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Milton's Visionary Obedience

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MILTON'S VISIONARY OBEDIENCE

A Dissertation Presented

by

TIMOTHY IRISH WATT

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DEDICATION

To Atis.

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ABSTRACT

MILTON'S VISIONARY OBEDIENCE

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This dissertation is a study of the work of John Milton, most especially of his late poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*. The early poetry, the prose tracts, and *Christian Doctrine* are considered in their developmental relation to those late poems.

The question my study addresses is this: What does Milton mean by obedience? The critical approach used to address the question is as much philosophical-theological as it is literary. My project seeks to understand the shaping role of Milton's theology on his poetry: that is, to attempt to recreate and understand Milton's thinking on obedience from *Milton's* perspective. To this end, I focus on providing contextualized, attentive readings of key poetic moments. The contexts I provide are those derived from the two great heritages Milton had at his disposal—the Classical and Christian traditions. The poetic moments I attend to are most usually theologically and conceptually difficult moments, moments in which Milton is working out (as much as reflecting on or demonstrating or poeticizing) his key theological concerns, chief among them, obedience.

Milton's concept of obedience is not just an idea developed within given interpretive frameworks, Classical, Christian, and a specific historic context, England in the seventeenth century. It is a strangely practical structure of being intended by Milton to recollect something of the disposition of Adam and Even before the fall. In other words, Miltonic obedience is multifaceted and complex. To address the complexity and nuance of what Milton means by obedience, I suggest that Milton's idea of obedience may be understood as a *concept*. The definitional source of Milton's concept of obedience is the Bible, and various texts of the Classical tradition. The necessary mechanism of the concept is Milton's idea of right timing, derived from the Greek idea of *kairos*. The necessary condition of Miltonic obedience is *unknowing.* With Milton's concept of obedience fully established, the dissertation concludes by suggesting connections between Milton's religious imagination and his political engagements. If Milton's paramount value was obedience, it was so because his paramount concern was liberty, for himself and for his nation.

TEXTUAL NOTE/ABBREVIATIONS

All quotations of Milton's poetry are taken from John Milton, *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Modern Library, 2007). All quotations of Milton's prose are taken from John Milton, *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols. in 10 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-1982).

Abbreviations

Milton

The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton	MLM
Complete Prose Works of John Milton	Yale
A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle	*Masque*
"On the Morning of Christ's Nativity"	"Nativity Ode"
Paradise Lost	*PL*
Paradise Regained	*PR*
Samson Agonistes	*SA*
An Apology for Smectymnuus	*Apology*
Areopagitica	*Areop*
A Defense of the English People	*1Def*
The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce	*DDD*
The Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelaty	*RCG*
Second Defense of the English People	*2Def*
The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates	*TKM*

Bible

All biblical quotations are taken from the Authorized Version (King James Version).

Classical Works

Classical works are abbreviated in the standard fashion, e.g., *Od.* for *Odyssey*, *Aen.* for *Aeneid*.

Reference Works

Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed.	*OED*
Oxford Dictionary of National Biography	*ODNB*

Catalogues (see bibliography for full information)

A.W. Pollard and G.R. Redgrave, et al., *A Short-title Catalogue*	STC
Thomason Tracts	Thomason
Donald Wing, et al., *Short-Title Catalogue*, rev. ed.	Wing

Critical Works (see bibliography for full information)

Stanley Fish, *How Milton Works*	*HMW*
Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography*	*Life*
Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton*	*DM*

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation addresses the following question: What does Milton mean by obedience? The obvious reply—by obedience, Milton means obedience to the will of God—is easily enough written. However, Milton's idea of obedience is extraordinarily complex in its conception of the will of God, of human will, and the mechanics of obedience. Milton does not only propose obedience as an abstract ideal. He is interested in how obedience works in the world, and how it is worked. This is the case because for Milton obedience is not a fact, nor a static ideal, nor a law, nor a mode of rote and submissive conduct, but a sublime concept comprised of moving, inter-dependent parts, and intended to liberate both individuals and societies.

Method

In the service of addressing my question, the discussions I offer here tend not to comprise conventionally extended literary readings or arguments about Milton's writings. Instead my project seeks to understand the shaping role of Milton's theology (of which obedience is the paramount value) on his poetry, from the inside as it were: that is, to attempt to recreate and understand Milton's thinking on obedience and related issues—chiefly knowledge, free will, time, and interpretation—from *Milton's* perspective, and in terms of his conceptual and poetic development of these ideas. As such, I focus on providing deeply contextualized, attentive readings of key poetic moments, especially in *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes,* and in continual reference to Milton's

prose works, both the political tracts and *Christian Doctrine*. The contexts I provide are primarily from intellectual history, and are those derived from the two great heritages Milton had at his disposal—the Classical and Christian traditions. The Classical and Christian traditions served as continual sources to Milton, and importantly, as the interpretive frameworks by which he understood the issues of his day, and the concerns of his poetry. The poetic moments I attend to are most usually theologically and conceptually difficult moments, because these are in my view precisely those moments in which Milton is working out (as much as reflecting or demonstrating or poeticizing) his key theological concerns.

