will have acquired the knowledge that he is a dignified and worthy being. Adam, however, does not learn his lesson properly and he sins. Failing to be "actuated by a regard" to his own "dignity rightly understood," Adam loses his innocence. He fails to be magnanimous
and cannot, then, be a bona fide hero. The question we must ask, however, is whether Adam, if he had not sinned, could have been a perfect Miltonic hero. Adam, Milton makes it very clear, should have possessed a sense of worth. But what, if anything, could Adam deem himself worthy of?

Milton's theology embraces the view that God created the world to augment His own glory. In De Doctrina Milton argued:

CREATION is that act whereby GOD THE FATHER PRODUCED EVERY THING THAT EXISTS BY HIS WORD AND SPIRIT, that is, BY HIS WILL, FOR THE MANIFESTATION OF THE GLORY OF HIS POWER AND GOODNESS.

Indeed, the Christian doctrine itself, as Milton pointed out, was "the divine revelation concerning the nature and worship of the deity for the promotion of the glory of God, and the salvation of mankind." Moreover, the same view is implicit throughout Paradise Lost. When, for example, Raphael tells Adam how God had made the world and man, the angel explains, too, how the heavenly host reacted to the Creator's accomplishment. The angelic choir sings:

... Thrice happy men,
And Sons of men, whom God hath thus advanc'\'t,
Created in his Image, there to dwell
And worship him ... (VII. 625-628)

And Adam learns that the worship of God is man's principal duty. But the important point here is the actual meaning Milton assigned to worship.

In De Doctrina Christiana Milton defined worship as "the love of God." To love God, it is obvious, means to glorify God. Indeed, God created man in His own image and gave him the power to reason so that man might understand the divine goodness and thus willingly praise
and honour the divine beneficence. Man was to be the "Master work," a being "endu'd/ with Sanctity of Reason" (VII. 507-508). Adam learns that God, after the revolt in heaven, created man as a proof that evil was powerless, to prove that He could produce good from evil. Adam hears the angels sing to God,

. . . Who seeks
To lessen thee, against his purpose serves
To manifest the more thy might: his evil
Thou usest, and from thence creat' st more good.
(VII. 613-616)

Adam learns, then, that he has been created to augment his Creator's glory, and to prove the impotence of evil. In man's "happiest life" he glorifies his God by his willing obedience. By proving that he is capable of resisting and rejecting any temptation to wander from the path that has been shown him, he honours and glorifies his Creator. But can an Adam who is ignorant of evil, who has been warned only of its existence, possibly have an active role to play? Can innocent Adam be aware that his strength, his rejection of evil, will augment God's glory? The answer, I think, is that he cannot.

Adam is aware that his obedience will ensure the maintenance of his own happiness, and the happiness of his wife and his progeny. But his innocence precludes his understanding that it is in his power to prevent the existence of evil. Though Adam knows that his strength will cause Raphael and the other angels great joy, he does not comprehend that he can actively pursue God's glory. In short, Adam's ignorance of evil makes his virtue meaningful only to himself and his progeny.
For example, of the tree of knowledge, God had warned him:

The day thou eat'st thereof, my sole command
Transgrest, inevitably thou shalt die;
From that day mortal, and this happy State
Shalt lose, expell'd from hence into a World
Of woe and sorrow. (VIII. 329-333)

God did not tell him, however, that if (Adam) did not eat, his action would augment the Creator's glory. Adam does not, in fact, recognize that he can honour or glorify God. This can be made clearer by a few illustrations.

Abdiel's rejection of Satan is ostensibly the best model of virtue Adam is informed of. The angel's refusal to "swerve from Truth" merits God's approval, and this, indeed, is the highest honor or glory. But Adam is not aware that he can pursue the same honor. Raphael's final warning to Adam does not imply that God will be honored by Adam's conquest of evil. The angel admonishes:

Be strong, live happy, and love, but first of all
Him whom to love is to obey, and keep
His great command; take heed lest Passion sway
Thy Judgment to do aught, which else free Will
Would not admit; thine and of all thy Sons
The weal or woe in thee is plac't; beware,
I in thy persevering shall rejoice,
And all the Blest: stand fast; to stand or fall
Free in thine own Arbitrement it lies,
Perfet within, no outward aid require;
And all temptation to transgress repel.
(VIII. 633-643)

That Adam's rejection of evil will please God is made clear, but that he can thereby honour or glorify God is not explained or expressed. Innocent man, unlike his Christian counterpart, is not aware that he can be a
soldier in God's army, a combatant in the universal struggle against evil. Innocent Adam knows only that he can be happy or miserable and that the choice is his. One further example will serve to make my point.

When Adam asks Raphael for information concerning the visible universe, the angel hastens to explain that certain knowledge is forbidden to man. Adam, indeed, is made very much aware of the fact that there exists a great gulf between Heaven and earth. While it is true that Adam and Eve are in perpetual communion with Heaven, and while it is true that Heaven and earth are not greatly dissimilar, the fact remains: innocent man's lot on earth is to live in happy ignorance of what he cannot immediately perceive or comprehend. Raphael thus tells Adam:

Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid,
Leave them to God above, him serve and fear;
Of other creatures, as him pleases best,
Wherever plac't, let him dispose: joy thou
In what he gives to thee, this Paradise
And thy fair Eve: Heav'n is for thee too high
To know what passes there: be lowly wise:
Think only what concerns thee and thy being;
Dream not of other Worlds, what Creatures there
Live, in what state, condition or degree,
Contented that thus far hath been reveal'd
Not of Earth only but of highest Heav'n.

(VIII. 167-78)

Despite the fact that Raphael does spend a considerable amount of time discussing "what passes there," Adam is informed that ignorance is indeed bliss. Though Adam learns that the gulf may be bridged at some later time, and that this is man's normal course, the problem remains: Adam's appetite for knowledge has been whetted by Raphael and partially satisfied, but Adam is then told he should not have hunger. What is even more
important here, however, is that Adam's innocence precludes his pursuit of honour or glory. That is, Adam's life before the fall is rigidly circumscribed to imply that he cannot have an active role to play in the cosmic battle against evil, that war which, if waged strenuously, makes the human soldier an active worker on God's behalf. Adam does not know--he has not been told—that he can be an active participant in the universal struggle, a human hero whose life is dedicated and devoted to the augmentation of God's glory. Adam knows only that he can merit God's approval, and man's role, his contribution, thus becomes patently negligible. Innocence means that Adam cannot pursue honour or glory in the manner of the true wayfaring Christian. Indeed, it is only when evil exists in the world that man can be truly magnanimous, can be a soldier in God's army, can be personally committed to the destruction of evil.

The gulf that exists between heaven and earth while man lives in a state of innocence is, then, too wide. Its prodigious size is even more apparent, however, when we examine the magnanimous-man's contemplative faculty.

**Contemptus mundi** is alien to the state of innocence. Paradise is a near perfect existence, and Adam and Eve have been instructed to enjoy their life in the garden. Thus it is that Adam can tell his mate: "For not to irksome toil, but to delight / He made us, and delight to Reason join'd" (IX. 242-243). Indeed, the garden of Eden is a world of sensuous pleasure. Delightfully evocative, it is a celebration of sensuous experience. Asceticism and austerity have no place in the world
of innocence, and contemplation, therefore, takes on a meaning very different from that held by either Aristotle or Augustine. But we must question whether contemplation is, in fact, possible before the existence of evil in the world.

When Raphael tells Adam and Eve of God's creation of man, God is portrayed as explaining how He will frustrate Satan's attempts to make evil victorious, how He will create another world. God

... in a moment will create
Another World, out of one man a Race
Of men innumerable, there to dwell,
Not here, till by degrees of merit rais'd
They open to themselves at length the way
Up hither, under long obedience tri'd,
And Earth be chang'd to Heav'n, and Heav'n to Earth,
One Kingdom, Joy and Union without end,

(VII. 154-61)

This is the divine plan. It is a statement of the process by which man can attain the intimate knowledge of God and can be united with Him.

The important point for our discussion here is that man can achieve this blessed state only by proving himself worthy. We must consider how man does this. What are the "degrees of merit" by which man can be raised? Is it possible for man's innocent life to be in any way contemplative, as the term is defined in our first chapter? Most importantly, does man's innocence not preclude contemplation as it precludes his pursuit of honour and glory?

I have pointed out earlier that Raphael explains to Adam and Eve how they may "at last turn all to spirit," and how they are guaranteed this reward if they remain obedient (V. 493-503). Adam's answer reveals what remains for man to do. To Raphael he says:
O favorable Spirit, propitious guest,
Well hast thou taught the way that might direct
Our knowledge, and the scale of Nature set
From centre to circumference, whereon
In contemplation of created things
By steps we may ascend to God. (V. 507-512)

The crucial point here is that man is to concern himself only with "created" things, with that which God has placed before him. His life, then, is of this world. He is not to aspire to higher things, but, rather, to accept by faith alone that he may ascend to heaven—without personally committing himself to that end. Paradise does not allow for the individual's transcendence of the physical world. It is true that this is promised to Adam and Eve, but their duty is merely to live their life on earth to the fullest, to be thankful and obedient, and not to concern themselves with anything above and beyond paradise. Their innocent existence is, in fact, severely restricted to the tangible world of the senses.

This is made emphatically clear when Raphael tells Adam that, though it is good for man "to ask or search," man must accept that God's dwelling-place is far beyond human comprehension, and man would do better to concentrate entirely on his own world.

God to remove his ways from human sense,
Plac'd Heav'n from Earth so far, that earthly sight,
If it presume, might err in things too high,
And no advantage gain. (VIII. 119-122)

It is made patently obvious here that beyond obedience to God's will, man's innocent life, though it is a process of becoming, does not leave much room for contemplation.

Adam learns from Raphael a lesson that sounds very much like the
philosophy expressed in Ecclesiastes: "For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (I. 18). Adam learns how

\[
\ldots \text{apt the Mind or Fancy is to rove}
\]
\[
\text{Uncheckt, and of her roving is no end;}
\]
\[
\text{Till warn'd, or by experience taught, she learn}
\]
\[
\text{That not to know at large of things remote}
\]
\[
\text{From use, obscure and subtle, but to know}
\]
\[
\text{That which before us lies in daily life,}
\]
\[
\text{Is the prime Wisdom; what is more, is fume,}
\]
\[
\text{Or emptiness, or fond impertinence,}
\]
\[
\text{And renders us in things that most concern}
\]
\[
\text{Unpractic'd, unprepar'd, and still to seek.}
\]
\[
\text{(VIII. 188-197)}
\]

In fact, then, contemplation of the divine is an impossibility in the state of innocence. The Aristotelian concept of sophia has been sublimated to become: "obey God and praise His goodness; and do not seek to know God." The only suggestion of something more than innocent existence is thus made purposefully vague. Adam and Eve are to be intimately united with God, but they are not to aspire actively to that condition. Life in Eden, with reference to contemplation, becomes a state of semi-consciousness; it is stringently prescribed and circumscribed. One hardly need point out here that this idea was not attractive or acceptable to Milton.

Adam, in the state of innocence, is portrayed as an active being whose self-knowledge gives him a sense of worth and dignity. However, he cannot actively pursue honour or glory in a context of meaning beyond Eden. Moreover, he cannot actively aspire to knowledge of the divine. With reference to pre-lapsarian man, then, magnanimity or heroic virtue
is only partly possible. Adam could possess a sense of worth and dignity; he could not actively pursue honour or glory, and he could not actively aspire to intimate knowledge of the divine.

Milton portrayed Adam in such a way that he (Milton) could have the best of both worlds: the world of being and the world of becoming. The poet demonstrated that Eden or innocence was a blissful condition, but one that required active contributions from human beings to continue and to remain blissful. Because the state of innocence required active virtue on the part of its inhabitants, it is poetically successful, and innocent Adam emerges as an admirable figure. But Milton's Christian faith, his belief that the new dispensation signalled by Christ was a better condition for man than innocence, required that he show the limitations of innocence. One way in which Milton demonstrated the inferiority of man's first condition was to show that innocent Adam did not have the same potential for heroism as he had after he had sinned. Innocence was, indeed, a fugitive and cloistered heroism; Adam, even had he not sinned, could not be Milton's perfect hero.
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER II

1. The Renaissance and English Humanism, p. 120.

2. The City of God, p. xii.

3. Works, XIV, p. 27.

4. The possible exception to this is Adam's apparently intuitive knowledge of the hierarchy of the senses which he explains to Eve following her dream (V. 100-119). This knowledge, it may be argued, is not unlike Adam's innate capacity for speech. For the rest, however, Adam's acquisition of knowledge is the result of his own actions.

5. Works, XV, p. 5.

6. Ibid., XIV, p. 17.

7. Ibid., p. 21.

8. It might be argued here that the relationship between Heaven and earth was never more intimate than it was while man lived in innocence. The answer to this objection is contained in the very nature of Milton's Christian faith. God's Kingdom is within every man. The believing Christian, Milton for example, is equipped with knowledge of God's grand design. Moreover, accompanied and guided by the Holy Spirit, he is more intimately related to God than innocent man was. Thus, Adam, though he bitterly complains of the cessation of communion with Heaven occasioned by his transgression (IX. 1080-1090), is, when he learns of the new dispensation, happier. He possesses within himself a "paradise, happier far."
CHAPTER III
FROM SIN TO GRACE: THE PATH TO HEROIC MAGNANIMITY

... we know not only evil, but we know good only by means of evil. For it is by evil that virtue is chiefly exercised, and shines with greater brightness.

*De Doctrina Christiana*

In Jewish and in Christian writings the fall of man has always been treated as a terrible catastrophe. In *De Doctrina Christiana*, for example, Milton argued that the original sin of Adam and Eve contained within itself a whole complex of sins: the first parents had distrusted the divine veracity; they had been guilty of unbelief, ingratitude, disobedience, and gluttony; Eve had not shown a "proper regard" to Adam; and Adam had been guilty of "excessive uxoriousness". Similarly, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton does not allow us to forget the gravity of Adam and Eve's offence, and in introducing the painful subject he complains:

... I now must change
Those notes to Tragic; foul distrust, and breach
Disloyal on the part of Man, revolt,
And disobedience: On the part of Heav'n
Now alienated, distance and distaste,
Anger and just rebuke, and judgment giv'n,
That brought into this World a world of woe,
Sin and her shadow Death, and Misery
Death's Harbinger... (IX. 5-13)

Because Milton understood the fall as the source of "all our woe," he had to describe the incident as profoundly moving and tragic. In doing this Milton had admirable success, but no serious student of Milton can or will deny that the last three books of *Paradise Lost*, considered
together with *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*, are Milton's honest attempt to demonstrate that the fall of man was really a fortunate event. Paradoxically, the fall of man was fortunate, for from that evil God was able to produce a greater good than that which had been lost. It should be pointed out here, however, that Milton cannot be given credit for either originality or brilliance of thought in his treatment of man's first transgression. As Arthur O. Lovejoy has demonstrated, more than one Christian writer before Milton had embraced and advocated a similar opinion.

A paradox which had been embraced by Ambrose, Leo the Great, Gregory the Great, Francis de Sales, and Du Bartas; had for at least ten centuries had a place in many missals, and had finally been officially adopted by the Roman Church, was, obviously, sufficiently orthodox; and it had been put more sharply and boldly by at least two of the Doctors of the Church, by the composer of the *Exultet*, by the French mystic, and by the author of *La Semaine*, than by Milton.²

Regardless of the acceptability or orthodoxy of the opinion, however, the important point for our discussion here is that the doctrine of the "fortunate fall" is an integral part of Milton's concept of heroic man. Man's new state, his lost innocence and his awareness of evil, provided Milton with much more scope for the delineation of heroic virtue than had man's innocence. Indeed, fallen man has a greater potential for heroism than had man in the state of innocence.

By permitting passion to overthrow his reason, Adam became aware of his own freedom of will. As Basil Willey points out,

Adam, though free before his fall, had not the full spiritual liberty which consists in the voluntary submission of a rational being to the law of reason. With the exception of his one vulnerable point, his
paradoxical capacity to lose his freedom, he was really God-constrained, not in the manner of a responsible moral being, but in the manner of the animals and the rest of nature. He could not but will what was right until, having disobeyed, he had become capable of sin. Only a being capable of sin could know the meaning which Milton really attached to the notion of spiritual freedom; thus the Fall was logically a necessary stage in the evolution of man. It may be said that Adam and Eve were capable of moral choice, and hence of sin, before they ate the fruit, otherwise they could not have chosen to disobey God's express command; and Milton, in his endeavour to make his epic narrative humanly convincing, certainly has to attribute to them some of the frailties of fallen humanity in order to make their behaviour plausible. But this limited freedom of choice, and its arbitrary connection with an inexplicable "taboo, did not constitute the full "liberty" of Milton's own ripest thought. A man must know good and evil much more intimately than prelapsarian Adam could before he can submit with his whole being to the control of that divine law in whose service is perfect freedom.  

In his innocence, then, Adam had an innate or intuitive knowledge of right reason. After the fall, however, he had to struggle to know right reason and to make it prevail in his conduct. The principal difficulty facing Milton in *Paradise Lost* was to syncretize his religious conviction with his humanism. Milton's religion dictated that something wonderful had been lost when Adam took his first bite of the fruit. But his humanity answered that the very joy of life was in the struggle to "regain the blissful seat." Man's awareness of both good and evil and awareness of his human potential to embrace and obtain either, and man's consciously reasoned struggle to pursue the good (the glory of God), despite the difficulties *en route*, are, for Milton, tantamount to heroic. It is in the struggle itself that Milton as a human being found man's capacity for heroism, and on this premise Milton's concept of heroic man is ultimately based.