My critical approach then is as much philosophical-theological as it is literary. To understand what Milton means by obedience requires a familiarity if not a developed understanding of the way he utilized his dual heritage—Classical, Christian—as both source and as a dialectical, interpretive framework. In brief terms, Milton the Christian and Milton the Classicist were in continual conversation. Despite the Son's rejection of Classical learning in *Paradise Regained*, Milton himself did not reject it. By the time Milton came to write the late poems, he did *prioritize* the Christian over the Classical, but he retained the Classical, and in critical ways, his theology derives as much from Classical as from Biblical concepts. It is not too much to say that Milton's lifelong valuation of obedience is the product of his internal, lifelong conversation between those parts of himself, Classical and Christian.

The ripe fruits of this "conversation" are *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*. From a theological standpoint, and most particularly in reference to his concept of obedience, Milton's three late poems may be approached as a unified

work, with a demonstrable thematic arc. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton gives us his definition of obedience and shows us why it his paramount value; in *Paradise Regained*, Milton shows us how obedience works in its perfected form; in *Samson Agonistes*, Milton dramatizes what he takes to be obedience's necessary conditions for humankind.

Background

Milton understood obedience to be the singular rule for all human conduct, his own and others. As a poet Milton labored under and sang before this sole command.[1] He was to be its exemplar, a bright free figure of obedience, his experience of time synchronous with the will of God:

> Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,
> It shall be still in strictest measure even
> To that same lot, however mean or high,
> Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven;
> All is, if I have grace to use it so,
> As ever in my taskmaster's eye.
> (Sonnet 7 ll.9-14)

The lines are a self-authoring interpretation of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard.[2]

Milton's concept of obedience derived from his lifelong reading of scripture. From scripture, Milton received the Mosaic Law and Pauline conscience. As a Christian, Milton prioritized conscience over Law, so that obedience became in his work dependent on conscience first. His prioritization of conscience was so emphatic that it could at times seem synonymous with his concept of obedience. This perception would be

[1] Cf. *Paradise Lost* 3.94.

[2] See Matthew 20.1-16.

mistaken. For Milton the relationship of conscience to scripture was pragmatically about prioritization. Fundamentally it concerned the proper alignment of conscience and scripture, the right preparation for obedience. Further, all three—conscience, scripture, obedience—were organized together and made coherent by the Holy Spirit. The crux of this cohering activity Milton called "right reason" (Yale 6:132).

By the time Milton left Cambridge in 1632, he fully believed in the primacy of obedience to divine will as *the* necessary human disposition, and mode of human conduct. That is, he upheld obedience as the singular ideal. However, he had not yet worked out exactly what he meant by obedience. Nor had he begun to formulate how to implement it. It was a virginal concept set apart from, if not against, the world. One could without too much hedging propose that Milton spent the rest of his life, from his university graduation to his last fatal flare of gout, working out for himself, and then for his nation, what he meant by obedience to divine will. The conceptual labor began in earnest with the "Nativity Ode" (written 1629), developed with *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* (performed 1634), was doubted into crisis and then recovery in *Lycidas* (written 1637), and culminated many years later in *Paradise Lost* (1667), *Paradise Regained* (1671), and *Samson Agonistes* (1671).

In *Masque* and then again in *Lycidas* especially, Milton first confronted and was confronted by a formidable intellectual and spiritual dilemma with regard to obedience: How did obedience work, and what was its necessary condition/s? If obedience was, as Milton believed following Paul, dependent on conscience, how could one prepare conscience to be obedient? And how could one verify that his conscience was indeed

right?[3] Milton's first strong response to all three questions was purity, which in the 1630's he misunderstood primarily as a narrow kind of chastity. In other words, Milton's first sustained formulation of purity was a misreading of chastity, aligned with obedience. This early version of purity seemed to complete Milton's concept of obedience by proposing a disposition, if not exactly a mechanism, for obedience, and the condition necessary for its flourishing. Thus, the necessary condition for obedience would be purity, the way to prepare one's conscience to be obedient would be to behave purely, and the verification of right conscience would be its degree of purity. And purity depended principally on a stern and serious chastity.[4]

The crisis of doubt brought on by the seemingly random death of Edward King, and memorialized in *Lycidas*—perhaps interrogated and resolved is a better way to put it—revealed Milton's overestimation of the Muse as he then understood it, and rendered the masque's version of purity a misguided frigidity, what Comus calls "a lean and

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[3] These questions are similar to those confronting Puritans, and their efforts at reform in the years leading up to the Civil Wars. See A.E. Barker, *Milton's Puritan Dilemma* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1942).

[4] For the standard discussion of the influence of Spenserian chastity on Milton's idea of purity, see A.S.P. Woodhouse, "The Argument of Milton's *Comus*," in John S. Diekhoff, ed., *A Mask at Ludlow: Essays on Milton's* Comus (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1968), 19-41; see also Barker, *Milton's Puritan Dilemma*, 9-12, 97. For more recent discussions on the same, see Annabel Patterson, *Reading Between the Lines* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 43-50; Debora Shuger, "'Gums of Glutinous Heat' and the Stream of Consciousness: The Theology of Milton's Maske," *Representations* 60 (Autumn, 1997),1-21. See also Gordon Teskey, "From Allegory to Dialectic: Imagining Error in Spenser and Milton," *PMLA* 101.1 (1986), 9-23. For a more general, and influential discussion of Spenser as Milton's "dangerous precursor," see Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 125-43. And for a standard discussion of the canonical pairing of Milton and Spenser, see Annabel Patterson, "Couples, Canons, and the Uncouth: Spenser-and-Milton in Educational Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 16.4 (Summer, 1990), 773-93. Patterson argues that Spenser's influence on Milton has been overestimated, primarily by Christian humanist academics of the first half of the twentieth century (she has her teachers in mind, among them A.S.P. Woodhouse). Patterson counts references —to Spenser, Shakespeare, Jonson, and others—and finds that Spenser is the least directly alluded to. The argument is persuasive as far as it goes, but it fails to account for the question of influence as separate from the question of how, merely, a writer alludes to precursors. Spenser, understood as a kind of epic monument, especially in terms of ambition, as an example of poetic reach, is what Milton had in mind when he told Dryden that Spenser was "his true originall," or, if Dryden was being strategically apocryphal, what Dryden had in mind.

sallow Abstinence," the product of those "budge doctors of the Stoic fur." (*Masque* l.710) (The contemporary target of Comus' slight was severe, flesh-denying Puritans, and more broadly perhaps Milton was targeting the version of Milton himself who aligned entirely with the Lady, and was, in A.E. Barker's words, "preoccupied with discipline rather than with the fruits of discipline.")[5] As *Masque* reveals, young Milton mistook the requirements of the Muse for abstinence, still further he had mistaken the power of the Muse, the lament at the center of *Lycidas*.

In response to this crisis in his poetic vocation, Milton left his study in Horton and entered the world: he travelled to Europe, got married, and soon found himself deeply engaged in the fray of civil dispute, war, and revolution. He dedicated the next two decades almost entirely to polemical writing. And in that period of time, that long and anxious complication to his poetic ambition, Milton reformulated his concept of obedience from a static ideal to an active disposition. Over the course of the prose tracts, and later in *Christian Doctrine*, he opened up his concept of obedience—he put it in the world—and continually refined it with the means available to him. These means were the disputes in which he was so vigorously engaged, the issues around which those disputes were centered, and the civil wars and the revolution that followed.

The turn from studious retirement to what can fairly be described as violent engagement, from a position of remove to the heart of the matter, transformed Milton's sense of himself as a poet. The prophetic identity—implicit in Milton from a young age—became explicit in the prose tracts, and thereafter carried into the late poems.[6] The

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[5] Barker, 12.

[6] See William Kerrigan, *The Prophetic Milton* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1974), 11, 167-77. As Kerrigan writes, "He [Milton] spoke as prophet, rarely of the prophet, and this belief in intimate

turn also produced the collateral result of in effect vanquishing Milton's closest precursor, Spenser, as *precursor*, and his decisive Classical precursor, Virgil, as precursor, while retaining their example and poetry for allusiveness. After 1640 or so, Milton came to see himself as a prophet, whose only true precursors were Moses, the prophets of the Old Testament, and Paul.[7] As such, Milton wrote from the high and intuitively assumed position of supreme importance, whether in poetry or in prose.

In one of his earliest tracts, *The Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelaty* (1642), Milton identified himself with the prophet, Jeremiah, commanded by God "to take the trumpet and blow a dolorous or a jarring blast" (Yale 1:803). In his reading here, Milton first encourages himself with the example of Jeremiah, and then aligns himself implicitly and almost precisely with the coming out of Jeremiah as a prophet:

> If he shall think to be silent, as *Jeremiah* did, because of the reproach and derision he met with daily, and *all his familiar friends watcht for his halting* to be reveng'd on him for speaking the truth, he would be forc't to confesse as he confest, *his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, I was weary with forebearing and could not stay*.
>
> (Yale 1: 803)

The "he" of the passage is Milton. Milton collapses the concerns of the pamphlet—the present and future of church government—with his own concerns—the present and future of himself as a poet. The astonishing directness with which he does so may be described as arrogant, humble, naive, courageous, indiscreet, boastful, merely honest, and so on, and of course as a bewildering Miltonic combination of all of these traits. Whatever the case, the result produces in *The Reason of Church Government* one of the most famous

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impulse sustained through most of his life. When he spoke in public of his inner accord with God, his language was proud and passionate—but guarded, poised, and often impenetrable. Master of the conventions of public discourse, this man excelled in *the rare art of speaking intimately before an audience*" (11, emphasis added). See also Barker, xiii.