It has been pointed out in an earlier chapter of this essay that Man's state of innocence did not allow for real heroism, for magnanimity.
Because Heaven and earth were distinctly separate, man could not understand or realize his heroic potential. Adam, thus, could not see that he could be a soldier in the cosmic struggle against evil. He could not visualize himself as a soldier in God's army whose career of willing service to God could augment God's glory and honour. Moreover, the great gulf that existed between heaven and earth did not permit of man's contemplation of the divine. Innocence was earth-bound and flight was not for man. The knowledge of evil Adam gained by eating the forbidden fruit, by disobeying God, radically altered all of this. Adam's new condition, what we may fairly call the human condition, presented him with new and more challenging opportunities. He now faced a challenge which would tax him to the limit of what man can endure. Adam's reach could now exceed his grasp—yet could still merit God's approval. Adam could now become a hero: magnanimous man.

Adam and Eve's loss of innocence is accompanied by a gain of knowledge. They know: "Both Good and Evil, Good lost and Evil Got. . . ." (IX. 1071). What this means is that they discover how wretched their condition is. Carnal lust is the first manifestation of their altered state, and from this they acquire a knowledge of their own depravity and bestiality, what Willey calls "sexual self-consciousness." What is more important, however, is that they feel shame. Adam recognizes that he has not acted as befits a superior being (man), that he has, in fact, debased his own human dignity by allowing passion to overrule his reason. He is ashamed that he is man. Bereft of any sense of worth, he wishes that he might never be seen by angels' eyes again. To Eve he thus counsels:
But let us now, as in bad plight, devise
What best may for the present serve to hide
The Parts of each from other, that seem most
To shame obnoxious, and unseemliest seen,
Some Tree whose broad smooth leaves together sew'd
And girded on our loins, may cover round
Those middle parts, that this new comer, Shame,
There sit not, and reproach us as unclean.

(IX. 1091-98)

This sense of shame, however, is the necessary first step in Adam's regeneration, for without it he cannot possess any sense of his own worth and dignity. He will remain without any vestige of self-respect. Paradoxically, an admission of his own weakness is mandatory in order for Milton's superior man to be strong. He must know he can be, or has been weak. How man is regenerated, how he regains his lost sense of worth, is our first concern.

Milton's God, we know, had declared He would be merciful to certain men.

Man shall not quite be lost, but sav'd who will,
Yet not of will in him, but grace in me
Freely voutsaf't; once more I will renew
His lapsed powers, though forfeit and enthrall'd
By sin to foul exorbitant desires;
Upheld by me, yet once more he shall stand
On even ground against his mortal foe,
By me upheld, that he may know how frail
His fall'n condition is, and to me owe
All his deliverance, and to none but me.

(III. 173-82)

Theologically Milton accepted this doctrine of grace. But in one important point he differed from the Augustinian doctrine. Milton could not wholly accept a doctrine which placed so little emphasis on the human being's own contribution to salvation. To judge from God's
speech above, with its manifest contemptus homo attitude, it is rather obvious that man's role (and implicitly his dignity) is of minor significance. Milton's view of man, however, represents a definite rejection of that aspect of the doctrine of grace which implied that man's own contribution is insignificant. Milton, it is fair to say, looked upon man's regeneration as an act of divine grace working in man and as a definite exercise of the human will. God's mercy and His Grace made regeneration possible; but God did not make it happen. This will be made clearer by reference to De Doctrina Christiana and Paradise Lost.

In De Doctrina Christiana Milton discussed at considerable length how man could be restored. By God's grace acting in him and by the exercise of the divine mercy, man can possess a paradise "happier far" than the one which he had lost. Man can attain a happier, eternal life. God's grace is what makes this possible, and He gives it freely. That is, man does not have to prove himself worthy of grace. This much is given.

THE RESTORATION OF MAN IS the act whereby man, being delivered from sin and death by God the Father through Jesus Christ, is raised to a far more excellent state of grace and glory than that from which he had fallen.

In the process are contained redemption and renovation.

The redemption of man is Christ's willing payment for the debt of man's sin.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (John III, 16-17)
Christ willingly became as man and willingly died so that other men might live. His ministry of redemption included, first, his humiliation at the hands of men, then his exaltation at the hands of God. It was a free gift by the grace of God and, hence, unearned by man. Man's renovation is "that change whereby HE WHO WAS BEFORE UNDER THE CURSE, AND OBNOXIOUS TO THE DIVINE WRATH, IS BROUGHT INTO A STATE OF GRACE." By this process, man is invited to know the way that God can be propitiated and worshipped. In short, renovation is the gift of God by which man might be saved from death, the curse that followed his sinful disobedience. But God, in fact, makes it possible for man to save himself. His grace and his mercy allow men to repent, but repentence is their own free act. Indeed, many are called but few are chosen, for man's will is free. He must choose in order to be chosen. Thus, what God's restoration and renovation of man means is that God will give men the opportunity to be dignified and strong, to be worthy. Theologically, this interpretation of grace is perhaps subject to some dispute. For Milton, however, it is entirely acceptable.

Milton's attitude is that God's grace makes regeneration or renovation possible, but that the final choice whether to be regenerated remains with man. It is the intent of spiritual renovation, Milton argues, to restore, "more completely than before", the natural faculties: reason and free will. But it is also "to create afresh the inward man and infuse new and supernatural faculties into the mind of the renovated." The 'new' inward man has been regenerated.

REGENERATION IS THAT CHANGE OPERATED BY THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT, WHEREBY THE OLD MAN BEING DESTROYED, THE INWARD MAN IS REGENERATED BY
GOD AFTER HIS OWN IMAGE, IN ALL THE FACULTIES OF HIS MIND ("understanding and will") (Milton's note), INSOMUCH THAT HE BECOMES AS IT WERE A NEW CREATURE, AND THE WHOLE MAN IS SANCTIFIED BOTH IN BODY AND SOUL, FOR THE SERVICE OF GOD, AND THE PERFORMANCE OF GOOD WORKS.  

The effects of this regeneration are two: repentance and faith.

REPENTANCE . . . IS THE GIFT OF GOD, WHEREBY THE REGENERATE MAN PERCEIVING WITH SORROW THAT HE HAS OFFENDED GOD BY SIN, DETESTS AND AVOIDS IT, HUMBLY TURNING TO GOD THROUGH A SENSE OF THE DIVINE MERCY, AND HEARTILY STRIVING TO FOLLOW RIGHTEOUSNESS.

For faith, Milton accepts the Pauline definition: the substance of things hoped for. It is a firm belief that what has been promised will be.

Basing judgment entirely on the material quoted above, it might seem that Milton, like Augustine, regarded man's contribution as painfully minimal. But Milton's own emphasis on the soul's freedom of choice cannot, I am sure, be ignored or overstressed. Thus, in Paradise Lost, despite Milton's emphasis on God's voluntary gift, it is made emphatically clear that grace is a kind of covenant. Mercy will be shown to Adam and Eve. They will have the opportunity to accept it. God will not "harden" their hearts. But he will leave it to them to choose. Adam and Eve, because of God's "prevenient grace" working in them, beg for mercy. But God's words, and here Milton strictly followed Genesis, reveal the nature of free will and the necessity for choice. To the Son, God says:

He sorrows now, repents and prays contrite,  
My motions in him; longer than they move,  
His heart I know; how variable and vain  
Self-left.  

(XI. 90-93)

Regardless, then, of whether or not we agree with God's concept of justice
and mercy, it is certainly obvious that Adam and Eve have free will, that they are free to accept or reject God's offer of mercy. If God must place a guard around the tree of life, then Adam and Eve are free to sit down to another meal, and that, in the same way as if Robert Frost had taken the other road, would have made all the difference. God's grace, in short, is the beginning of man's regeneration. Eternal happiness is contingent on man's activity. The ultimate choice rests with man.

I have quoted at some length from Milton's De Doctrina Christiana in order to make clear what I think is the crucial point in man's regeneration. Man, by the grace of God, can regain his dignity. But to do so, there must be an active exertion of the human will. Milton's last three books of Paradise Lost represent the poet's attempt to refashion Adam as a dignified and worthy being, as a magnanimous man.

In the concluding pages of his well-known essay on Paradise Lost, C.S. Lewis points out that "the real question at issue" is "whether man should or should not continue to be 'a noble animal, splendid in ashes and pompous in the grave'." Lewis contends he should and Milton insists upon it. Adam's education after the fall is, thus, a process by which he becomes more noble.

I have said that Adam's contempt for his own humanity is the first step in his regeneration. He must be aware of his frailty before he can be strong. Though tout comprendre does not necessarily mean tout pardonner, knowledge is power in Milton's view of man. Man understands his nobility by comprehending his potentiality for bestiality.
Shortly after clothing themselves in the vain hope that they can hide their shame, Adam and Eve become more and more aware of the wretchedness of their own condition. They learn that reason, the image of the divine in them, is now the source of their greatest pain rather than the source of greatest pleasure it had formerly been. That is, they are aware of what they have been and what they are now, and their misery is compounded by the comparison. This is a torture, for, like Satan, they discover that they cannot erase from their minds the memory of their former grandeur. The mind becomes a prison from which no escape is possible.

Thus fenc't, and as they thought, thir shame in part Cover'd, but not at rest or ease of Mind,
They sat them down to weep, nor only Tears
Rain'd at th'ir Eyes, but high Winds worse within
Began to rise, high Passions, Anger, Hate,
Mistrust, Suspicion, Discord, and shook sore
Thir inward State of Mind, calm Region once
And full of Peace, now toss't and turbulent...

(IX. 1119-27)

Shamed by his own absence of dignity, Adam begins to reprimand Eve for her weakness, for her foolishness in inviting disaster. Though Adam is hardly noble in attacking his wife, he has learned something. He knows that the wisely virtuous man does not seek temptation. He does not deliberately seek to put his faith to the test.

When Eve argues in her defence that Adam should not have permitted her to leave him, Adam is forced to try to justify his own conduct. Because Adam cannot, and because he is too ashamed to accept his guilt, he foolishly upbraids Eve and all women. But Adam had learned from
Raphael that it is right "to subdue / By force who reason for thir Law refuse" (VI. 39-40). He, therefore, did not execute his duty. As Eve's superior, he was obligated to constrain her if she would not be persuaded. Adam only begins to realize that the chief guilt is his: ". . . perhaps / I also erred in overmuch admiring" (IX. 1177-78). He is still too depraved and ashamed to accept the blame. Paradoxically, however, this must mean that Adam retains some sense of worth and dignity which, ironically, he no longer possesses. Adam, in fact, is too proud to acknowledge his own depravity, to accept his fallen condition, and, as Milton pointed out in De Doctrina Christiana, "conviction of sin" is the first step in the process of repentance.12

When Christ descends from Heaven to judge Adam and Eve, they are too ashamed to face Him and attempt to hide themselves. Adam, whose intuitive sense of dignity had given him the courage to question who had made him, and which had enabled him to ask his creator why it was that man should be a solitary being, is now presented to us as a cowering, frightened, and pathetically frail creature. He can no longer freely say what he feels or thinks, and can no longer freely question. Rather, he must weigh his words carefully and must analyze his speech. Spontaneity of utterance and self-confidence have disappeared. Thus, when questioned by the Son, Adam cannot answer candidly or ingenuously. He replies carefully and with long hesitation for fear of offending. His behaviour is, in fact, despicable. He attempts to extenuate his own guilt by emphasizing that he could not reasonably have expected that a creature as fair as Eve could be capable of deceit.
This Woman whom thou mad'st to be my help,
And gav'st me as thy perfect gift, so good,
So fit, so acceptable, so Divine,
That from her hand I could suspect no ill,
And what she did, whatever in itself,
Her doing seem'd to justify the deed;
She gave me of the Tree, and I did eat.

(X. 137-143)

Adam's response here stamps him as a coward. He is pathetic. What is more, he is a liar, for Adam was not deceived. He wilfully disobeyed God. We could admire Adam if he admitted that he had not been willing to live without Eve, and that he would rather die than be without her (his real reason for disobeying). But when he attempts to lessen the gravity of his own sin by implying ignorance, he is despicable. The Son correctly chastizes Adam, then, for abrogating his manhood. Adam is criticized for not correctly understanding his own dignity, for his want of magnanimity. Indeed, Christ's indictment of Adam reveals the real nature of Adam's sin: he has failed to recognize his worth as man.

The Son says:

Was she thy God, that her thou didst obey
Before his voice, or was she made thy guide,
Superior, or but equal, that to her
Thou didst resign thy Manhood, and the Place
Wherein God set thee above her made of thee,
And for thee, whose perfection far excell'd
Hers in all real dignity: Adorn'd
She was indeed, and lovely to attract
Thy love, not thy Subjection, and her Gifts
Were such as under Government well seem'd,
Unseemly to bear rule, which was thy part
And person, hadst thou known thyself aright.

(X. 145-156)

Similarly, when Christ passes judgment on Adam, we discover that the emphasis is once more placed upon man's abrogation of responsibility.
Because thou hast heark'n'd to the voice of thy Wife,  
And eaten of the tree concerning which  
I charg'd thee, saying: Thou shalt not eat thereof,  
Curs'd is the ground for thy sake . . . . (X. 198-201)

As a Christian, Milton had to embrace the doctrine that Adam was "fondly overcome with Female charm." It is obvious, however, that Adam's sin resulted from his failure to recognize his own superiority. Adam was not--when he should have been--magnanimous. He is now, as a result, wholly without dignity. Adam must realize this before he can be regenerated as a worthy and dignified being, as magnanimous man.

With the coming of Sin and Death, the paradisal aspect of Eden is transformed to a Hobbesian "state of nature". Adam discovers that the concord and harmony of prelapsarian Eden have given place to a life that is, indeed, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." Adam sees how

Beast now with Beast gan war, and Fowl with Fowl,  
And Fish with Fish; to graze the Herb all leaving,  
Devour'd each other; nor stood much in awe  
Of Man, but fled him, or with count'nance grim  
Glar'd on him passing. . . . (X. 710-14)

He sees, then, that he is no longer the "Master work" of creation. He is no longer recognized by the brute creatures as the superior being, and he must realize that he is, in fact, no better than they, that he is, indeed, worse. Adam's "conviction of sin" must be accompanied by awareness of his own depravity. Adam's protracted complaint (X. 720-844) makes this clear.

Adam's capacity to reason becomes his bane. His reason informs him that the guilt is his alone, but informs him, too, that he is a
generator of evil and misery. His sin will be the source of misery for generations yet unborn. He is a cancer. The only escape Adam can comprehend is death, and he welcomes its approach. But his reason also robs him of this hope.

... Yet one doubt
Pursues me still, lest all I cannot die,
Lest that pure breath of Life, the Spirit of Man
Which God inspir'd, cannot together perish
With this corporeal Clod; then in the Grave,
Or in some other dismal place, who knows
But I shall die a living Death? (X. 782-88)

He fondly hopes that God's wrath might be spent on him alone, but knows that he is too frail to bear that burden even if shared with Eve. His reason leads him into a labyrinth of despair from which no escape is possible. And conscience, which unbeknown to Adam is God's gift whereby man might be helped to regain "the blissful seat", becomes Adam's worst enemy.

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!
(X. 842-44)

But Adam is not yet fully 'convicted' of his own sin. He still blames Eve for his miserable condition. 13

Adam's long harangue against woman seems to have blinded most readers to the fact that he forgives Eve and accepts the chief guilt as his. Her admission of guilt moves Adam to pity and to nobility. Eve had declared (X. 930-36) that she would willingly accept the guilt and the punishment, and her altruism moves Adam to assert that he would do
the same. But Adam knows that neither of them can atone for man's dis-obedience by their own voluntary sacrifice. They do not know that that task remains for the "one greater Man", and they can, therefore, only speculate concerning what remains to be done by man. Adam's words, however, contain an admission of personal guilt. He tells Eve:

... 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 me committed and by me expos'd. (my italics)
But rise, let us no more contend, nor blame
Each other, blam'd enough elsewhere, but strive
In offices of Love, how we may light'n
Each other's burden in our share of woe, ... .

(X. 952-961)

The very fact that Adam does not devote much sound and breath to his own mea culpa makes his admission more believable. He simply admits guilt and proceeds to reason how he and Eve may adapt themselves to their new condition. Adam's repentance and his regeneration have begun.

In De Doctrina Christiana Milton listed five steps in the process of repentance: "conviction of sin, contrition, confession, departure from evil, and conversion to good." Adam has taken the first step towards regeneration by forgiving Eve and admitting his own guilt.

Contrition is the second step and is equally difficult. That is, Adam must accept and acknowledge his own depravity; he must be broken in order to be rebuilt. Conviction differs from contrition in that the former requires that the sinner accept his guilt, whereas the latter requires he admit he is powerless to atone for that guilt without the aid of divine mercy. The contrite man must admit that he is too weak and
insignificant to be capable of atoning for his sin without God's help (grace).

To the problem of how they should conduct themselves in the face of God's curse, Eve proposes two solutions: sexual abstinence and suicide. Adam commends her for the apparent superiority of mind her contempt for life and pleasure manifests. But he correctly reasons that her thoughts are the product of her own "anguish and regret / For loss of life and pleasure overlov'd" (X. 1018-19). Moreover, he reasons that God is too wise to allow them to escape the doom He has prescribed for them. Adam then remembers that the curse also entailed man's opportunity for revenge against Satan, and concludes that this sweet revenge would not be possible if he and Eve did not reproduce their species. But the problem with both Adam's and Eve's reasoning here is that they are thinking of God as their enemy. He is their adversary rather than their benefactor. Adam and Eve have not yet considered submission to the will of God as their salvation, and it is only when Adam begins to reason without "Rancor and pride, impatience and despite" that real repentance and regeneration are possible.