[7] See Harold Bloom, *Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 93.

passages in all of Milton's prose. It is nothing less than a public admission and re-articulation of his poetic ambitions, and his commitment to them:

> Neither doe I think it shame to covnant with any knowing reader, that for some few yeers yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be rays'd from the heart of youth or the vapours of wine, like that which flows at wast from the pen of some vulgar Amorist or the trencher fury of a riming parasite, nor to be obtain'd by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternall Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallow'd fire of his Altar to touch and pacify the lips of whom he pleases.
>
> (Yale 1:820-21)

Critically, in this passage Milton fuses the Classical muse with the Christian God. The fusion needs to be emphasized. It is one of the most important maneuvers Milton ever made in his development as a poet, not least because of its revisionary effect on his concept of obedience. By re-making his muse in the image of God, Milton made for his poetry an indestructible source, and for himself the identity as that source's chosen instrument. Thus strengthened to the power of eternity, Milton's ideals—chiefly obedience, and its subsidiaries—were reconceived and ready for the world and all of its abuses, obscurity, neglect, and temptations.

In *Areopagitica* (1644), written just two years after *Reason of Church Government*, Milton articulates the transformation in his conception and approach:

> I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd vertue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary.
>
> (Yale 2: 515)

In just six years, Milton has traveled far from the "sage and serious doctrine of virginity" of *Masque*, from his first sustained attempt at defining obedience in-the-world, and far

from the "uncouth swain" he presents himself as at the end of *Lycidas* (l.186). As J.M. Evans suggests, *Lycidas* "records Milton's emergence from the *persona* of the uncouth swain. *Lycidas* is one long act of disengagement."[8] As a disengagement from a *persona*, *Lycidas* is also Milton's disengagement from the conceptual limitations responsible for creating that persona. At the risk of overstatement, in *Lycidas*, Milton as he was in 1637, dies to himself as a poet. As Evans writes, "The conclusion of *Lycidas* thus enacts in an extraordinarily vivid way an experience analogous to, though not, I think, identical with, the Christian conversion experience. As the old speaker fades away, a new speaker is born."[9] The new speaker is the Milton of the prose tracts. And this speaker becomes the Milton of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*, the poet of visionary obedience, a pure concept refined not against but in all the hullaballoo Milton's world had to offer. If Milton's earlier formulation of obedience faltered on a narrow and defensive version of purity, his realized concept of obedience flourished as a nuanced and expansive version of a disposition ready to recover something of the disposition of Adam and Eve before the fall.

Organization

This study comprises four chapters and a conclusion. The chapters are organized in a philosophical-theological progression in terms of Milton's concept of obedience, and its constituent parts. Since this progression reflects the progression Milton develops in

[8] J.M. Evans, "*Lycidas*," in Dennis Danielson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 48.

[9] Evans, 48.

Paradise Lost, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*, the chapters are also organized to a degree chronologically. Further, each chapter provides the relevant intellectual and philosophical foundation of that aspect of obedience with which the chapter is concerned.

The first chapter presents the scriptural foundation of Milton's obedience, as it appears in *Christian Doctrine*, and is refracted in *Paradise Lost*. The primary work of this chapter is to provide Milton's definitional understanding of obedience; that is, the definition of obedience as an ideal that Milton derives from his reading, interpretation, and use of scripture. In the first two sections of the chapter, I address Mosaic Law and then Pauline conscience, and the interdependency of the two in terms of obedience. The final section of the chapter addresses the way in which Milton reconciles Law and conscience, by way of his refashioned concept of purity.

In the second chapter, I take up the question of knowledge—of divine knowledge, and of human knowledge, and human knowledge of the divine—as it relates to obedience. The chapter engages the question of the condition of knowledge before and after the fall as it is presented in *Paradise Lost*. The chapter is especially focused on the discussion of foreknowledge and predestination in Book 3. The primary intellectual foundation provided in this chapter is the long and highly contested debate about foreknowledge and predestination in Christian theology from Antiquity to the Reformation, and from the Reformation to the Renaissance, and more generally, the problem of free will and determinism in the Classical tradition. Knowing where Milton comes down on the question of foreknowledge and predestination is critical to any understanding of his concept of obedience, and further, to any thematic conception of his late poems.