Adam and Eve's final resolution to pray for divine mercy is the culmination of a long reasoning process (X. 1046-1096). Through the exercise of his own reason, Adam comes to know that: God is too powerful for man to frustrate His grand design; God showed pity and compassion in judging man, and must, therefore, be benevolent and merciful; the curse itself is not completely sans joie, for the pains of childbirth are recompensed by the joys of parenthood, and labor is not in itself despicable. Knowing this much, Adam correctly reasons that if God can
be, and is compassionate without human beings' entreaties, then he must surely be even more merciful when earnestly appealed to. Adam recognizes, moreover, that without God's grace man is powerless. He thus asks:

What better can we do, than to the place
Repairing where he judg'd us, prostrate fall
Before him reverent, and there confess
Humbly our faults, and pardon beg, with tears
Watering the ground, and with our sighs the Air
Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign
Of sorrow unfeign'd, and humiliation meek.

(X. 1086-1093)

The answer of course is that there is nothing better to do. By understanding and accepting that he depends on the mercy of a compassionate God, Adam is contrite. Confession is the next step and an easier one.

It is the visible manifestation of repentance and regeneration, the proof, as it were, of conviction, and contrition. Aware of their guilt and aware that they are powerless without God's grace, Adam and Eve can freely confess. The final step in repentance is more difficult, and Adam and Eve's "departure from evil and conversion to good" requires Michael's visit to earth.

Though Adam and Eve have now become convinced of their guilt, have been contrite, and have confessed their sin, they have not yet learned that still more is required of man. They have not yet learned that "to stand approv'd in sight of God" requires more than passive submission to the will of God. They must learn, and it is Michael's job to teach them, that faithful service to God demands human activity. Man must do all that lies in his power to augment the glory of God. He must be an active and energetic worker on God's behalf. Departure from
evil and conversion to good are not a simple matter of passive obedience.

On the contrary, they entail—indeed demand—willful and active service on the part of man. Whatever the opposition might be, and regardless of the difficulties to be faced, man has a positive duty to continue the struggle. Adam and Eve must learn that the path is not easily followed, that the road leading to God is hard to walk and will demand all their strength and power of will. The good is not to be attained without arduous and painful labor, and Michael's mission is to make this vividly clear to Adam and Eve. It is for this reason that the Archangel's announcement that Eden must be vacated is made so painful. Adam and Eve cannot, in fact, pursue the good without suffering; it is not an easy or a painless quest. This is demonstrated even before Adam and Eve are informed of their expulsion.

When God announces Adam and Eve's banishment, he points out that they have lost their happiness (innocence) and immortality by their disobedience. But He also announces that an escape from misery is possible for Adam and Eve. God will give them mortal pain and immortal happiness. For man, then,

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

(XI. 61-67)

Man's lot, however, is not wholly painful or miserable, though Milton's God has an awkward habit of making it appear so. To judge from God's
words, life becomes a painful and wholly unpleasant necessity which is offset only by the happiness rewarded at the end of a virtuous life. The happiness, of course, is sufficient to make the pain bearable. But God makes it clear that human life may be "refin'd" by faith and faithful works, and this is the basis of the paradise "happier far" Michael ultimately promises to Adam and Eve. Human life, we may assume, then, can be other than miserable or painful. Michael's task is to show Adam how this may be accomplished. He must show them that human life, though fraught with pain and suffering, is worthwhile. He must make it clear to Adam that life can be a blessing or a curse, that, properly armed with faith, man's existence need not be wretched. The Archangel must demonstrate to Adam how man can vindicate himself in the eyes of God and how he can earn the praise of God. From Michael's long history of the world and his prophecy of the world's future, Adam acquires, or should acquire, a knowledge of himself--of man. His capacity for heroism depends on his ability to comprehend Michael's lesson. He must learn that it remains a matter of personal choice whether he is bestial or dignified, depraved or magnanimous. Adam must understand what man's new duties and responsibilities are.

Before Michael's revelation of God's grand design for man, Adam is presented to us as happy in the expectation that his sin will be forgiven. He presumes that God will be merciful and that happiness is within his grasp. Adam's presumption is correct, but he errs in thinking that his own regeneration and happiness are imminent. In few words Michael destroys Adam's illusions and hopes of an easy victory.
Adam, Heav'n's high behest no Preface needs:
Sufficient that thy Prayers are heard, and Death,
Then due by sentence when thou didst transgress,
Defeated of his seizure many days
Giv'n thee of Grace, wherein thou mayst repent,
And one bad act with many deeds well done
May'st cover: well may then thy Lord appeas'd
Redeem thee quite from Death's rapacious claim;
But longer in this Paradise to dwell
Permits not; to remove thee I am come,
And send thee from the Garden forth to till
The ground whence thou wast tak'n, fitter Soil.
(XI. 251-62)

The effect this has on Adam and Eve is staggering. When Adam regains
his composure, however, he asks the Archangel what more of misery man
must bear, and Michael replies that Adam can

... good with bad
Expect to hear, supernal Grace contending
With sinfulness of Men; thereby to learn
True patience, and to temper joy with fear
And pious sorrow, equally inur'd
By moderation either state to bear,
Prosperous or adverse: so shalt thou lead
Safest thy life, and best prepar'd endure
Thy mortal passage when it comes. (XI. 358-67)

In the history of the world Michael shows and relates to Adam, misery
and horror are the scenes which predominate. The "good" is most remarkable
by its relative absence. Adam witnesses murder, the pains of growing
old, the horrible results of sensual pleasure, carnage, butchery, lust,
and depravity. Man's inhumanity to man and man's bestiality are the
feature attractions of Michael's grim spectacle. But from all this horror
Adam learns that for virtuous men something more is possible. He learns
that certain men can be accepted by God and can please God. He discovers
that God cares enough for individual men that he will not destroy all
men. Adam learns, moreover, that some men can be heroes of God.

Michael relates the careers of Enoch and Noah to show Adam the path the virtuous man must follow. Both men are unshakeable in their faith, and are not swayed by the opinions of the multitude. Both men have the courage of their conviction; they speak out against sin and evil. Thus, Enoch "spake much of Right and Wrong, / Of Justice, of Religion, Truth and Peace, / and Judgment from above" (XI. 666-668). His was an active virtue. Noah's behavior is also a case in point. Noah viewed the sinful activities of men and he "declar'd" his dislike; he "testifi'd" against their ways, and he "preach'd" (XI. 720-724). The italics are mine). The important point is that both Enoch and Noah actively follow the law of God, and actively strive to disseminate His truth. Both, too, are willing to suffer for the just cause. Both view the bestial aspect of man's being, and both struggle to make reason ruler over passion. From this Adam learns that the faithful servant of God must be an active being in order to be worthy. In the antediluvian period of history man's own righteousness is not sufficient, for he must struggle to show others the way to God. Adam learns from the histories of Enoch and Noah that truth's service is never easy. Pain and suffering, indeed, are a part of the hero's career. Adam learns, moreover, that it is not for all men to be servants of God, for the task is too hard for most. He discovers from Michael's history of antediluvian man that men, for the most part, are wretched creatures. But he also learns that men can be superior beings—if they recognize their own worth—if they recognize and reverence the image of the divine in themselves. Adam
learns that he can be either dignified or bestial. He has been both, and it remains for him to choose which he will be now. The magnanimous man recognizes his superiority by his demonstrated ability to persevere in the cause of truth. From the first part of Michael's history Adam discovers man's duality of nature. He finds out that he, too, can be either man or beast. He can remain wretched or depraved, or he can prove himself worthy in God's eyes and in his own. Raphael had warned him of the results man's failure to live by reason would have. Michael now shows him the results. Horrified by what he sees, and shamed by the knowledge that he is the first cause of the misery and wretchedness he witnesses, Adam has painfully acquired self-knowledge. This is the initial step in his process of becoming magnanimous. The second and third steps are more complex, for they require that Adam be aware of God's grand design for man.

As a Christian poet, Milton was obligated to make his heroic man a Christian. Though this may sound a little fatuous here, or at least self-evident, it is not. The problem, as Burton Kurth has demonstrated, was that the exploits of the Old Testament figures were not satisfactory models for the Christian hero. The careers of these men and women were inadequate because the individuals did not know of God's overall design, the course of universal history. True heroism or magnanimity, as Milton understood it, was not, in fact, possible until the coming of Christ. Because Adam is informed of the course of universal history, because he learns of the cosmic struggle between good and evil, however, he has the opportunity to be a heroic man. Adam learns of Christ's
ministry, his crucifixion, his resurrection, and his second coming, and is thus equipped with the same information the Christian hero is required to have in order to be truly heroic. This will be made clearer by a brief examination of the Christian view of history.

After Adam and Eve's disobedience man lives in a state of sin. His capacity to reason has diminished and he must struggle to overcome his passions. In De Doctrina Christiana Milton contended that man's sin had lessened man's power to determine "the chief good". Man's sinful condition demanded that he be on guard, for as Michael tells Adam,

Since thy original lapse, true Liberty Is lost, which always with right Reason dwells Twinn'd, and from her hath no dividual being: Reason in man obscur'd, or not obey'd, Immediately inordinate desires And upstart Passions catch the Government From Reason, and to servitude reduce Man till then free. (XII. 83-90)

Because of man's inherent depravity, his inability to reason rightly, God revealed His will to men through prophets. Men were obligated to follow God's law as revealed, for without the law men would soon lapse into sinful behavior. A man's self-knowledge amounted to recognition of his own need for the law, for this was the barrier which prevented him from descending to a lower, bestial form of being. Theoretically, men could be aware of their own dignity by how well they adhered to the precepts of the law. That is, men were aware of their dignity by their obedience to God's will as transmitted by the law. They could, in a somewhat restricted sense, be magnanimous. Theoretically, man could also pursue the honor and glory of God before the coming of Christ. His pursuit
of glory, however, was directed to the leadership of God's chosen people. That is, he could honor or glorify God by enforcing God's law and directing His people in their worship of God. But the pursuit of honor and glory are also circumscribed while man is living in sin. The same gulf that existed between heaven and earth in the state of innocence is still present. Man's life is sharply separated from God and from heaven, and the glory he pursues is earthly glory (the Kingdom of Israel) that will please God. Magnanimity as contemplation is not possible for man while he lives in sin. He was too depraved (sinful) to aspire to knowledge of God in this life. Contemplation, the intimate knowledge of and union with God, was the end of a virtuous life, the reward for obedience. Knowledge of God was possible for only a few men, for those especially chosen by God to be His prophets. Man's lot, however, did not permit contemplation in this life. Christ's coming changed all of this.

With the ADVENT the law was replaced by a new covenant, a "better" one in Milton's view, for, as Michael tells Adam, the law is a temporary measure, and imperfect (XII. 300-306). The new dispensation placed emphasis on the inward man, and man proved his obedience by faith rather than by strict obedience to the law.

Under the law, those who trusted in God were justified by faith indeed, but not without the works of the law .... The gospel, on the contrary, justifies by faith without the works of the law. Wherefore, we being freed from the works of the law, no longer follow the letter, but the spirit; doing the works of faith, not of the law.17

The new covenant differed from the old also in placing special emphasis on man's free choice. As Milton explains,
Moses imposed the letter, or external law, even on those who were not willing to receive it; whereas Christ writes the inward law of God by his Spirit on the hearts of believers, and leads them as willing followers.  

Because of this new emphasis on freedom of choice, the acquisition of self-knowledge becomes strenuous. Men can be either depraved or worthy and dignified. More importantly, men can be either for or against God. If they accept Christ as the Son of God they become workers in the service of God; if they deny Him, they become workers in the service of Satan. Man can attain a sense of worth by his ability to persevere in the struggle against evil, and magnanimity in the context of self-knowledge thus takes on a whole new, and broader meaning. Man's life is no longer restricted in the sense that his life is entirely a means of obtaining his own salvation or damnation. Rather, human life becomes the means by which man can glorify God. The virtuous man's life naturally becomes devoted to the service of God, and the superior man actively pursues honor and glory. He is magnanimous.

The new dispensation Christ offered also made it possible for all men to know God by faithfully accepting Jesus Christ as the Son. All men now had the potential for contemplation. Though Milton was very careful to point out that perfection was not possible in this life, he nonetheless makes it clear that men can imperfectly experience the divine presence while on earth. By becoming "ingrafted" in Christ, the regenerate man can be reborn into a better and higher kind of life, a "newness" of life which is more spiritual, more contemplative.
NEWNESS OF LIFE is that by which we are said to live unto God. . . .

The primary functions of the new life are comprehension of spiritual things, and love of holiness. And as the power of exercising these functions was weakened and in a manner destroyed by the spiritual death of man's disobedience, so is the understanding restored in great part to its primitive clearness, and the will to its primitive liberty, by the new spiritual life in Christ. 19

By becoming "implanted" in Christ, the believer attains some knowledge of God. Indeed, as Jesus told the Pharisees: "the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke XVII, 21). But the Christian can know God in another way too.

The Holy Spirit walks with man on earth. The third member of the Trinity serves as man's comforter, and as man's link with the divine being. When Adam asks Michael how it is that men can be strong enough to suffer persecution for truth's sake, the Archangel tells him that God

. . . to his own a Comforter will send,
The promise of the Father, who shall dwell
His Spirit within them, and the Law of Faith
Working through love, upon their hearts shall write,
To guide them in all truth, and also arm
With spiritual Armor, able to resist
Satan's assaults, and quench his fiery darts,
What Man can do against them, not afraid,
Though to the death, against such cruelties
With inward consolations recompens't,
And oft supported so as shall amaze
Thir proudest persecutors. . . . (XII. 486-497)

What we might choose to call faith is, for the believer, tantamount to a knowledge of God. If man wholeheartedly accepts Christ, he has attained some knowledge of the divine, for the Christian accepts as truth that:

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew V,8).

Because Adam is informed of all of this, he can be a hero.
Equipped with self-knowledge (the nature of man), Adam can possess a sense of worth or dignity. Further, knowing that man's life is a small part of the cosmic or universal struggle between good and evil, Adam can pursue the honor or glory of God. And, armed with faith, Adam can apparently contemplate God, can achieve a partial or imperfect knowledge of God. Adam can be magnanimous. Though it is true that certain chosen men living before the time of Christ could be heroic because in direct communication with God, for the masses of men real heroism was an impossibility. Christianity offered the potential for real heroism to all men. Christ showed men how they could glorify God and showed them how they could gain some knowledge of God while they remained on earth. Indeed, Adam's second education, his preparation for heroism, only really begins when Michael tells him of Christ's ministry and explains how the inward paradise "happier far" might be realized.

When he learns that Christ's mission is to destroy evil, Adam expects to hear of a magnificent physical combat between the Son and Satan. Michael informs him, however, that the battle is not to be heroic in any conventional sense of the term. Adam is introduced to a "more heroic" contest in which good overcomes evil not by strength but by weakness. He learns that "... God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty" (I Corinthians I, 27). The Christian mystique with its paradoxical emphasis on great strength in weakness, is the lesson Adam must learn. Christ will overcome Satanic strength with divine weakness. He will resist and reject sin and will die only to live
again. His apparent weakness, his patient endurance of pain, suffering, and death, becomes his great strength, for by resisting sin and by being resurrected, he proves that evil's great strength (Sin and Death) is powerless. Ostensible weakness is really great strength and has the final victory. Christ is heroic because he voluntarily offers to suffer and to die so that he might redeem man and destroy evil. Man, by following Christ's example, can also contribute to the destruction of evil. Man can be free from sin ("dead to sin") and can be resurrected with Christ. The Christian hero's duty, then, is to patiently endure the torments of evil, and thereby aid in the destruction of evil. Adam learns that he can be a part of the universal conflict, that he can contribute to evil's destruction. Knowing this, Adam can have a sense of purpose and a conviction of his own worth. He can devote his life to the pursuit of God's glory and honor.

For the Christian, to follow Christ is to glorify the Father.

''. . . Jesus said, (sic.) Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him. (John XIII, 30-31)

Man's ability to persevere in the cause of righteousness even though this may mean persecution, pleases and glorifies God. Indeed, God can be glorified by any good and virtuous act. Milton contended that the Holy Scriptures were written for the "promotion of the glory of God, and the salvation of mankind."21 The true worship (love) of the divine consisted in "good works" and served to promote the glory of God.
GOOD WORKS are THOSE WHICH WE PERFORM BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD WORKING IN US THROUGH TRUE FAITH, TO THE GLORY OF GOD, THE ASSURED HOPE OF OUR OWN SALVATION, AND THE EDIFICATION OF OUR NEIGHBOR.  

For the Christian hero, then, life is a battle against the forces of evil which, if fought strenuously and successfully, serves to glorify God. As Michael tells Adam, "add / Deeds to thy knowledge answerable . . . . " (XII. 581-582) We thus learn that Adam has a positive duty to execute in life; he is to be a servant of God working for the glory of God. He is to be magnanimous.

Whether we can consider Adam a potentially contemplative being when he leaves Eden, however, depends on the precise meaning we assign to "Providence". I have said that Adam, because he is aware of Christ's redemptive mission, and because he is aware of God's grand design, may have the capacity for knowing God while he (Adam) yet remains on earth. Milton points out in De Doctrina Christiana, however, that God's comforter was "sent by the Son from the father." Milton does not say whether Adam, existing before Christ's coming, had the advantage of the Holy Spirit's aid. I think that Milton would argue he did not. Adam would not, then, have the same capacity for heroism that the believing Christian did. Milton would accept this opinion, I believe, because it would make Christ's advent more meaningful to men. That is, perfect heroism is only possible with the physical arrival of Christ, and Christ, therefore, deserves all the more thanks and praise for his goodness. Adam has only conscience (right reason) and "Providence" to guide him. His power to reason, because regenerated, will enable him to differentiate between good and evil, but whether he has any kind of contact with the divine presence
we cannot know for certain. Providence is the only possible alternative to the Holy Spirit. In *De Doctrina Christiana* Milton defined providence as God's government of the universe, as the divine principle making for order.

There can be no doubt that every thing in the world, by the beauty of its order, and evidence of a determinate and beneficial purpose which pervades it, testifies that some supreme efficient Power must have pre-existed, by which the whole was ordained for a specific end.  