In the third chapter, I focus on the temptation of the Son in *Paradise Regained*. The Son resists Satan's temptations by being perfectly obedient to the will of the Father. His obedience is not perfect because he has complete knowledge of what is going to happen, of the end. Instead, his knowledge is professedly incomplete. In my argument, what makes the Son's obedience perfect is his sense of timing, and its perfect synchronization with the will of the Father. This *right timing* is the single trait of the Son's that Satan doesn't understand. Milton derives his concept of right timing from the Greek concept of *kairos*. So the intellectual foundation provided in this chapter is a definition and discussion of the genesis and development of *kairos* in the Classical world, along poetic and philosophical lines. Particular attention is given to the use of *kairos* in Homer, Pindar, and Plato. For Milton, right timing is the decisive mechanical characteristic of obedience after the fall.

The final chapter reads the ambiguity of Samson's actions in *Samson Agonistes* as denotative of the necessary grounds, or condition for obedience. This condition is *unknowing*. The work itself dramatizes the condition of unknowing, still further, this condition is the source of *Samson Agonistes*' dramatic power. Simply put, the drama is an interpretive dilemma not only for all the characters involved, but also for the reader. The meaning of the work cannot be resolved with certainty, and the will of God is not disclosed. Therefore, the meaning of Samson's final action as it accords or not with the will of God cannot with certainty be known. This interpretive predicament is for Milton precisely the predicament of humankind after the fall. Milton's solution to the predicament is an emphasis on the *necessity of choosing* in a condition of unknowing. As such, Miltonic unknowing is more than a mere recognition of the ineffability of the

divine. Unknowing is Milton's visionary re-figuration of the existential condition of uncertainty into the necessary condition for obedience. The intellectual foundation of this chapter is the theological tradition of *apophasis* or negative theology.

Taken together, the four chapters provide a comprehensive definition of Milton's concept of obedience, as an active disposition with specific requirements for its efficacy— free will, timing, and unknowing. It is my hope that this definition of Milton's concept of obedience will contribute to any thematic consideration of his late poems, and of their interrelationship.

Following from this stated hope, in the conclusion to this study I propose a way in which this sustained meditation on Miltonic obedience can inform a similar investigation of Milton's concept of liberty. If Milton's paramount value is obedience, one may reasonably ask, to what end? Perhaps the first response would be, to the end that is communion with God. But then, one could reasonably ask further, to what end here on Earth, for us mortals, in our day to day existence with each other—in our intimate, social, economic, and political lives? Milton's response to this question—to what end, for the sake of what?—is elegant in its simplicity, and profound in its reach. It is for the sake of liberty.

CHAPTER 1

LAW, CONSCIENCE, PURITY

In *Apology for Smectymnuus* (1642) Milton says of himself: "For I Readers, shall always be of this opinion, that obedience to the Spirit of God, rather than to the faire seeming pretences of men, is the best and most dutifull order that a Christian can observe" (Yale 1:937). The claim may be taken as paradigmatic. For what Milton means by "obedience" and how he orients and prioritizes "the Spirit of God" defines his Christianity, and is critical to any understanding of his work.

For Milton, as for any devout Christian, everything—all matter and all human and humanly known experience—follows from the creator, thus is created. This belief speaks to Milton's monism, which I touch on below.[10] For now it is enough to note that Milton sees no other possibility available to reason than monism. In *Christian Doctrine*, Milton justifies his monism with scripture, relying particularly on Romans 11.36 ("from him and through him and in him are all things"); I Corinthians 8.6 ("one God, the Father, from whom all things are"); and Hebrews 2.11 ("for both he who sanctifies and he who is sanctified, are all from one.").[11]

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[10] For a discussion of Milton's monism, see Jason P. Rosenblatt, *Torah and Law in* Paradise Lost (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 71-137.

[11] *CD* (Yale 6:417). Most of Milton's Biblical citations are verse fragments in his own translations, and most of these translations are quietly but forcefully and intentionally rhetorical. Because his texts sometimes differ from more familiar translations, when quoting Milton's scriptural citations in *CD* I will offer the Authorized Version in the footnotes. For the just-noted citations, the complete verses read: "For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever" (Romans 11.36); "But to us *there is but* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom *are* all things, and we by him" (I Corinthians 8.6); and "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified *are* all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Hebrews 2.11).