There can also be no doubt that Milton believed Adam left paradise to dwell in a benevolent universe where God permitted evil to flourish so that man could prove his righteousness. But whether pre-Christian man could actually experience the divine presence, could actually acquire any knowledge of God, is a debatable point and one that my remarks here will not likely resolve. I wish to point out, however, that Adam was very likely incapable of contemplation—of complete and perfect heroism—for that required the mediation of Christ. Regardless of whether we choose to call Adam a perfect Miltonic hero or not, however, one fact is sure: Adam is more heroic after the fall than he was before it. His new life is a challenge which he knows will demand all his will and his strength. He has a greater sense of worth now because he knows that he can be a soldier of God in the war against evil. He knows that he has been, and still is weak, but knows, too, that he can be strong. Armed with a new sense of purpose he can be stronger than before. In paradise, Adam had blissful life created for him; on earth he must create his own. Indeed, before the fall, Adam's world was before him and he owned it all. Now it is for him to choose his own "place of rest." *Felix culpa*.
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER III


4. Ibid., p. 255.


6. Ibid., p. 343.

7. Ibid., p. 367.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., p. 379.


11. In the second book of *De Doctrina Christiana* Milton discusses prudence as one of the duties owing to both God and man. Belonging to the understanding, prudence is "that virtue by which we discern what is proper to be done under the various circumstances of time and place" (*Works*, XVII, p. 37).


13. E.M.W. Tillyard argues, and with some justification, that Adam's passionate outcry against women (X, 888-908) "is of course Milton's own voice, unable through the urgency of personal experience to keep silent." This opinion, it seems to me, fails to recognize that Adam is wholly depraved when he speaks. Before Adam can be regenerated, before he can, in fact, become noble, he must acknowledge his own guilt as the chief one. Adam is never allowed to forget that it was his responsibility to manage his wife. See: E.M.W. Tillyard, *Milton* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1956), p. 265.
At the Last Supper Jesus told his disciples: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John XIV, 26).
For we ourselves are as great enemies to our salvation as either the world or the devil. For our understanding, reason, will and affections, are altogether against us. Our natural wisdom is an enemy unto us. Our concupisences and lusts do minister strength to Satan's temptations. They are al in league with Satan against us. They take part with him, in every thing, against us and our salvation. They fight al under his standard, and receive their pay of him. This then goeth hard on our side, that the devil hath an inward party against us: and we carry alwaies within us our greatest enemie, which is ever readie, night and day, to betray us into the hands of Satan; yet, to unbolt the doore, and let him in, to cut our throats. Here then we see an huge army of dreadfull enemies, and a very Legion of devils, lying in ambush, against our soules. Are not we therefore poore wretches, in a most pittiful case, which are thus besieged on every side?

Arthur Dent
The Plaine-Mans Path-way to Heaven (1601)

To look at the career of a pre-Christian man in the hope of discovering Milton's final statement of what constitutes heroic virtue would seem to contradict all that has been said in this essay. Critics of Samson Agonistes, however, have attempted, and with considerable success, to show that Samson, in the final analysis, is Milton's most successful rendering of heroic man. Writing in 1949, F.M. Krouse in his full-length study of Samson Agonistes, points out Milton's Samson is a model of Christian heroism and virtue. Milton, Krouse contends, drew from a rich and varied literary tradition surrounding the biblical Samson, and made his own protagonist an exemplary image of Christian virtue for all men to emulate. Krouse writes:
The Samson we meet in Milton's play is a saint, a champion of God, a great hero, who, through his own fault, has failed in his vocation, fallen from virtue and grace, and sorely repented. Indeed, following Krouse's lead, more recent critics of Milton's tragedy have made a concerted effort to demonstrate that the English poet's play could well be a chapter in the New Testament.

Writing in 1959, A.S.P. Woodhouse points out that the religion permeating *Samson Agonistes* is not Hebraic but distinctively Christian. The tension in the poem is between man's freedom and God's providence. John M. Steadman, by astute and lengthy references to the theological writings of Milton's contemporaries and to Milton's own discussion of Christian doctrine, reveals that Milton's Samson, though living in the old dispensation, can still be a "hero of faith." Samson "conforms to the law of the spirit in contradistinction with the written law." The fact that Samson was a Nazarite, all the critics agree, does not in any way detract from his potentiality for Christian heroism. Because Samson is fallen man whose painful suffering does not make him despair of the fulfilment of God's promise to him, he is a suitable model for the delineation of Christian heroism. Samson conforms to the heroic pattern outlined by Burton Kurth.

In the Christian view, there was not only the heroism of the active struggle with evil forces, but also the heroism of sacrifice and submission to the will of God in order that greater good might be achieved, the victorious suffering of the martyrs and saints. Furthermore, the contest with evil was seen not only as a test of the Christian hero's nobility and spiritual strength, but also as the means whereby he might gain greater wisdom and faith. Trial and suffering began to emerge as the chief measures of the Christian hero, whose virtue and steadfastness were thus exemplified and proved.
It is no longer subject to dispute, then, to regard Milton's Samson as an exemplar of Christian heroism. Samson, though living before the advent of Christ, can, apparently, be a perfect Miltonic hero.

At risk of appearing to have constructed a kind of "straw man" argument by outlining the modern critical opinion concerning Milton's play, I must point out that I think the critics have ignored one extremely important element: Milton's treatment of the Nazarite clearly shows that Samson's heroism is imperfect, imperfect in the sense that Samson's contemporaries do not correctly understand Milton's grounds for considering Samson a hero. *Samson Agonistes*, in fact, contains an implicit rejection of Samson's physical heroism, and the poem thus embraces a subtle but nonetheless grand irony. That is, Samson's destruction of the Philistines' temple is a symbolic act. Samson, by pulling down the pillars, symbolically destroys evil. But it is his physical act of destruction that his friends praise; they admire "might" and call it "heroic virtue."

In *Samson Agonistes*, like *Paradise Lost*, Milton set out to reveal the inferior condition in which men lived before the time of Christ. I call this chapter "Magnanimity Agonistes" for two reasons: first, Samson is magnanimous man who loses his own sense of worth and must struggle to regain it; secondly, the concept of magnanimity itself is on trial in Milton's play, for Milton demonstrates that, until Christ's advent, true heroism, magnanimity, was neither understood nor recognized by men. Samson, because directly chosen by God and because, we may assume, in direct communication with God, can be a bona fide Christian hero. But Samson's contemporaries, not equipped with the same intimate knowledge of
God that Samson has, cannot comprehend Samson's heroism.

When we first meet Samson, he is the image of fallen humanity, the eikon of depraved and sinful man. The nature of his sin demands our first consideration. Samson knows that he was born "a person separate to God, /Design'd for great exploits ..." (31-32). He knows, moreover, that his great strength was the gift of God, given so that Samson might glorify God by delivering his people from their slavery to the Philistines. Before his sin, Samson knew, then, that he was a superior man, one whose life was to be dedicated and devoted to the service of God. Because of the supernatural circumstances surrounding his birth and because of his supernatural strength, Samson was obligated to be conscious of his own worth. His sin resulted from a failure on his part to recognize his own worth and dignity as a servant of God. Like Adam, Samson forgot or ignored his responsibility; he thereby repudiated his own worth and dignity. Indeed, Samson's bitter complaint is focused on this matter: he complains that he has betrayed himself and, implicitly, God's trust. He has revealed the source of his strength to an inferior, an enemy of his people and his God. Though Samson's first impulse is to impute the fault to God (35-42), he realizes that the weakness is his own and upbraids himself.

Whom have I to complain of but myself?  
Who this high gift of strength committed to me,  
In what part lodg'd, how easily bereft me,  
Under the seal of silence could not keep,  
But weakly to a woman must reveal it,  
O'ercome with importunity and tears.  
O impotence of mind, in body strong! (46-52)

Samson's sin, then, amounts to his failure to act as befits a superior man. This can perhaps be made clearer by reference to De Doctrina Christiana.
where Milton outlines the vices opposed to magnanimity: ambitious spirit, pride, and pusillanimity. Does Samson's sin, in the same way as Adam's, reveal that he is guilty of any or all of these?

Milton contended, by quoting from Scripture, that "for men to search their own glory is not glory" (Proverbs XXV, 27). To do so would be to have an ambitious spirit. Milton's Samson, however, devoted his life to the pursuit of God's glory. He is not guilty on this account.

The guilt here, however, is not wholly absent. It is Manoa's. He, by repeatedly praising his son for the latter's 'heroic' exploits, is actually tempting Samson to be ambitious, to pursue his own glory rather than the glory of God. For example, when Manoa believes he has been successful in arranging Samson's release from the mill, he says:

> It shall be my delight to tend his eyes,  
> And view him sitting in the house ennobl'd  
> With all those high exploits by him achiev'd,  
> And on his shoulders waving down those locks,  
> That of a Nation arm'd the strength contain'd . . . .

(1490-1494)

Samson's father wants to glorify Samson and, vicariously, himself. He thus complains against God's justice when he sees his son's wretched condition.

> O wherefore did God grant me my request,  
> And as a blessing with such pomp adorn'd?  
> Why are his gifts desirable; to tempt  
> Our earnest Prayers, then, giv'n with solemn hand  
> As Graces, draw a Scorpion's tail behind?  
> For this did th' Angel twice descend? for this  
> Ordain'd thy nurture holy, as of a Plant?  
> Select and Sacred, Glorious for a while,  
> The miracle of men: then in an hour  
> Ensnar'd, assaulted, overcome, led bound  
> Thy Foes' derision, Captive, Poor, and Blind,  
> Into a Dungeon thrust, to work with Slaves?

(356-367)
It might be argued in Manoa's defence that he is a heartbroken old man whose life has come crashing down around him. But Milton, besides making the old man blame God in order that Samson might be compelled to reason that the fault is not God's, makes it clear, too, that the old man is guilty of an ambitious spirit. He wants glory for Samson and for himself as Samson's father. Obviously Manoa does not understand the real nature of the superior man's pursuit of glory.

Pride, the second vice opposed to magnanimity, is a sin of which both Samson and his father are guilty. Samson differs from his father in this, however, for Samson admits his guilt. He explains:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{. . . after some proof} \\
&\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{Of acts indeed heroic, far beyond} \\
&\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{The Sons of Anak, famous now and blaz'd,} \\
&\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{Fearless of danger, like a petty God} \\
&\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{I walk'd about admir'd of all and dreaded} \\
&\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{On hostile ground, none daring my affront.} \\
&\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{(526-531)}
\end{align*}
\]

In *De Doctrina Christiana* Milton defined pride as "when a man values himself without merit, or more highly than his merits deserve, or is elated by some insignificant circumstance." Samson prided himself in the physical strength God had given him. Samson's own merit lay in his adherence to the cause of truth and the use of his strength in God's service—not in the acts themselves. The strength, in fact, was of minor significance. It had been the gift of God, and Samson, therefore, had no right to pride himself on what God's strength could accomplish. Samson, indeed, was elated by the acts themselves, rather than by what the acts accomplished with reference to God's glory. Unlike his son, Manoa does not understand, as Samson ultimately does, that the heroic acts are not
in themselves heroic, that the glory Samson gains is his only in trust, and that the final glory must be God's. The old man thus refers to his son as "once glorious", "the miracle of men". He reminds Samson of the sinfulness of taking part in the Philistian celebration, pointing out to his son that Samson will thereby dishonour God. But Manoa's grief is as much for himself as it is for God. He complains:

So Dagon shall be magnified, and God,
Besides whom is no God, compar'd with Idols,
Disglorified, blasphem'd, and had in scorn
By th'Idolatrous rout amidst their wine;
Which to have come to pass by means of thee,
Samson, of all thy sufferings think the heaviest,
Of all reproach the most with shame that ever
Could have befall'n thee and thy Father's house.

(440-447)

Manoa's complaint, though he acknowledges that the great shame will accrue to God, also reveals that he is guilty of pride. That is, Manoa is ashamed as much for himself and his house as he is for God. His shame reveals that he wants glory for his son's exploits. Once more it is obvious that Manoa does not comprehend the real nature of the superior man's pursuit of glory.

It is the third vice opposed to magnanimity, pusillanimity, which represents Samson's gravest offence, for Samson's failure to be magnanimous is the principal cause of his sin. In De Doctrina Christiana Milton does not formally define the term. Rather, he provides an example. The example Milton gives, however, leaves no doubt as to the precise meaning Milton assigned to pusillanimity. He refers to the first book of Samuel in which the prophet informs Saul that he (Saul) is to be the King of Israel.
Though Saul had already been anointed by Samuel and told of God's will (I. X, 1), he did not admit to his uncle what the prophet had revealed. Similarly, when Samuel announces to the people that a King has been chosen, Saul is nowhere to be found.

. . . and Saul the son of Kish was taken by lot. But when they sought him, he could not be found.

So they inquired again of the LORD, "Did the man come hither?" and the LORD said, "Behold, he has hidden himself among the baggage." Then they ran and fetched him from there; and when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulder upward. And Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen? There is none like him among all the people." And all the people shouted, "Long live the king!" (I.X, 20-24)

Significantly, Milton chose the episode of Saul to demonstrate what the magnanimous man had not to be. Saul, like Samson, has great strength (his height is symbolic of this) and, even more significant, he soon proves himself a capable military leader (I.XI, 11). The most important point here is surely that Saul, according to Milton, lacks a necessary quality. He does not recognize his own worth, and this, it is emphasized, is a vice, a weakness in his character. Pusillanimity is defined (OED) as: "lack of courage or fortitude; pettiness of spirit; cowardliness, timidity." Physically, neither Samson nor Saul are cowardly. As avowed servants of God, both men, moreover, are above pettiness of Spirit. But Samson, like Saul, was not sufficiently aware of his own worth. Neither man was "actuated by a regard to his own dignity rightly understood." Samson had been divinely called to be a servant of God and to glorify God. By failing to recognize his own magnanimity, by betraying his secret (God's secret) to Dalila, he had, in effect, renounced his own
dignity. Samson's contest is with himself, and the drama of Samson Agonistes is Samson's struggle to be regenerated as magnanimous man.

As I have suggested in my discussion concerning Adam's regeneration, self-knowledge, leading ultimately to the individual's sense of worth, demands, paradoxically, that the individual acknowledge his own weakness. Samson, like Adam, must accept his own human frailty before he can be strong. He must learn the nature of his own humanity. "Self-knowledge," as one critic has maintained, is

the insight into one's own nature, its essence, its capacities, its weaknesses, and its obligations ... /It provides the foundation, therefore, both of intellectual humility and of magnanimity. To perform his proper function and offices and to observe his proper end, the rational creature must recognize his peculiar position in the scale of being and the distinctive properties which differentiate him from other creatures--both higher and lower than himself--and from God.

Samson is not a plaster-saint without seams; he is a human being. He has, then, the capacity for greatness (the God-like in him) and an equal capacity for depravity (the brute-like). The first step to the heroic stature Samson ultimately attains is the self-knowledge that, as man, he is frail. He must learn that even his great physical strength is actually weak. Milton makes this point expressly clear by presenting Samson, the supernaturally strong man, as blind, "eyeless in Gaza", dressed in rags and stumbling. Samson's great physical strength, indeed, is made pathetic, for he is presented to us as protesting God's wisdom in making his body so frail. He complains

... why was the sight
To such a tender ball as th'eye confin'd?  
And not as feeling through all parts diffus'd,
That she might look at will through every pore? (93-97)
But Samson's acknowledgement of his physical frailty *per se* is only the beginning of his self-knowledge. He must learn that physical strength is only meaningful insofar as it is commensurate with wisdom, mental or spiritual strength. He thus reasons:

But what is strength without a double share  
Of wisdom? Vast, unwieldy, burdensome,  
Proudly secure, yet liable to fall  
By weakest subtleties, not made to rule,  
But to subserve where wisdom bears command.

(53-57)

And, even more importantly, Samson learns the truth, by painful experience, that God's gift of strength did not make him invulnerable. Though Samson is tempted to blame God when he laments his fallen condition, the truth of his observation is obvious. He argues:

God, when he gave me strength, to show withal  
How slight the gift was, hung it in my Hair.

(58-59)

What Samson says here is true in that God's gift *is* slight. That is, physical strength *per se* is helplessly weak. The chorus reminds us of the real nature of God's gift when they bemoan Samson's miserable condition. We learn of Samson

... whose strength, *while* virtue was her mate,  
Might have subdu'd the Earth ... (172-173; my italics)

The emphasis, in short, is placed upon the limitations of physical strength. It follows, therefore, that Samson's physical strength as it is manifested by his destruction of the Philistine's temple, cannot be the justification for calling him a hero. Samson's heroism, rather, depends on
his ability to accept his human frailty by acknowledging that the principal
guilt is his alone. He cannot be strong until he admits he is weak.

Though the Biblical account of Samson cannot be looked upon as
a kind of 'key' to Samson Agonistes, the concluding episode in Samson's
career bears consideration here. According to Judges, Samson sins, is
blinded and made captive by the Philistines, and, while "making sport"
for them, pulls down the pillars of their temple and destroys himself
and his enemies. There is only one brief suggestion of Samson's inner
struggle in the Biblical account. He prays:

O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee,
only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged on the Philistines
for my two eyes. (XVI, 28)

In this passage is contained the germ of Milton's tragedy, for Samson's
words suggest that he has learned his limitations as man—he prays that
God will grant him the great strength he once had—and, further, suggest
that Samson perhaps sees himself as the instrument of God's justice.
Milton took these two ideas and made them the basis of his poem's conflict.
Samson must recognize that he is powerless without God's grace and must
recognize, too, that he might yet contribute in the cosmic struggle against
evil and thereby glorify God. Samson Agonistes is a dramatic account of
one man's sin, suffering, repentance, and regeneration as magnanimous or
heroic man.

Samson, reflecting on his own folly and his miserable condition,
comes dangerously close to falling into despair, which, as Milton pointed
out in De Doctrina Christiana, "takes place only in the reprobate."
Samson knows that God had chosen him to be the deliverer of his people, but he cannot accept that he might still succeed in his mission.