Since all creation comes from the creator, all creation is made to be obedient to the creator. For Milton, this requirement is an absolute rule. However, one can never be sure if one is obeying this rule. Furthermore, obedience to the rule depends upon conscience, the intentions of which cannot ever be explicated with certainty. In some sense always, an impossibility of knowledge attends the relationship to the divine will, with the sole exception of the figure of the Son. Thus Milton's concept of obedience in terms of humankind transpires in a kind of unknowing. As he writes in *Christian Doctrine*, "We know God, in so far as we are permitted to know him, from either his nature or his efficiency"; and "When we talk about knowing God, it must be understood in terms of man's limited powers of comprehension. God, as he really is, is far beyond man's imagination" (Yale 6:133).[12] So there is a necessary geometry to Milton's concept of obedience, in which individual conscience, engaged in a field of unknowing, is then situated in an angle of relation to divine will. Take away obedience, and the geometry collapses.

Milton's rationale for the primacy of obedience is simple: the opposite of obedience, disobedience, caused the fall. The fall, as Milton has it in *Paradise Lost*, wrecks reason: the "being" —"discursive, or intuitive" —of the "soul," as Raphael describes it to Adam.[13] Without reason there can be no liberty, no virtue, no prospect of meaning other than cursed tyranny (e.g., bad kings and awful prelates in Milton's

[12] Like William Ames (*Marrow of Sacred Divinity*, 1643), Milton cites 1 Timothy 6.16 to support his claim. Cf. *Marrow*, I, iv, 2-3, 9.

[13] See *PL* 5.485-88. Cf. *PL* 3.80-134, God's speech on divine foreknowledge and human free will; *PL* 9.351-52: "But God left free the will, for what obeys / Reason, is free, and reason he made right"; and *Areop*: "When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing" (Yale 2:526).

view).[14] Perhaps most strikingly, there can be no autonomy.[15] Instead, subjugation takes the place of autonomy.

To make such a conceptual leap—from obedience to autonomy—requires a sophisticated concept of obedience. In Milton's case, such a leap is in large part the reasoned outcome of a deeply engaged if highly particular interpretative relationship to scripture. Milton's biblical hermeneutics—that is, the way he interprets scripture for understanding both practical and theoretical—turns upon his estimation of the role and power of conscience. Individual conscience prepares to obey divine will through the reading of scripture. So Milton derives his concept of obedience from his reading of scripture, but does so by emphasizing to himself and to his readers, that scripture can only be read properly by individual conscience.

This emphasis on conscience complicates the view of Milton's obedience, and provokes important questions. The first and most fundamental is: what exactly is Milton saying about the relationship between conscience (the individual) and law (scripture)? If he gives priority to conscience in his biblical exegesis, what does this prioritization of conscience do to the authority of scripture as the word of God? And most fundamentally perhaps, is Milton choosing one over or at the expense of the other? Conscience over scripture? Conscience over law? If so, what effect would such a choice have on his formulation of obedience? If not, what nuances of Miltonic obedience, like gossamer threads, hold together his seemingly incompatible ideas of conscience and scripture under

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[14] See *Paradise Lost* 12.79-101.

[15] See Michael Schoenfeldt, "Obedience and Autonomy in *Paradise Lost*," in *A Companion to Milton*, edited by Thomas N. Corns (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 366.

the rubric of obedience? Finally, a perhaps unsympathetic critic might ask, is Milton simply prioritizing Milton?

Like the rabbinic commentators for whom meaning is not separate *from* Torah, but *is* the study of Torah, so too Milton interprets scripture.[16] He interpreted scripture throughout his life. He approached his interpretation of scripture as the foundation of his belief, and as the devotional spiritual and intellectual practice without which intimacy with divine will was simply not possible. Further, Milton read the Old Testament in Hebrew, and as a tutor required his nephews to learn Hebrew so that they also could read the scriptures "in their own original" (*Of Education*, Yale 2:400). According to Edward Phillips, the tutorial also included the study of Aramaic, so that his nephews could read the Targum Onkelos (c. 5th century CE), the first Aramaic translation and commentary of the original Hebrew Torah, produced during the Babylonian exile. Milton leans heavily on Mosaic Law to justify his arguments in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, *Tetrachordon*, *Of Education*, and *Areopagitica*, and just as heavily on Psalms in the creation of his epic poetics. Simply enough, as Jason Rosenblatt calls him, Milton is "the most Hebraic of great English poets."[17]

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[16] Beginning in 1926, Harris Francis Fletcher established Milton's debt to the Rabbinic commentaries on the Torah—most especially the medieval commentaries of Rashi and others—over the course of three books and numerous articles. See Harris Francis Fletcher, "Milton and Yossipon," *Studies in Philology* 21.3 (July, 1924), 496-501; *Milton's Semitic Studies: And Some Manifestations of Them in His Poetry* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1926); *The Use of the Bible in Milton's Prose* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1929); *Milton's Rabbinical Readings* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1930); and "Milton and Ben Gerson," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 29.1 (January, 1930), 41-52. To give one example, it was Fletcher who first pointed out Milton's use of Rabbinical commentary in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643). See Fletcher, *Milton's Rabbinical Readings*, 36; and William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon eds., *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton* (New York: The Modern Library, 2007), 909. Three notable books on the subject have appeared since Fletcher: Rosenblatt, *Torah and Law in* Paradise Lost; Golda Werman, *Milton and Midrash* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995); and most recently, Jeffrey S. Shoulson, *Milton and the Rabbis: Hebraism, Hellenism, & Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). For Rashi's influence on Milton, see especially Rosenblatt, 84-85.

More well known, and more broadly received than Milton's Hebraism, is Milton's Pauline theology. In particular, Milton's concept of obedience is radically Pauline because it takes the implications of Paul—fundamentally, the prioritization of grace before law—and raises them to an unassailably internal and therefore unverifiable condition. These two characterizations of Milton—Hebraic, Pauline—do not cancel each other out, but instead co-exist in Milton as a productive dialectic. In brief, "the Hebrew Bible and the Pauline epistles are the principal matrices of Milton's poetry and doctrine respectively."[18]

It is this seemingly obvious and yet uncanny duality—Hebraic and Pauline—which constitutes in large measure Milton's concept of obedience, comprised of Milton's "extraordinary mixture of confidence and hazard—confidence in the reality of God's truth and the hazard of identifying that truth in the absence of any (sure) external indication of its location."[19] Milton's poetic and interpretive force gives his concept of obedience its visionary quality. Scripture provides the foundation for his concept. *Christian Doctrine*—Milton's version of Midrash—contains more than nine thousand citations to scripture, or to put it another way, twice as many as Calvin's *Institutes*. His polemical prose is likewise filled with biblical citations, regardless of their purported subject matter: divorce, marriage, licensing, education, Italy, the execution of kings.

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[17] Rosenblatt, 6. Rosenblatt's book is the best of its kind, and has served to correct numerous misconceptions about Milton's relationship to Torah, and numerous overstatements of Milton's Pauline theology, or rather, those views of Milton which take him to be entirely Pauline in his theology, by critics Rosenblatt otherwise highly esteems: Arthur Barker, Ernest Sirluck, and A.S.P. Woodhouse. See Rosenblatt, 1-11. For evidence of Milton's Hebraism, Rosenblatt concentrates on the prose tracts of 1643-1645.

[18] Rosenblatt, 11.

[19] Stanley Fish, *How Milton Works* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 104.

Paradise Lost and *Paradise Regained* function as sustained meditations on a few verses of scripture, plumbed by Milton to what he takes to be their bright essence. *Samson Agonistes*—Milton's marriage of Hebrew and Greek, Israel and Athens, the classical and the biblical traditions—accomplishes the Pauline feat of performing a Hellenic reading of a quintessentially Hebrew *Aggadah*, and thereby creating a Christian hero, or perhaps a tragic Christian, or perhaps versions of both. Further, all three of Milton's major poems derive from the Bible: *Paradise Lost* from Genesis, *Paradise Regained* from Job, *Samson Agonistes* from Judges. As well, Psalms exerted a lifelong and dynamic influence on Milton's poetry and thought.[20] The earliest surviving English compositions we have of Milton's are his paraphrases of Psalms 114 and 136, written when he was fifteen years of age, either as a grammar school exercise or perhaps at the behest of his father. Milton included both paraphrases in his *Poems* (1645), with a note of explanation: "this and the following Psalm were done by the author at fifteen years old."[21]

Milton likely included his paraphrases to demonstrate his indebtedness to Psalms, and to situate himself as a direct poetic descendent of the psalmist. Psalms records an emotionally comprehensive and highly subjective experience of living within, and in accord to Mosaic Law. For Milton, as Mary Ann Radzinowicz points out, Psalms is "the record of a journey through life traversing all the tempers, moods, passions, and uneven reaction that mark the psalmist's search for an adequate faith."[22] The psalmist makes his

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[20] Mary Ann Radzinowicz, *Milton's Epics and the Book of Psalms* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), ix. Together with *Toward* Samson Agonistes: *The Growth of Milton's Mind* (Princeton, 1978), Radzinowicz demonstrates the influence of the Bible on Milton's poetry and thought, and Milton's use of the Bible in his poetry.

[21] John Milton, *Poems* (London, 1645). In *Milton's Epics and the Book of Psalms*, Psalm 136 is mistakenly given as 146.

[22] Radzinowicz, *Milton's Epics and The Book of Psalms*, 3.

"journey" in intense and continual reference to the Mosaic Law. So does Milton. As such, to read Milton requires us to read Milton reading the conception and unfolding of Mosaic Law, the history of responses to it as recorded in the Torah, and the revolutionary response to Mosaic Law, Christianity.