Promise was that I
Should Israel from Philistian yoke deliver;
Ask for this great Deliverer now, and find him
Eyeless in Gaza at the Mill with slaves,
Himself in bonds under Philistian yoke;
Yet stay, let me not rashly call in doubt
Divine prediction; what if all foretold
Had been fulfill'd but through mine own default,
Whom have I to complain of but myself? (38-46)

Samson is too ashamed and too depraved to deem himself worthy of God's service. Though it is true that Samson acquits God of the blame and though he does not deny that God's will may yet prevail (60-62), he cannot see that he might have a part to play in God's divine plan. Samson is without hope. He remains, as the chorus later observes,

As one past hope, abandon'd
And by himself given over . . .
(120-212)

Hope, Milton argued, was "that by which we accept with certainty the fulfilment of God's promises." That Samson is plagued by doubt is made patently clear by the fact that Samson does not want to live. Lamenting his blindness, Samson complains that his living death is worse than physical death. He argues he is

Buried, yet not exempt
By privilege of death and burial
From worst of other evils, pains and wrongs,
But made hereby obnoxious more
To all the miseries of life,
Among inhuman foes. (103-109; my italics)
By looking upon physical death as a "privilege", Samson reveals that he is hopeless. His inhuman foes are his own thoughts, and Samson's sense of shame is only compounded by his consciousness of what he had been, was to have been, and what he is now. This is the figure we encounter in the first one-hundred and more lines of Milton's poem. Samson is pathetic, ashamed, and pitifully hopeless, and death is the only remedy he can conceive. It is not unfounded speculation to argue here that Samson might have carried on in this manner indefinitely—even until his natural death. But he is not allowed to do this, for, compelled by the actions of both friends and enemies, he is forced to examine himself, the nature of his sin, and his own faith in God. Indeed, Milton's belief that "triall is by what is contrary"\(^{13}\) is exemplified in the action of Samson Agonistes. Samson is tempted by both his comforters and his tormentors; his virtue is tested. Samson must learn from this, first, to differentiate between good and evil, then, to pursue the good and reject the evil. By this process Samson can regain a sense of his own worth; he can become magnanimous man.

The drama of *Samson Agonistes* can be looked upon as consisting of five separate acts.\(^{14}\) The first (1-331) concerns Samson and the chorus, and reveals Samson's initial state of mind. Samson, as Woodhouse notes, feels remorse—not repentance.\(^{15}\) Samson's complaints arise from his sense of injured merit. He recognizes that he has been weak, but his personal shame leads him to ascribe the fault to God. To the chorus he complains that he has been foolish and weak, and asks:
. . . tell me, friends,
Am I not sung and proverb'd for a fool
In every street; do not they say, "How well
Are come upon him his deserts?" yet why?
Immeasurable strength they might behold
In me, of wisdom nothing more than mean;
This with the other should, at least, have pair'd,
These two proportion'd ill drove me transverse.

(202-209)

The chorus correctly reprimands Samson for his implicit criticism of God and informs him that human flesh is inherently weak.

Tax not divine disposal; wisest Men
Have err'd, and by bad Women been deceiv'd;
And shall again, pretend they ne'er so wise.

(210-212)

But when Samson's friends proceed to accuse him of more guilt than is rightfully his, he is impelled to defend himself. In addition to explaining that he chose an infidel for his wife because prompted by divine impulse, Samson rejects the advice of his supposed friends. They had informed him that flesh was frail and that many good men had been deceived by women, but Samson refuses to accept precedent as grounds for extenuating his guilt. Rather, he admits:

... of what now I suffer
She [Dalila] was not the prime cause, but I myself
Who vanquisht with a peal of words (O Weakness!)
Gave up my fort of silence to a Woman.

(233-236)

Though the chorus has visited Samson in the belief that

... apt words have power to swaye
The tumors of a troubl'd mind,
And are as balm to fester'd wounds (184-186),
their words only serve to augment Samson's grief and remorse. The chorus forces Samson to accept that the chief guilt is his own. His friends' second overture, however, has a very different effect.

When Samson's countrymen complain that "Israel still serves with all his Sons" (239), Samson argues in his defence that one man's valor can not make and keep a nation free. What is more important for our discussion here, however, is that Samson's answer reveals certain traces of magnanimity. He admits that he did not seek to gain a large following, that he was not ambitious. The magnanimous man does not, to refer once again to Cicero, "depend on the mistaken plaudits of the ignorant. Samson had been guilty of pride; he had indeed "walk'd about like a petty God," and had concerned himself with the applause of the multitude. He now admits that the strength was God's gift and that he had used it to promote God's glory. Though Samson's sense of injured merit still prevents him from being penitent, he begins to understand that he was worthy, and he thus refuses to accept the guilt that is not rightly his. Indeed, when the chorus proceeds to explain Samson's misfortune by referring to examples from history (277-289), Samson, though he admits to failure in his mission, tells his countrymen that they are obligated to keep their faith in God's promised deliverance.

Of such examples add mee to the role,  
Mee easily indeed mine may neglect,  
But God's propos'd deliverance not so.  
(290-292)

Ironically, Samson advises the chorus as to what they must do—without comprehending that he, too, must not abandon faith. In the first act of
Milton's drama, then, Samson's shame is counterbalanced by his sense of injured merit. He has not fully accepted the guilt or repented, and he advises others to continue the pursuit of God's glory (to maintain their faith) while he is in extreme danger of completely losing his own. The second act (332-709), however, represents an even lower point in Samson's wretchedness.

Manoa's impassioned complaint against the miserable condition in which he finds his son and against the misery he himself feels, moves Samson to defend God's ways. He corrects his father's error, and admonishes

Appoint not heavenly disposition Father,
Nothing of all these evils hath befall'n me
But justly; I myself have brought them on,
Sole author I, sole cause, if aught seem vile,
As vile hath been my folly, who have profan'd
The mystery of God giv'n me under pledge
Of vow, and have betray'd it to a woman,
A Canaanite, my faithless enemy.
This well I knew, nor was at all surpris'd,
But warn'd by oft experience; . . . (373-382)

By defending God's justice, Samson recognizes that he has been fairly treated, and recognizes that the misery he now suffers is not as wretched as his former weakness had been. He admits:

The base degree to which I now am fall'n,
These rags, this grinding is not yet so base
As was my former servitude . . . (414-416)

The greatest pain Samson suffers is inward, the indignity and shame he feels at having been untrue to himself, at not having been magnanimous as he should have been. It is when Manoa informs him of the shame Samson
has brought to God (433-457), however, that Samson's shame becomes almost unbearable. But, by the force of the old man's argument, Samson is compelled to assert his own faith in God.

This only hope relieves me, that the strife
With mee hath end; all the contest is now
Twixt God and Dagon; Dagon hath presum'd,
Mee overthrown, to enter lists with God,
His Deity comparing and preferring
Before the God of Abraham. He, be sure,
Will not connive, or linger thus provok'd,
But will arise and his great name assert . . . .

(460-468)

Samson, then, has not lost his faith in God's power to combat and defeat evil. He cannot, however, comprehend that he may be a participant in the great contest. Indeed, it is here that the inferior human condition of the old dispensation manifests itself.

Manoa, though he, like Samson, acknowledges God's power, does not understand that his own son may yet be of service to God (478-481), and the old man thus suggests that Samson might be released by payments made to the Philistian lords (481-486). What Manoa suggests here is really a temptation put before Samson, a temptation to give up the struggle, and must necessarily be rejected. Indeed, passive suffering is anathema to Milton's concept of heroic man, for the superior man is morally obligated to pursue the honour of God; he is, in Aquinas' words, "minded to do some great act." And Samson, though he cannot see himself as having an active role to play in the battle against evil, must not leave the field. To do so would be to irrevocably renounce his own magnanimity.

But Samson's reply to his father is not indicative of regained magnanimity,
for it is not properly motivated. Samson, in fact, wants to punish himself. To Manoa, he says

Spare that proposal, Father, spare the trouble
Of that solicitation; let me here,
As I deserve, pay on my punishment;
And expiate, if possible, my crime,
Shameful garrulity. (487-490)

Samson, as his father correctly reasons, is "over-just." He tells his son that Samson should be repentant, but should not wilfully aggravate his misery (502-515). And here Samson is once more called upon to differentiate between good and evil. He must repent his sin, to be sure, but if he passively accepts his own miserable condition, his decision will manifest his distrust of God. Manoa, in fact, here tempts him to do this. Samson's rejection of the course of inaction his father outlines, however, is still not intrinsically good. Rather, Samson complains that life would no longer be bearable because of his inward misery, and because of his consciousness of what he had formerly been. His life, he complains, would be utterly devoid of meaning and purpose. He asks,

Now blind, disheart'n'd, sham'd, dishon'ed, quell'd
To what can I be useful, wherein serve
My Nation, and the work from Heav'n impos'd,
But to sit idle on the household hearth,
A burdensome drone . . . ? (563-567)

The painful truth is that the superior man living before the advent of Christ is not aware that he can make any meaningful contribution except in terms of action. The 'imperfect faith' of the old dispensation actually precludes Samson's understanding that men can justify their existence by simply resisting and rejecting evil. The only evil Samson knows is
Dagon and his worshippers. Unless he can see his duty comprised of actual physical struggle against Dagon, Samson cannot see himself as a hero. Manoa, it is true, had extolled patience and filial submission as man's lot (511), but for the truly magnanimous man who pursues honor and glory, submission is hardly tantamount to heroism. In short, evil in the old dispensation amounted to idolatry. Virtue meant obedience to God's law. The magnanimous or heroic man's task is to aid in the destruction of evil and thereby to glorify God. But the enemy to the law (idolators) is the only evil he knows. Samson cannot know that he can glorify God by patient endurance of evil, and that he can destroy evil by rejecting it in himself. His heroism must, therefore, be demonstrated by physical acts. It is for this reason that Samson, incapable of comprehending how he, blinded and made captive, can battle Dagon, he is tempted naturally to give up the struggle. Like the mythic Sibyl, he wants only to die. Samson's wretchedness is made even more horrible, however, by the fact that his imperfect comprehension of faith leads him to believe God has deserted him.

I was his nursling once and choice delight,
His destin'd from the womb,
Promis'd by Heavenly message twice descending,
Under his special eye
Abstemious I grew up and thriv'd amain;
He led me on to mightiest deeds
Above the nerve of mortal arm
Against th'uncircumcis'd, our enemies.
But now hath cast me off as never known . . .

(633-641)

The chorus' response to Samson's expression of anguish reveals the real nature of the particular difficulty in which Samson finds himself. They argue:
Many are the sayings of the wise
In ancient and in modern books enroll'd,
Extolling patience as the truest fortitude,
And to the bearing well of all calamities,
All chances incident to man's frail life
Consolatories writ
With studied argument, and much persuasion sought
Lenient of grief and anxious thought,
But with th'affected in his pangs thir sound
Little prevails, or rather seems a tune,
Harsh, and of dissonant mood from his complaint,
Unless he feel within
Some source of consolation from above
Secret refreshings, that repair his strength,
And fainting spirits uphold. (652-666)

The crucial point here is that Samson cannot possess any source of consolation from above which might enable him to patiently endure. He does not know that patience in the face of evil glorifies God, or that the patient sufferer has as much claim to being called a soldier in God's army as has the active warrior. Samson cannot know this grand design. As a result, though Samson can have faith in God's strength and in his mercy, and though he can trust in God's promise that Samson should deliver Israel, he is not equipped, because of his imperfect faith, to patiently endure. For this reason death is his only real remedy, and it is, moreover, the only possible solution to Samson's problem. It is for this reason also that Samson's faith is renewable only by its exercise in reaction to hostile forces. Samson does not possess any knowledge of God's grand design beyond what God has informed him concerning the deliverance of Israel. The only evil Samson recognizes, then, is in the form of his nation's enemies. Samson's regeneration is thus accomplished by his rejection of evil in the persons of Dalila and Harapha.

Dalila's overtures are a symbol of passion. Samson must reject
her in order to prove that he is no longer susceptible to passion's domination, that he is master of himself. Dalila's attempts to extenuate her own guilt are met with scorn by Samson, and it is interesting to note that in Samson's dismissal of her the beginnings of his new-found faith are manifest. Thus, when Dalila, begging for pardon, pleads innate weakness (female curiosity), and conjugal love as her reasons for betraying him (773-818), Samson becomes God's advocate: he informs her that weakness can never be an excuse in God's eyes (829-835); he instructs her in the real meaning of love (836-840). Samson, perhaps unwittingly, has become an active servant of God. But he is forced to acknowledge the truth of one of Dalila's arguments: he is as guilty as she is, perhaps even more so. He admits:

I to myself was false ere thou to me;
Such pardon therefore as I give my folly,
Take to thy wicked deed .... (824-826)

Similarly, when Dalila claims her religion was itself justification, Samson argues that gods who are ungodly are no gods and deserve no obedience (895-898). Dalila's offer of emotional and physical sanctuary (909-927) must also be rejected, for to accept would be to embrace the very evil that had debased Samson. But Samson's rejection of evil (faithless, Philistian Dalila) gives him strength and partial release from his pain. He regains a measure of self-esteem by recognizing that his servitude at the mill is less servile than would be his acceptance of Dalila's offered pleasure. Indeed, as he tells Dalila,

This Gaol I count the house of Liberty
To thine whose doors my feet shall never enter.
(949-950)
Thus rejected, Dalila torments Samson and exults in her victory, (959-996). The importance of this scene is that Dalila, by coming in contact with good, manifests herself as evil, and she is seen by Samson for what she really is: spiteful, cruel, hypocritical, and idolatrous. It is after Dalila departs, however, that we see the full effect she has had on Samson.

Samson's words after Dalila's departure reveal that he begins to understand, though imperfectly, the mystery of God's ways. Ironically, he reasons,

. . . God sent her to debase me,
And aggravate my folly who committed
To such a viper his most sacred trust
Of secrecy, my safety, and my life. (999-1002)

God's permissive will allowed Dalila to tempt Samson and to taunt him— but not in order to shame him more. Rather, Dalila's overtures enable Samson to refashion some vestige of personal worth, and for this reason God had permitted her to confront Samson. Samson has mastered himself. He has preferred "strenuous liberty" to "bondage with ease", and knowing that it was within his power to choose and that he has chosen the harder course, he has a renewed sense of worth. This is made patently clear in the fourth act of the drama (1075-1307) when he is confronted by the Philistian giant, Harapha.

Observing Harapha's approach, the chorus informs Samson that the giant's "... habit carries peace, his brow defiance" (1073). Samson's laconic reply reveals the transformation his character has undergone, for he says simply, "Or peace or not, alike to me he comes" (1074). His fortitude tempered and toughened by his painful ordeal, Samson is now equipped to face his adversary.
Harapha's actions do not constitute a temptation. Rather, they are Milton's device to lift Samson out of his depressed state. Confronted by a braggart who speaks against Samson and his God, Samson must actively oppose the giant. But from the conflict Samson draws strength and confidence. Harapha is the eidolon of heroic magnanimity. He is of 'heroic' stature, skilled in feats of arms, and exultant in his own physical strength. Moreover, the giant is overtly contemptuous of inferiors; his mind aspires to the increase of his own glory. His vaunts (not accidently bearing remarkable resemblance to the kind of speeches which permeate the *Iliad*) move Samson to assert his (Samson's) mettle. The giant has come to examine Samson's physical bearing, for by inspecting Samson's outward form Harapha mistakenly believes he can evaluate Samson's worth. By his own admission, Samson is not heroic in aspect; he had formerly referred to himself as a "burdensome drone" and, outwardly at least, he is a pathetic figure. His heroic spirit, however, remains formidable, and Samson openly challenges the giant to mortal combat. But Samson's valor is not the result of pride in his own physical strength. This, indeed, is made expressly clear when Harapha ridicules the blind warrior and accuses him of using "spells" or "black enchantments" to subdue his foes (1130-1138). Samson, forced to reply to this challenge, argues that his armor is his faith, and his strength the gift of God.

I know no spells, use no forbidden Arts;  
My trust is in the living God who gave me  
At my Nativity this strength . . . .  
(1139-1141)

By inviting Harapha to defend the name of Dagon (evil) Samson obviously
sees himself as God's champion (1145-1153). Samson has recaptured his lost hope by challenging Harapha, for the Nazarite no longer doubts that what God has promised will come to pass. When, similarly, Harapha accuses Samson of presuming on his God (1165-1168), Samson answers in his own defence that his God is merciful and forgiving. To Harapha's insults and his suggestion that Samson's God has forsaken his former champion, Samson thus replies:

All these indignities, for such they are
From thine, these evils I deserve and more,
Acknowledge them from God inflicted on me
Justly, yet despair not of his final pardon
Whose ear is ever open; and his eye
Gracious to re-admit the suppliant . . . .

(1168-1173)

Forced by external circumstances to assert his worth and to examine his own faith, Samson has moved that much closer to recapturing his magnanimity. As a sinner he is obligated to be 'convicted' of his sin, to be contrite, to confess, to depart from evil, and, ultimately, to turn to good. By the time the giant departs, Samson has been regenerated; he has repented his sin. The next step in his renovation is the acquisition of faith, which he now manifests signs of possessing. But Samson's faith is demonstrable only by trial, and before he can hope (can expect that what has been promised by God will be given), he must prove his faith. The messenger's arrival triggers this final development in Samson's character.

When informed of the demands of the Philistian lords, Samson's first reaction is blatant refusal. Warned that his refusal will offend the enemy, Samson shows that he is immune to any punishment that might be dealt him. He protests,
Can they think me so broken, so debas'd
With corporal servitude, that my mind ever
Will condescend to such absurd commands?
(1335-1337)

Samson has obviously regained his sense of personal worth and dignity. Justifiably, he believes he is too worthy a being to "make sport" for the Philistines. To glorify Dagon, of course, is the ultimate depravity for Samson as a Hebrew, and idolatry is the worst kind of sin. Jahweh, indeed, is a jealous God. But Samson no longer sees himself as individual man; he is God's champion. Samson's particular faith, however, like faith itself as Hume contended, subverts all the principles of human understanding. Samson feels certain "motions" within him (1381-1383). He relents, and follows the messenger to do he knows not what. To his friends, he bids farewell by saying,

Happ'n what may, of me expect to hear
Nothing dishonorable, impure, unworthy
Our God, our Law, my nation, or myself;
The last of me or no I cannot warrant.
(1423-1426)

Significantly, St. Paul considered Samson a hero of faith. Paul had defined faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews XI, 1), and had argued that the faithful servant of God "must believe what he [God] is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (XI, 6). Samson, according to Paul, had, then, to be convinced that God would grant him the strength to destroy the temple of Dagon. The messenger's description of Samson's last moments manifests that Milton, like Paul, obviously considered Samson a hero of faith. Samson,
... with head a while inclin'd,
And eyes fast fixt he stood, as one who pray'd,
Or some great matter in his mind revolv'd.
(1636-1638)

There can be no doubt that Milton's Samson had, before his death, recovered his faith, "... A FULL PERSUASION OPERATED IN IS THROUGH THE GIFT OF GOD, WHEREBY WE BELIEVE, ON THE SOLE AUTHORITY OF THE PROMISE ITSELF, THAT WHATSOEVER THINGS HE HAS PROMISED ... ARE OURS ... "

Samson had, moreover, regained his dignity as a man, had devoted his life and death to the pursuit of God's honour and glory, and had, by acquiring faith, gained some knowledge of God. He is magnanimous man, a Miltonic hero. Samson's struggle, however, is only one part, albeit the most important part, of the contest Milton's poem depicts. Magnanimity is also contesting.

Samson's particular gift from God is physical strength, and his achievement is thus represented in physical terms; he destroys the temple and the Philistines. The physical act, of course, is a symbolic representation of man's victory over evil (Dagon). By destroying evil, man fulfils his obligations in life and can thus shake off the mortal coil and gain his reward. The real drama of Milton's tragedy concerns Samson's inward struggle to destroy the evil in himself, to make himself worthy, and the drama is eminently psychological. But Milton, as I have indicated throughout this chapter, makes it patently clear that the real nature of Samson's heroism and his magnanimity is imperfectly understood—especially by Manoa.

The chorus, whose function it is to provide a commentary on the action of the poem, apparently comprehends the nature of Samson's heroism
and his magnanimity. Thus, when Samson challenges Harapha to combat and the giant refuses, the chorus reminds us that Samson's great strength is inward. He has ". . . Plain Heroic magnitude of mind," and he is armed with "celestial vigor" (1279-1280). The chorus then proceeds to extol patience as a better fortitude (1287-1289), but, as I pointed out in my discussion of Manoa's praise of filial submission, patience is not tantamount to heroism in Samson's eyes. Milton's own Christianity likely moved him to put these words into the mouths of the chorus, but one fact is clear: in the context of the old dispensation patient acceptance of suffering is not heroic. This could only be when men were aware that the cosmic struggle between good and evil could be waged within every man. Samson's magnanimous nature cannot fulfil itself by patient endurance of evil. It requires active struggle against evil (Dagon). It is Manoa's role in the play to make it obvious that real heroism is not possible for men (men not expressly chosen by God) living in the old dispensation, for Samson's father reveals that he does not comprehend why his son is a hero.

On Manoa's return to the courtyard where he had left Samson, the old man proudly announces his success in working his son's liberty (1454). Obviously Manoa does not understand the nature of true liberty, however, for he has failed to comprehend that Samson's slavery and bondage were inward. The chorus, because they joyously react to Manoa's news, also fail to understand that Samson had attained freedom (1455-1466). Similarly, Manoa will be "ennobl'd" by his son's past accomplishments (1491-1492). He takes pride in what are really "insignificant circumstances." But the grand irony occurs after Samson's death.
Manoa, with his characteristic habit of speaking absolute truth and utter falsehood in the same breath, asks,

How died he? death to life is crown or shame.
All by him fell thou say' st, by whom fell he,
What glorious hand gave Samson his death's wound?

(1579-1581)

Manoa's first statement is correct. But, like Harapha, Manoa is most impressed by feats of arms and martial valor. Apparently the man who slays Samson gains glory. Again, when Manoa learns of the manner in which his son died, he describes the revenge as "glorious" (1660). Though Manoa admits that the revenge is glorious because God has fulfilled his promise to Samson, the glory the old man exults in is not the glory of God, or Samson's in the name of God. Indeed, Manoa's last words make it very clear that he does not perceive the real, essential nature of Samson's heroism. He tells his friends:

Come, come, no time for lamentation now,
Nor much more cause: Samson hath quit himself
Like Samson, and heroically hath finish'd
A life Heroic, on his Enemies
Fully reveng'd hath left them years of mourning . . .

(1708-1712)

Surely Milton's point is that Samson has finished life more 'heroically' than Samson. Manoa, however, measures his son's heroism by the physical act—the number of the enemy Samson has slain. Furthermore, the glory in which Manoa exults is essentially that which he and Samson will receive. Though Manoa recognizes that the honor of Israel has been vindicated by Samson's act (1714-1716), he does not comprehend that the real glory is owing to God, that his son's glory is only Samson's
insofar as the hero is considered to be God's agent. Manoa's decision to build a monument to his son's glory conclusively reveals that Manoa does not recognize the essential quality of heroism. Manoa will

... build him
A Monument, and plant it round with shade
Of Laurel ever green, and branching Palm,
With all his Trophies hung, and Acts enrol'd
In copious Legend, or sweet Lyric Song.
Thither shall all the valiant youth resort,
And from his memory inflame thir breasts
To matchless valor, and adventures high.

(1733-1740; italics are mine)

For Manoa, then, heroism means physical valor and martial prowess. He represents the meaning heroism held for men who lived in the old dispensation. He cannot conceive of a brand of heroism that transcends the purely physical. That Milton deliberately set out to demonstrate the imperfect comprehension of pre-Christian men, I think, is indisputable to judge from the action of Samson Agonistes. In Paradise Lost Michael had informed Adam, though the angel referred to the evil acts of the sons of Seth, that:

... in those days Might only shall be admir'd
And valor and Heroic virtue call'd;
To overcome in Battle, and subdue
Nations, and bring home spoils with infinite
Man-slaughter, shall be held the highest pitch
Of human glory, and for Glory done
Of triumph; to be styled great conquerors,
Patrons of Mankind, Gods, and Sons of Gods,
Destroyers rightlier call'd, and Plagues of men,
Thus fame shall be achiev'd, renown on Earth,
And what most merits fame in silence hid.

(XI. 689-699)

Though Milton's Samson, because he was a servant of God and chosen by
God to augment the Creator's glory, cannot be placed in the same category as the race of giants, the fact remains: Manoa does not recognize or comprehend "what most merits fame." Despite the fact that the bloody carnage Manoa exults in has been committed in the name of God, it does not alter the plain fact that Manoa does not perceive the essential meaning of heroism. The Old Testament version of heroism was not satisfactory to Milton, and Manoa's function in the play, it seems obvious to me, is to make this clear.

E.M.W. Tillyard's discussion of *Samson Agonistes* embraces the point of view that Milton was dissatisfied with his heroes in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. Milton's drama represents the poet's "renewed faith in action."

In neither *Paradise Lost* nor *Paradise Regained* had there been a normal hero. Adam, if the hero, was in a situation too far removed from ordinary human conditions to be quite satisfactory as normal man: further, he did not have the opportunity of effecting anything that could be called worthy of the highest abilities of mankind. Christ in *Paradise Regained* cannot be said to correspond to fallible humanity: his victory is a foregone conclusion and his struggle, as struggle, has little interest. Samson is different: human, fallible, and yet exhibiting to what heroism humanity can rise. Milton may well have rested unsatisfied till he had achieved his creation.25

I do not dispute that Samson is a Miltonic hero, but I do dispute Tillyard's grounds for calling him a hero. Samson's career represents Milton's archetypal heroic situation: man confronted by evil, struggling against it and overcoming it, and becoming magnanimous in the process. But Milton's religion dictated that genuine heroism was comprehended by men only with the advent of Christ. *Samson Agonistes* contains an implicit declaration of this, and Milton's exemplary hero must be, then, Christ himself.
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER IV


3 "Faithful Champion": The Theological Basis of Milton's Hero of Faith" in Milton Modern Essays in Criticism, p. 471.

4 Milton and Christian Heroism, p. 27.


6 There can be no doubt that Milton's Samson bears little resemblance to his counterpart in Judges. For information regarding the character of Samson we may, therefore, rely almost exclusively on Milton's play.

7 Works, XVII, pp. 245-47.

8 Ibid., p. 247.

9 With reference to Saul, I am here considering his character and career before the appearance of David when Saul's degeneration began.


11 Works, XVII, p. 59.

12 Ibid., p. 57.

13 "Areopagitica" in Works, IV, p. 311.

14 Woodhouse's division in "Tragic Effect in Samson Agonistes" is the one I have used in this paper.

Ambition, as used by Milton here, "keeps its Latin meaning of canvassing for public support." Merritt Y. Hughes' note in Complete Poems and Major Prose, p. 557.

De Officiis, p. 66.

Summa Theologica, p. 250.

In his edition of Milton's work Hughes notes that Milton defined righteousness "as justice to a man's self," and contended that opposed to righteousness was "a perverse hatred of self." Complete Poems, p. 563.

Milton argued in De Doctrina Christiana that God permitted temptation because it made for righteousness. Works, XIV, p. 247.

In De Doctrina Milton discussed fortitude as one of the duties man owed to himself. Fortitude "is chiefly conspicuous in rejecting evil, or in regarding its approach with equanimity." Works, XVII, p. 247.

It is strange to witness that Samson can experience these "motions" and yet can find no "source of consolation from above / Secret refreshings . . . ," that might serve to enable him to patiently endure. The fact that Samson's only release can be death serves, it seems to me, to show that the faith held by men living before the coming of Christ is inferior to Christianity.

Works, XVII, p. 393. This is from Milton's definition of "saving faith." The omission is: " . . . whatsoever things he has promised in Christ are ours . . . ." Samson's faith, because he has been promised by God that he should deliver Israel, is substantially and essentially the same as Christian "saving faith."

St. Paul, whom I venture to think Milton's "best" teacher, had contended: "Every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that" (I. Corinthians VII, 7).

CHAPTER V

CHRIST: THE MEASURE OF HEROIC MAGNANIMITY

And when it was day, he departed and went into a desert place: and the people sought him, and came unto him, that he should not depart from them.
And he said unto them, I must preach the Kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent.

Luke IV, 42-43

Despite the fact that dispassionate criticism has long been recognized as the principal criterion for critical evaluation of literature, the experience of literature remains eminently personal. Next to Paradise Regained, I can think of no other poem with which critics have had greater difficulty in seeing the object as in itself it really is. We come to the poem bearing our likes and dislikes, our biases and prejudices, our icons and idols; we generally depart carrying the same baggage. Because the permanent beliefs of men reside in an area of the mind where logic and reason are seldom permitted entry, when we examine a work of art which lies near the very heart of our own personal experience and culture, our capacity for impartial examination and evaluation is greatly impaired. This is the difficulty facing the student of Paradise Regained. Christian readers fear their own bias; they carefully guard their praises and their criticisms. Non-Christians fear nothing; they can freely deprecate the poet's achievement out of hand. Ostensibly, to defend Milton's brief is to justify the Christian faith with all its contradictions and its ambiguities; to attack the poem is to argue that
the character of Jesus Christ automatically precludes any possibility of dramatic conflict. The real problem facing critics of Paradise Regained concerns the mysterious nature of Christ: is he man or is he a god? The Christian believes that the Son is both human and divine; he is, as Milton argued in De Doctrina, the "hypostatic union of two natures." The non-Christian finds it almost impossible to accept Milton's Christ as man. Unfounded admiration and unsupported condemnation are the two poles between which the would-be-honest-critic of Milton's brief epic must steer. And the course is hazardous.

For Milton, the Christ of Paradise Regained represents the ultimate heroism man can realize; the Son is the perfect measure of heroic magnanimity. Indeed in his first invocation Milton promises

... to tell of deeds
Above Heroic, though in secret done,
And unrecorded left through many an Age,
Worthy t'have not remained so long unsung.
(I. 14-17)

Significantly, Milton did not choose either Christ's ministry or the "Passion" to demonstrate the Son's heroism, a brand of heroism which the poet claimed was superior to, and "above" what other poets had named heroic. Milton elected, rather, to represent the ultimate heroism by portraying Christ battling against Satan in the wilderness. But Satan's triple temptation of Christ as recorded in the gospel according to Luke, provided Milton with what I have called the archetypal heroic situation: man tempted by evil, struggling against and rejecting evil, destroying evil by accepting good, and becoming magnanimous in the process.
The great difficulty most critics have found in dealing with *Paradise Regained*, however, is that, for them, the poem contains no elements of drama--there is no conflict. In its essential outlines, the prevalent critical attitude regarding Milton's brief epic follows.

The character of Christ, it is implied, is above temptation. The Son is, in fact, the perfect magnanimous man before he is approached by Satan. There is no development or progression in the poem because Christ has realized his potential for heroism before he is called upon to prove it. Christ, most readers of *Paradise Regained* seem to agree, is more divine than human. As a result, the reader is not made to feel that the Son is hungry or that there is any possibility of his weakening. Satan's overtures thus become empty motions, and the poem fails to engage the reader.

What follows in this chapter is not offered in the hope that a critical revaluation of the poem will suddenly alter the attitudes and opinions of men who are wiser and more experienced than I, but simply to show what I take to be Milton's best expression of what heroic man was to be. In my opinion, there is a conflict in the poem. It concerns Christ's perfect heroism, his magnanimous nature.

Satan's temptation of Christ is a temptation for the apparently superior man either to renounce or fail to recognize his own magnanimity. The Adversary's plan is to prove that Jesus is not the perfect man. He can do this by showing that Christ's self-esteem is not justifiable, or by demonstrating that the Son does not place sufficient emphasis on his own worth, by showing that Christ is proud, ambitious, or pusillanimous. Satan, in fact, challenges the Son's magnanimity, and the latter, therefore,
is called upon to defend and to define his own superior nature. Their battle, as Saurat has contended, is between reason and passion (false reason), a purely intellectual conflict in which reason and passion contend for the mastery of man.\(^4\) Seen in this context, \textit{Paradise Regained} does embrace and contain a dramatic situation.\(^5\) There is not, as W.W. Robson argues, "an essential failure in the life of the poem."\(^6\) Satan's challenge to Christ represents a challenge to Milton's concept of heroic magnanimity.\(^7\) Christ's answer to the devil's challenge therefore provides us with Milton's final pattern of magnanimity or heroic virtue.

On our first meeting with Milton's Christ, we learn that he is the superior man. We learn that he has acquired self-knowledge. He acknowledges his own weakness as man by explaining that he is dependent on God (I. 293), and knows his strength as man by recognizing that he can be a soldier in the army of God. From his childhood, he admits,

\begin{verbatim}
   . . . my mind was set
   Serious to learn and know, and thence to do
   What might be public good; myself I thought
   Born to that end, born to promote all truth,
   All righteous things . . . . (I. 202-205)
\end{verbatim}

Aware of his own worth, Christ's mind aspires to higher things, to the pursuit of honour and glory. "Admir'd by all" for his youthful wisdom, the Son admits:

\begin{verbatim}
   . . . victorious deeds
   Flam'd in my heart heroic acts; one while
   To rescue \textit{Israel} from the \textit{Roman} yoke,
   Then to subdue and quell o'er all the earth
   Brute violence and proud Tyrannic pow'r,
   Till truth were freed, and equity restor'd:
   Yet held it more humane, more heavenly, first
\end{verbatim}
By winning words to conquer willing hearts,
And make persuasion do the work of fear;
At least to try, and teach the erring Soul
Not wilfully misdoing, but unaware
Misled: the stubborn only to subdue.

(I. 215-226)

Moreover, Christ knows that the end of his life is union with his father. After fulfilling his obligations as man, he will ultimately acquire the perfect knowledge of God.

... my way must lie
Through many a hard assay even to the death,
Ere I the promis'd Kingdom can attain...

(I. 263-265)

Thus before he is confronted by Satan, Christ is magnanimous man. He recognizes his own worth. He seeks the honour and glory of God, and he aspires to attain the perfect knowledge of God. But it is Christ's magnanimous nature that makes him vulnerable. Because he wants immediately to begin the battle against evil, because he wants to glorify and honour God by destroying evil, Satan can offer him the apparent means to do so, and can criticize the Son for neglecting his responsibilities while meditating in the desert. And this is precisely what Satan's real temptation is. Confronted by the Adversary, Christ must learn to differentiate between good and evil. He must learn to discern what is intrinsically good and to accept it, and to discern what is intrinsically evil and reject it. Christ must demonstrate his ability to distinguish between apparent and actual, to reject the former and embrace the latter. Indeed, the Son must become aware of what genuine or real heroism entails and embraces. The important point is that Christ does not yet fully comprehend
how he may begin his good works. He does not know what he will do or how and when he shall begin. He knows only that he is the Son of God and that he has a duty to perform. Singled out by John the Baptist and acknowledged as the Messiah by signs from heaven, Christ reasons that his work can now begin.

... I knew the time
Now full, that I no more should live obscure,
But openly begin, as best becomes
The Authority which I deriv'd from Heaven.
And now by some strong motion I am led
Into this Wilderness, to what intent
I learn not yet; perhaps I need not know;
For what concerns my knowledge God reveals.
(I. 286-293)

Satan, we discover, loses little time in analyzing his opponent's strengths and potential weaknesses, and his first encounter with the Son is really nothing more than a kind of reconnaissance mission.

The Adversary's first and foremost task is to discover the true identity of Jesus. He does not know for certain whether the self-proclaimed Messiah is the actual Son of God. To his comrades, Satan thus announces:

Who this is we must learn, for man he seems
In all his lineaments, though in his face
The glimpses of his Father's glory shine.
(I. 91-93)

To this end all the devil's energy is directed. By suggesting that no ordinary man would venture alone into the wilderness (I. 321-325), and by remarking that the wanderer is the man whom John the Baptist had declared the promised deliverer of men, Satan hopes to gain from the man
a declaration and confirmation of his (Jesus') identity. But the Son answers Satan's exploratory question by a flat declaration of his faith in God: "Who brought me hither / Will bring me hence, no other guide I seek" (I. 335-336). Satan's first demand of Christ is a carefully framed question which is put forward in the hope that Christ will demonstrate his divinity. By challenging Jesus to turn stones into bread (I. 342-345), Satan can evaluate his opponent's power of resistance. If Christ performs the miracle, the Adversary will learn his identity; if the Son refuses, Satan can judge from Jesus' grounds for refusal whether the solitary man can be the promised saviour of men. Indeed, from Christ's answer Satan should learn precisely what he set out to discover, and he does, in fact, gain from the Son an admission of the latter's identity. Jesus asks,

Why dost thou then suggest to me distrust,
Knowing who I am, as I know who thou art?
(I. 355-356)

Satan, however, does not comprehend the real significance of Christ's rejection of him.

The Son is equipped with faith in himself and his God, and therefore feels no need to demand proof of, or justification for his faith. Significantly, the man's response to Satan's challenge, his defence as it were (I. 347-356), is based on mortal men's ability to endure, and does not, therefore, give the Adversary any tangible proof of Christ's divine nature. The plain fact that Satan fails to recognize is that belief or faith requires no tangible or concrete proof. Satan,
however,'would see a sign'. The first temptation, if it may be referred to as such, fails. 8 That this is so is not because Satan's demands have failed to achieve the desired effect, but because Satan's 'unbelief' renders him incapable of comprehending Christ's divine nature. That is, because Satan must have physical evidence (a miracle) to accept that Christ is the Son, he cannot believe. Christ's belief, his ability to accept by faith alone, enables him to recognize Satan as the evil one, and it is only this which provides Satan with the sign he requires. But the remainder of the first encounter between the devil and the Son reveals that Satan is resourceful, cunning, and a worthy adversary, for, now reasonably convinced of his enemy's identity, the devil begins to plot his strategy. He attempts, by reconnoitering his opponent's defences, to discover where the Son is most vulnerable. Before he confronted the Son, Satan had told his comrades that force would not be successful, that they would, rather, have to employ "well-couch't fraud, well-woven snares" (I. 97). Satan's remaining speeches in the first book of the poem reveal his skilful attempt to discover what particular kind of fraud will best serve him.

Because Christ recognizes him, Satan capitalizes on the apparent weakness of his own position. He openly declares his identity and proceeds to make an appeal to the Son's sympathies. The Adversary's long speech (I, 357-405) is complex, a mixture of truth and falsehood. He implies that he feels remorse: the angels' revolt was "rash"; he is an "unfortunate Spirit" who has lost his "happy Station". Yet he explains that he still enjoys "large liberty", and then complains that he is involuntarily in
God's service: "For what he bids I do" (I. 377). Satan's apparent confusion, however, is a ruse. His real strategy becomes apparent when he explains his new condition and informs the Son why he (Satan) has confronted him. Satan explains:

\[\ldots\] I have not lost
To love, at least contemplate and admire
What I see excellent in good, or fair,  
Or virtuous; I should so have lost all sense.
What can be then less in me than desire
To see thee and approach thee, whom I know
Declar'd the Son of God, to hear attent
Thy wisdom, and behold thy Godlike deeds?
(I. 379-386)

Satan's plan is to make Christ aware of the latter's own sense of worth, his magnanimity. Satan flatters the Son. But he does not allow Christ to ponder the meaning of this, for he immediately changes the direction of his argument. He pleads that he is not the sworn enemy of man (I. 387-396). He argues that his own misery is not alleviated by making others miserable (I. 397-403), and ends by asserting that his own misery is compounded by the knowledge that he can never be restored (I. 404-405). Satan's complex and often contradictory arguments represent an elaborately contrived test of Christ's perception. From Christ's response Satan will learn a great deal about his enemy.

When Christ replies and reveals that he has not been confused by the arguments Satan has put forward, the Adversary learns one important thing: Christ is eager to attack him for his evil doings, but is not disposed to rebuke Satan for the latter's flattery. Christ does not upbraid the evil one for pretending to admire virtue. Satan's next speech (I. 468-492) thus explores the one possible weakness in Christ's
character he has discovered. Satan claims that he admires virtue and therefore wishes to be in the presence of virtue (I. 482-485). But Satan's appeal is made even stronger by directing his arguments to Christ's knowledge of evil in the world of men. Satan asks why Christ should reject him if God allows evil men to profane His glory (I. 486-492). Once more the Adversary's argument is two-pronged. He appeals, first, to Christ's own sense of worth and dignity, and, secondly, to the Son's role in the ultimate extermination of evil. By suggesting that evil is permitted to flourish until the coming of Christ, Satan is flattering the Son, bolstering Christ's ego and impelling him to recognize his own worth. Once more Christ answers correctly but does not say enough. He tells Satan:

Thy coming hither, though I know thy scope,
I bid not or forbid; do as thou find'st
Permission from above; thou canst not more.
(I. 493-495)

By answering Satan as he does here, and by not saying more, Jesus gives Satan two valuable pieces of information. The first is that Christ is not averse to being flattered; twice Satan has openly praised the Son and neither time has he been rebuffed. The second is that Christ, who, as Satan had learned earlier (I. 460-461), is "minded to do some great act", is conscious of his own worth; he will not shrink from the encounter with evil and indeed, stands ready and waiting to do battle with evil.

I have considered Satan's first overtures at some length here because, it seems to me, they reveal the course that the contest between the devil and the Son is to take. Satan has discovered a potentially
weak spot in Christ's armor: the Son, because he fervently desires to do battle against evil, can be guilty of pride in either his mission (his sense of worth) or his achievements. This is reflected in the Son's failure to reject Satan's flattery and praise. How Satan reacts after his first encounter with Christ serves to show that he has discovered the one possible weakness in the character of his opponent, and serves to show, moreover, that he is determined to take full advantage of the intelligence.

Addressing his comrades, Satan relates what he has discovered. He has recognized that Christ is a superior man, and admits:

I, as I undertook, and with the vote
Consenting in full frequence was empow'r'd,
Have found him, view'd him, tasted him, but find
Far other labor to be undergone
Than when I dealt with Adam first of Men,
Though Adam by his Wife's allurement fell,
However to this Man inferior far,
If he be Man by Mother's side at least
With more than human gifts from Heav'n adorn'd,
Perfections absolute, Graces divine,
And amplitude of mind to greatest Deeds.

(II. 129-139)

Thus when Belial suggests physical temptation in the form of women (II. 153-171), Satan flatly rebukes him. Christ, Satan correctly diagnoses, is one "on worthier things intent" (ii. 195). The Son is

... wiser far
Than Solomon, of more exalted mind,
Made and set wholly on th'accomplishment:
Of greater things ... . . . (II. 205-207)

Christ is not to be defeated by too obvious means, and Satan concludes that the assault must be more psychological than physical. He resolves:
His constancy, with such as have more show
Of worth, of honor, glory, and popular praise;
Rocks whereon greatest men have oftest wreck'd;
Or that which only seems to satisfy
Lawful desires of Nature, not beyond ...

(II. 225-230; my italics)

To judge from Satan's words here, it seems that the Adversary recognizes he will offer only the apparently good things. But Satan's words must be ironic. He thinks that he will appeal to Christ's reason rather than to his passion, to the Son's sense of worth and dignity, his intelligence. The irony is that Satan's strategy is brilliant but his method is stupid. He could tempt Christ if he correctly understood the nature of glory, honour, worth, and the essential nature of Christ's proposed war against evil. That is, if the Adversary were to rebuke Christ for not immediately beginning to do God's work, if he were to challenge Christ for not hastening to alleviate human misery by preaching the word of God, his temptation could conceivably be effective. But, as we discover from Satan's conduct of the temptation, it is utterly futile.

The second confrontation begins when the Adversary offers nourishment to Christ. The evil one argues that hunger is a natural desire in men that must be satisfied (II. 302-316), and Christ is hungry. But Satan's temptation goes beyond the purely physical. He points out that other faithful servants of God have been fed by God (II. 306-313), and implies that Christ, as God's most faithful servant, should not then do without nourishment. He therefore asks the Son whether he would eat if food were set before him (II. 320-321). When, in reply to Satan's question, Christ answers "Thereafter as I like / The giver" (II. 321-322), Satan
makes a direct appeal to Jesus' magnanimity. He asks why Christ, as lord of all created things, should not be free to take whatever he requires (II. 322-327). He argues that Nature herself recognizes Christ's superior nature, and hence offers the Son her choicest delicacies. The bearers of the food, Satan tells Christ,

\[\ldots\text{ are Spirits of Air, and Woods, and Springs, Thy gentle Ministers, who come to pay Thee homage, and acknowledge thee thir Lord . . . .} \]

(II. 374-376)

But Christ's rejection of Satan's offer reveals that the Son has not been taken in by Satan's flattery, for Christ demonstrates that he is able to reject Satan because he (Christ) correctly understands his own dignity. He answers:

\[\text{Shall I receive by gift what of my own, When and where likes me best, I can command?} \]

(II. 380-381)

Satan had appealed to Christ's magnanimity to tempt him but is rebuked by Christ's magnanimous nature. That is, the Adversary's appeal was directed to Christ's superior nature but is rejected because Satan has not properly understood how convinced of his own worth the Son actually is. The food Satan offers is not intrinsically evil, but if Christ accepts it, he will not, in fact, recognize his own worth and power. The rest of the evil one's overtures are similarly motivated and similarly repulsed.

What Satan offers to Christ comprises what Aristotle's magnanimous man pursues. Satan offers Christ the means whereby the Son might acquire
honour, Power and riches, Aristotle had contended, were desirable. But the magnanimous man wanted them for the sake of the honour that surrounded them. They were, then, means to an end. Milton's magnanimous man, however, does not accept that the ends justify the means, for Milton's superior man must be perfectly and inwardly virtuous. How man conducts himself is as important as why he conducts himself in a particular way. Milton's definition of magnanimity must be quoted once more. "Magnanimity", he asserted, "is shown, when in the seeking or avoiding, the acceptance or refusal of riches, advantages, or honors, we are actuated by a regard to our own dignity, rightly understood" (my italics). Milton makes it clear, then, that the magnanimous man's pursuit of honour must not be an indiscriminate quest. The superior man must comprehend in what real honour consists, and must, in addition, 'rightly' understand himself, his own dignity and worth. Satan's second temptation forces Christ to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate honour and glory, and impels the Son to recognize his own dignity; it is a test of Christ's knowledge of heroic virtue.

Satan's argument manifests that he has a false idea of heroism. In fact, he fails to understand the meaning of heroic virtue as Milton understood it. The Adversary recognizes the external signs of the magnanimous man, but does not perceive, as Christ does, that real heroism is an inward quality. Indeed, as Milton's "better teacher" Spenser, had argued in the Faerie Queene,

... vertues seat is deepe within the mynd
And not in outward shows, but inward thoughts defynd.
(Prologue, VI.iv. 8-9)
Paradise Regained makes it clear that Milton followed his teacher's advice. Satan assumes that Christ's "great acts" will be heroic in the conventional sense; he assumes that Christ will wage a magnificent war on evil which will exceed the pomp and splendor of Caesar's greatest conquests. He assumes that Christ will be a valiant general who will lead a grand army into battle. Because he understands "high designs" and "high actions" as consisting in military victories, Satan naturally assumes that Christ will require money. He asks Jesus:

Which way or from what hope dost thou aspire
To greatness? whence Authority deriv'st,
What followers, what Retinue canst thou gain,
Or at thy heels the dizzy Multitude,
Longer than thou canst feed them on thy cost?
Money brings Honor, Friends, Conquest, and Realms . . . .

(II. 417-422)

But Christ answers Satan's question, and rebuts his argument that virtue, valor, and wisdom live in poverty and are therefore impotent (II. 430-432), by pointing out that men cannot be ruled by force alone.  

Yet Wealth without these three is impotent
To gain dominion or to keep it gain'd. (II. 434-435)

Riches, the Son then points out, are a hindrance to virtue (II. 435-456), and power, he adds, is a curse rather than a blessing, a painful obligation (II. 457-465). But Christ's real grounds for refusal are surely not based on his distaste for responsibility. They are, rather, to be found in Milton's religious convictions. The Son points out that the man who seeks power over other men must first master himself.  

He contends that:
... he who reigns within himself, and rules Passions, Desires, and Fears, is more a King; Which every wise and virtuous man attains: And who attains not, ill aspires to rule Cities of men, or headstrong Multitudes, Subject himself to Anarchy within, Or lawless passions in him, which he serves. But to guide Nations in the way of truth By saving Doctrine, and from error lead To know, and knowing worship God aright, Is yet more Kingly; this attracts the Soul, Governs the inner man, the nobler part; That other o'er the body only reigns, And oft by force, which to a generous mind So reigning can be no sincere delight. Besides, to give a Kingdom hath been thought Greater, and nobler done, and to lay down Far more magnanimous than to assume. (II. 466-483)

This long passage I have quoted here contains within itself the germ of Milton's concept of heroic man. The magnanimous man must first be master of himself in order to be a governor of men. Milton's praise of Oliver Cromwell in the Second Defense of the English People (1654) reveals the poet's abiding concern with the individual's self-mastery. Cromwell, he wrote,

... was a soldier, above all others the most exercised in the knowledge of himself; he had either destroyed, or reduced to his own control, all enemies within his own breast--vain hopes, fears, desires. A commander first over himself, the conqueror of himself, it was over himself he had learnt most to triumph.14

The importance Milton attached to individual self-mastery cannot be overstressed in dealing with his concept of heroic man. It is clear that Satan does not comprehend that the magnanimous man's greatest victory is personal, that his grandest conquest is the overcoming of his own weakness. The Adversary expects that Christ, like Moses or David, will engage in physical combat with evil. Satan does not recognize that the
battle Christ is fighting and will continue to fight, is inward in nature, and that it will be fought within each man who seeks honour. Men must be persuaded to be virtuous and to join the army of the forces for good—not coerced or constrained. It is thus Christ can argue "to give a Kingdom" is more magnanimous than to assume one. Indeed, it is Christ's mission to offer a kingdom to all men. He will not attempt to force obedience to his rule and command, but will instead show men the way to self-government. Hughes notes that "refusal of a crown was often cited as a supreme example of magnanimity," but Christ's statement here, it seems to me, represents what is for Milton the essential quality of heroism. Christ freely offers men a sense of worth and dignity by showing them the pathway to heroism. Magnanimity thus takes on the meaning of generosity, and this, in the final analysis, is an integral part of Milton's concept of heroism. Men are heroes when they conquer themselves and seek to show others the way to self-mastery and eternal happiness. The Son argues that magnanimity does not involve imposing one's will on others, but rather involves offering one's services to others. Satan's understanding of heroism with its implications of force and constraint is really anathema to Milton.

The remainder of Satan's arguments indicate that he has failed to perceive the essential quality of Christ's magnanimity. Indeed, Satan's cleverness and his resourcefulness diminish rapidly in the third and fourth books of the poem. He is enamoured of earthly glory and assumes that Christ will naturally share his love. Thus Satan's challenge that Christ is pusillanimous (III, 21-42), though it could have been effective if he had arraigned the Son for not beginning to preach the gospel of
salvation, loses any effect it might have had because Satan's challenge is based on a wholly false premise: earthly glory is good in itself. Christ thus attacks Satan for the devil's misunderstanding of glory—without however defending himself against Satan's first charge that Jesus was neglecting his duty by not fulfilling his obligations, by not, as it were, shining his light before men. Satan had asked:

These Godlike Virtues wherefore dost thou hide?
Affecting private life, or more obscure
In savage Wilderness . . . ? (III. 21-23)

But Satan had emasculated his own question by adding that Christ's guilt was the result of his failure to pursue glory as Satan understood it (III. 23-30). The Son thus rebukes Satan by making a long speech on the real nature of the glory the magnanimous man pursues. Christ argues that the praise of the multitude is false glory (III. 47-56). He points out that those men who have most eagerly pursued 'glory' are the worst enemies to mankind.

They err who count it glorious to subdue
By Conquest far and wide, to overrun
Large Countries, and in field great Battles win,
Great Cities by assault: what do these Worthies,
But rob and spoil, burn, slaughter, and enslave
Peaceable Nations, neighboring or remote,
Made Captive, yet deserving freedom more
Than those thir Conquerors, who leave behind
Nothing but ruin wheresoe'er they rove,
And all the flourishing works of peace destroy,
Then swell with pride, and must be titl'd Gods,
Great benefactors of mankind, Deliverers,
Worship't with Temple, Priest and Sacrifice?
One is the Son of Jove, or Mars the other,
Till Conqueror Death discover them scarce men,
Rolling in brutish vices, and deform'd,
Violent or shameful death thir due reward.
(III. 71-87)
The magnanimous man's mission is not to destroy but to build. Men are to be rehabilitated rather than punished. Moreover, the glory the truly heroic man pursues is not his own but God's (III. 106-107). The highest glory is thus to be obtained by the unswerving pursuit of truth, the will of God. For Milton, thus, Socrates and Job are more heroic than all the heroes of the past, for they have been true to themselves and to the cause of good. True glory, we learn, is tantamount to fame in Heaven; it is "to stand approv'd in sight of God." Rejected because of his failure to comprehend the real nature of glory, Satan shifts his attack to other grounds; he upbraids the Son for the latter's inactivity.

Satan's argument is that Christ has a duty to perform and is negligent by hesitating to execute it. He accuses the Son, in effect, of being pusillanimous. But once more Satan destroys the effectiveness of his argument by implying that Christ is guilty because he does not begin to pursue his own (Christ's) glory. Milton's magnanimous man, of course, must not pursue his own glory, for to do so would render him guilty of ambition, the excess of magnanimity. The magnanimous man pursues God's glory and willingly submits to the will of God. He therefore acts only when he knows that God wants him to. To Satan's challenge (III. 171-180), Christ thus responds:

All things are best fulfill'd in their due time,  
And time there is for all things, Truth hath said:  
If of my reign Prophetic Writ hath told  
That it should never end, so when begin  
The Father in his purpose hath decreed . . . .

(III. 182-186; my italics)

Once again the Adversary's ignorance has destroyed the possible effectiveness
of his challenge. Satan is unaware of God's grand design and unaware that the glory Christ pursues is not his (Christ's) own.

Satan's attempts to entrap Christ by showing him "all / The Kingdoms of the world, and all thir glory" (IV. 88-89) are thus refuted with relative ease by the Son. This is so because the Adversary has not yet fully understood that Christ's kingdom is not of this world. All Satan's offers of power, of the means whereby Christ might initiate his rule, are thus meaningless. Satan's notion that Christ will have to know the evil the Son proposes to overcome (III. 246-250) is also mistaken. Christ will not set out to depose the civil rulers of earth. He will, rather, free men from their inward servitude. Because the Adversary does not know God's grand design, all his examples of how men have battled evil in the past are similarly invalid. The new dispensation does not require means of the kind Satan proposes. Indeed, even though Christ informs Satan of the fact that physical force, the "luggage of war", is "argument / Of human weakness rather than of strength" (III. 401-402), the Adversary does not yet recognize what the nature of Christ's rule will be. And when the Son tells Satan that men who renounce their inward liberty deserve physical servitude (III. 414-432), the devil still fails to comprehend that the power he offers to Christ is worthless and impotent. He persists. He offers Christ a choice between the Roman and Parthian legions. From this point in the contest, Satan's overtures are really in the realm of travesty. His reasoning power has apparently deserted him, and his original plan to use "well-couch't fraud" certainly disappears when he demands that Christ worship him (IV. 166-167). The
remainder of Satan's temptations are utterly futile because, in fact, he has put forward the unacceptable condition before he makes his next offer. That is, Satan will give to Christ the "Kingdoms of the world" if the Son will worship him. These are Satan's conditions. Thus, any other offers the Adversary makes will involve the same conditions. As a result, Christ's refusal will be automatic. Indeed, Satan's offer of wisdom and Christ's vehement indictment of earthly wisdom must be seen in this context.

Milton's tirade against classical learning has occasioned much comment by his critics. Douglas Bush adequately explains the problem with which readers of Milton are confronted. Bush writes:

It is painful indeed to watch Milton turn and rend some main roots of his being, but we must try to understand him. His harsh condemnation is relative rather than absolute; we know that his favourite authors up to the end were ancients, and this very poem owes much to them. Yet, with a strenuous and disappointed life behind him, Milton has come more and more to hold fast to ultimate things. If he, a wayfaring Christian, must choose between the classical light of nature and the Hebrew light of revelation, he cannot hesitate, whatever the cost. For if our supreme task in this world is the conduct of our own lives, then Christ comes before Plato. It would be wrong to say simply that in old age the puritan has conquered the humanist. What is true is that Milton holds the traditional attitude of the Christian humanist with a more than traditional fervour inspired by the conditions of his age and by his own intense character. 18

This opinion, I believe, is the most intelligent critics of Milton have put forward. But Milton's attack on classical learning is also understandable and indeed justifiable, at least in part, because of its context in the poem. Satan, it must be remembered, has made it perfectly clear that Christ must worship the devil if he would receive the favors Satan proposes, and this, of course, is unthinkable. There is, moreover,
one other circumstance which might serve to mollify Milton's offence against the main roots of his being. This concerns the duty of the Christian.

Regardless of the believer's liberality, the plain truth is that the Christian finds "true wisdom" only in Scripture. He might, to be sure, find shades of truth in non-Christian writings, and might find certain vestiges of faith in pagan philosophers. But the "prime" wisdom is contained in the Bible. No Christian can or will deny this. In addition, the Adversary's offer is made to Christ—the repository of truth. He, as the Son of God, is in direct communication with the Omnipotent and has, therefore, acquired the perfect knowledge which other men must struggle to attain. It is for other mortal men to study "to know God aright"; it is for other men to write treatises on what they conceive to be the Christian doctrine. Christ is the Christian doctrine. I have digressed somewhat here only in order to make clear precisely how "relative rather than absolute" Christ's conduct is.

All of Satan's appeals have thus far been made to Christ's own sense of worth, to the Son's obvious desire to pursue the glory of God. Because Satan does not understand (to judge from his conduct) the essential nature of the superior man, or the particular kind of glory the magnanimous man pursues, he has been refuted with relative ease. Christ's consciousness of his own worth, his regard to his own dignity rightly understood, precludes his being deceived by Satan. Because of failure, Satan, frustrated, subjects the Son to a final test of the man's faith. Placing him on the highest peak of God's temple, Satan challenges:
There stand, if thou wilt stand, to stand upright
Will ask thee skill. . . . (IV. 551-552)

The Son knows that he has the power to overcome evil by faith, that he
is free to stand though free to fall. His faith gives him strength; he
does not presume to tempt his father by hurling himself from the pinnacle.
Satan, however, because he cannot comprehend the nature of faith or
belief, falls: "Satan smitten with amazement fell" (IV. 561). This
final scene is a symbolic representation of the power of faith or belief.
The Son represents belief; Satan, unbelief. Faith or belief gives man'
"skill"; without faith or belief, man cannot endure and cannot stand.
His condition, Milton makes it very clear, is perilous—unless man has
faith. Armed with faith in God as Christ is, man is capable of contrib­
uting to the destruction of evil. He can destroy evil, as it were,
by proving that evil is powerless to destroy him. This is the great
lesson of Paradise Regained. It is moreover, the perfect manifestation
of the heroic man's duty fulfilled.

Milton's Christ, I have maintained, represents the ultimate
heroism to which men can aspire; he is the perfect model of heroic
virtue. The problem facing most readers of Paradise Regained
whether Christ is a satisfactory model for mere men to emulate. Is the
Son not, in fact, too perfect? Is he not able to withstand evil so
successfully because of his divine nature rather than because of his
human strength? Milton apparently believed that Christ's human
nature and strength were being tested by Satan, and believed that Christ's
rejection and defeat of evil were possible for all men. There remain,
however, two problems that Christ's character in *Paradise Regained* poses for critics and readers of Milton. The first concerns what might be called Christ's personality, and questions whether he is a 'sympathetic character'. The second difficulty arises from the particular kind of heroism the Son's activity in the poem represents: is Milton's hero a contemplative rather than an active being?

Milton's Christ, it has been observed, is not very likeable. He is too proud, too conscious of his own worth, and is, therefore, more obnoxious than meek and mild. Is Milton's perfect hero really a satisfactory image of human excellence if he is so difficult to like? In answer to this, one can only reply that the Jesus we meet in *Paradise Regained* is confronted by the ultimate evil. Satan cannot be converted to good; he must be utterly rejected. The Miltonic hero cannot be tolerant of evil, for he must devote all his energies to destroying evil. Milton's puritan convictions dictated that the truly virtuous man had a positive duty to speak out against evil, that he be a living reproach to evil men. Despite the fact that love is the gospel Jesus preached, and is the real message of the second book of Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana*, the good Christian has a positive duty to hate evil. In a world where evil flourishes, virtue will seldom be regarded as wholly palatable, and the truly virtuous man will be looked upon with suspicion. Milton's perfect hero, because he actively opposes the sinful ways of the world, will be regarded with distrust and unbridled animosity. This, indeed, is the price the hero, the perfectly virtuous man, must pay. We should not forget that Yeats was perfectly correct when he observed:
... twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle.

That is, Christ's advent, his gospel, represented a challenge and a threat to the old dispensations. For some, Christ brought peace; for others, a sword. Indeed, gentle Jesus was both a deliverer and a nightmare.

That the magnanimous man's virtue will make him enemies is undeniable, but we must question why Milton's readers find it so difficult to accept the Christ of Paradise Regained. C.S. Lewis has pointed out that when poets set out to present virtue it is not always to teach that virtue, but, rather, to show that they adore virtue. Of Milton, Lewis writes:

The whole man is kindled by his vision of the shape of virtue. Unless we bear this in mind we shall not understand either Comus or Paradise Lost, either the Faerie Queene or the Arcadia, or the Divine Comedy itself. We shall be in constant danger of supposing that the poet was inculcating a rule when in fact he was enamoured of perfection.

Milton, I am sure, believed in the intrinsic beauty of virtue as he conceived it. If we cannot see the beauty in an unshakable resolution to serve God, it is our own loss. Milton's reaction, I believe, would have been simply: "So be it".

Much of the difficulty concerning Christ's essential nature arises from the fact that contemptus mundi is looked upon as synonomous with contemplation. What seems most important to me, is that Milton placed the greater emphasis on preparation for heroism, rather than on the visible manifestations of heroism. As Steadman points out, "Milton portrays his hero's virtue not simply in deed but, first and foremost, in analysis
and choice.²² Christ's rejection of "the Kingdoms of the world" is, to be sure, a triumph of spirit, but contemptus mundi is, I think, totally alien to Milton's concept of heroic man. Christ has a mission to perform: he is a teacher of men. He educates men how to live in the world of men and how to prepare themselves for a better, eternal life. Christ rejects the world insofar as the world is looked upon as the end of human existence, but his own career represents positive commitment to the world of men. Indeed,

... to give a Kingdom hath been thought
Greater, and nobler done, and to lay down
Far more magnanimous than to assume.
(II. 481-483)

What is more, we may be sure that Milton knew how Luke's record of Satan's triple temptation ended. He knew that Christ left his friends and disciples "to preach the Kingdom of God." As Milton writes,

Hail Son of the most High, heir of both worlds,
Queller of Satan, on thy glorious work
Now enter, and begin to save mankind.
(IV. 633-635)

And this, surely, is the only possible career for the Miltonic hero.

To strive to know one's limitations as man; to pursue, whatever the hazards, the glory of God; to testify against evil by preaching a message of truth; to defend and if need be suffer, and even die for what one believes: this is Milton's concept of what makes men heroes.
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER V


3. See, for example, the bibliographical entries under: Bush, Hughes, Kermode, Kurth, McNamee, Robson, Steadman, and Tillyard.


5. For a contrary point of view, see: E.M.W. Tillyard, Milton, p. 319.


7. The concept of magnanimity with reference to Paradise Regained has been discussed by both Tillyard and Hughes. Both men are concerned, however, with the figure of the poet himself, and see the contest of the poem as representing Milton's struggle to choose between the active and contemplative modes of life. See: E.M.W. Tillyard, "The Christ of Paradise Regained and the Renaissance Heroic Tradition" in Studies in Milton, pp. 100-106; and Hughes' article of the same title in Ten Perspectives on Milton, pp. 35-62.

8. In Luke's account of the temptation all three temptations are, of course, valid. Milton, following Scripture, had to pay lip service to all three. However, as Tillyard correctly points out, Milton really concerned himself with the second temptation only. See Milton, p. 323 ff.


11. John M. Steadman, in Milton and the Renaissance Hero, demonstrates how Milton's Satan (the Adversary of both Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained) represents the conventional epic hero. He is the eidolon of virtue; Christ, the eikon. Satan thus represents magnanimity in its external aspect; Christ represents real or genuine magnanimity, the inward virtue that renders him capable of defeating Satan and pursuing real honour. See pp. 160-164.
Ironically, the identical view had been expressed by the Satan of *Paradise Lost*: "... who overcomes / By force, hath overcome but half his foe" (I. 648-649).

Milton's authority for putting these words into Christ's mouth is unimpeachable. The same message forms the basis of the Pauline tracts and the greater part of the New Testament. Compare, for example, Jesus' words to the hypocrites: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess" (Matthew XXIII, 25).

Works, VIII, p. 215. Significantly, Milton considered Cromwell as an exemplar of magnanimity, though the poet expressed his concern that the general might not live up to his "wonted magnanimity." See: p. 225.

Complete Poems, p. 505.

It is on this issue, it seems to me, that the major difference between the youthful and mature attitudes held by Milton is discernible. His early political optimism (in *Areopagitica*, for example) gives way in *Paradise Regained* to the view that the New Jerusalem will not be built in England by Englishmen, but can be erected by each man within himself. This development, I think, is remarkably similar to St. Paul's attitude regarding the establishment of the Church. For me, there is no doubt that the latter is the saner and more enlightened view.

One critic contends that Christ's contempt for the multitude is not in keeping with the character of the biblical Christ. Though the critic recognizes that Jesus was not always "gentle Jesus", the real issue here, it seems to me, is that Christ is rejecting the unfounded praises of men. Milton is suggesting, I think, that men did not, before the advent of Christ, realize what comprised real virtue. They are, in fact, a "miscellaneous rabble" who do not comprehend the essential quality of heroism. The "new covenant" gave dignity to the masses of men that they could not possess before the Christian era. In addition, Milton's view of magnanimity, in this particular context of meaning, is not substantially different from either Aristotle, Cicero, or Aquinas. See: W.W. Robson, "The Better Fortitude" in *The Living Milton*, p. 133.

The Renaissance and English Humanism, p. 125.


21. See, for example, Merritt Y. Hughes, "The Christ of Paradise Regained and the Renaissance Heroic Tradition" in Ten Perspectives, pp. 35-62.

CONCLUSION

The critical debate concerning Milton's concept of heroic man likely began when John Dryden, in his *Discourse on Epic Poetry* (c.1697), wrote that Milton could have been fairly called a heroic poet, "if the devil had not been his hero, instead of Adam; if the giant had not foiled the knight, and driven him out of his strong hold, to wander through the world with his lady errant." It is no longer subject to dispute or debate to say that Satan is not Milton's hero in *Paradise Lost*, but the controversy over Milton's particular idea of what makes men heroes has hardly lessened in intensity since Dryden's time.

This essay, by focusing on Milton's Christianity, has attempted to show that Milton's religious belief provided him with what he conceived to be a new and enlarged scope for the delineation of heroic virtue. I have tried to demonstrate Milton's grounds for considering his own Christian hero superior to any of the heroes whose careers antedated *Paradise Lost*. Accepting magnanimity as the single virtue that most closely corresponds to heroic virtue, I have attempted to show how Milton points out the inferior condition in which men lived before the advent of Christ. Milton, I have contended, makes it patently clear that complete or perfect heroism is possible only with the coming of Christ.

Pre-lapsarian man, man living in a state of innocence, was incapable of realizing his highest human potentialities. His innocence in fact precluded heroism because he could not have an active role to play in the cosmic struggle against evil. That is, he did not know that it was in his power to prevent the existence of evil. In addition, innocent
man's particular position in creation did not lend itself to his fulfillment of the contemplative aspect of his being. His heroism, as a result, was what I have called a fugitive and cloistered heroism.

For man living in a state of sin, pre-Christian man, perfect or ideal heroism was also a manifest impossibility. That is, men recognized evil only as it was understood as that which was contrary to the law. Milton's Samson must thus destroy the Philistines to realize his heroic potentialities, and Milton makes it very clear that Samson's heroism is improperly understood by his fellows. Real heroism was conceivably possible for only a chosen few, for those expressly chosen by God, because the masses of men were not aware of the will of God except as it had been revealed to them by the prophets and the written law. They could not thus see themselves as agents in God's battle against evil, and, moreover, could not aspire to knowledge of God except in the life after. Real heroism, what I have called Milton's concept of heroism, could not be until the advent of Christ.

Complete and perfect magnanimity was possible only when Jesus manifested himself, for the Messiah showed to men the way they could be soldiers in the army of God, and showed them the means to attain eternal happiness. What this meant was that all men could now see the importance of any one individual's life, and could see that each man could be either for or against God. Thus, all Christians could legitimately pursue the honour and glory of the divine. In addition, the Christian was capable of contemplation.

Whereas pre-Christian man's life and virtue were measured only by obedience to the law, the Christian possessed faith. His faith enabled
him to acquire an imperfect knowledge of God while on earth. Insofar as the Holy Spirit was with him (the result of man's belief that the Spirit was in fact with him) he could be a contemplative being.

For Milton, then, the true wayfaring Christian was a hero, inasmuch as he demonstrated his ability to pursue the cause of truth—regardless of the difficulties he encountered en route. The true believer saw himself as a soldier in God's army and he was dignified by his faithful service to God. His life was a perpetual proving-ground, a continuous struggle in which he had to strive for mastery of himself, and of which the goal was "to stand approv'd in sight of God." The truly virtuous man thus represents a synthesis of active and contemplative modes of being. To live a virtuous life was to answer one side of one's nature; to aspire to the perfect knowledge of God, the other. Theoretically, the Christian dispensation made it possible for all men to be heroes. But Milton's perfect hero was not merely virtuous. He was a crusader. It is true all men could glorify God by their virtuous behaviour, but the magnanimous man did more. He was, indeed, minded to do some great act. The greatest, the supreme act of magnanimity, was to give, and Milton's perfect hero offered his life as a gift.

Magnanimity, the spirit by which every true Christian "is guided in his estimate of himself," is the sense of conviction that enables a man's reach to exceed his grasp. The Christian hero, Milton's magnanimous man, has that very opportunity. How well he understands himself, his own heroic potential, and how well he conducts his private war against evil are entirely up to him, and serve, in the final analysis, as the only basis for judging him. And, indeed, what more can we fairly demand of any man, or any hero?
SOURCES CONSULTED