In this chapter, I examine the scriptural foundations of Miltonic obedience, particularly as they appear in *Christian Doctrine* and are redacted in *Paradise Lost*, as the necessary first step in developing an understanding of and then providing a definition of Milton's concept of obedience. The first section of this chapter focuses on Milton and Mosaic Law, particularly on the conceptual and collaborative development of obedience in the Torah, in what I am calling the genealogy of response between God and Adam and Eve, then Noah, then Abraham, and finally Moses. The second section addresses what we might think of as Paul's theory of conscience; the third section concerns Milton's synthesis of the two, in terms of obedience, into a corollary concept, purity.

Mosaic Law

In the Torah, singular nomination generates genealogy.[23] God chooses to create humankind. He then calls into being the first man, and the calling into being of the first man is also simultaneously the naming of him. The calling into being is the naming. These two facets of a single act—calling and naming—constitute divine nomination. The singularity of that nomination is that God calls into being by name, one man. However, the rule of singularity then extends even to Adam and Eve, once Eve is called into being;

[23] I borrow the term "nomination" from George Steiner's "A Preface to the Hebrew Bible," reprinted in George Steiner, *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978–1995* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 45.

and not just because she is created out of Adam's rib, thus directly related to him, but because before the fall Eve and Adam are singular together. God nominates Adam. Then God nominates Adam and Eve. By nominating them, as first parents, he nominates humankind. At this moment, the nomination is singular, and theoretically complete.

But the fall, from the divine point-of-view as it were, instigates the need for a new nomination. This nomination is intended to be singular also, and on behalf of humankind again. But, as we know, God will have to nominate repeatedly. God nominates Noah. God nominates Abram/Abraham, and Abraham's line. And finally, God nominates Moses. The activity of divine nomination occurs repeatedly because of Israel's falling away from and transgression of divine will. Between the fall and the nomination of Abraham, the trilogy of sinful generations pass: the generation of the flood, the generation of the dispersion (after Babel), and the generation of Sodom. Abraham brings the sequence of sinful generations to a halt.[24] With Moses, the Law is given and formalized, the covenant finalized, and Israel delivered.

Taken together, the story of the generations from Adam to Moses is the story of the formation of Israel.[25] It is the story of an evolving relationship between divine and human. Obedience and disobedience dictate and organize the relationship. What obedience may mean depends upon both participants, God and humankind. Degrees of obedience, and degrees of disobedience, God's re-visionary responses to these degrees, and humankind's response to these revisions characterize and describe the formation of Israel as God's chosen people. The relationship develops by God's calls, and

[24] See Jacob Neusner, *Rabbinic Judaism: The Theological System* (Boston: Brill, 2002), 44.

[25] As Neusner has pointed out, the Israel named by Torah should in no way be confused with Israel, the nation, or with any other nation, but should be understood solely as the people who alone among all the peoples of the earth accepted the Torah from God. See Neusner, 28-52.

humankind's responses. In Genesis and Exodus, humankind's critical intimate interactions with God may be said to constitute a genealogy of response.

The genealogy of response begins with Adam and Eve, after they have eaten of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, after they have failed to resist Satan's temptation. Their response to God is at the heart of Israel's formation, and of the God of Israel's formation. Together they "hear the voice of the Lord walking in the garden in the cool of day." They hide from the voice. The Lord calls to Adam, "Where art thou?" (Genesis 3.9). In *Paradise Lost*, Milton expands and extends the moment:

> 'Where art thou Adam, wont with joy to meet
> My coming seen far off? I miss thee here,
> Not pleased, thus entertained with solitude,
> Where obvious duty erewhile appeared unsought:
> Or come I less conspicuous, or what change
> Absents thee, or what chance detain? Come forth.'
> He came, and with him Eve, more loath, though first
> To offend, discount'nanced both, and discomposed;
> Love was not in their looks, either to God
> Or to each other, but apparent guilt,
> And shame, and perturbation, and despair,
> Anger, and obstinacy, and hate, and guile.
> (*PL* 10.103-14)

Milton, following the Latin usage of dis-, communicates in full, despairing force that Adam and Eve have become the opposite of what they were before God.[26] Once countenanced and composed, reflective of the divine in both looks and internal ordering, Adam and Eve are now discountenanced and discomposed. Guilty of the first sin they are guilty of all sins.[27] They are no longer integral by love as children of God (before the fall they would have had no need to be *integrated*, since they had never been dis-integrated), and they know it. Adam responds: "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I

[26] See entry for "dis'" in the *OED* for a full etymological explanation.

[27] Cf. *CD* (Yale 6:383-84).

was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself" (Genesis 3.10). Rather than being mutual and clear, their response is a befuddlement of equivocation, shame, and fear. It is the sound, as it were, of the effects of disobedience.[28] As Milton has it, in *Paradise Lost* there now can be,

> No more of talk where God or angel guest
> With man, as with his friend, familiar used
> To sit indulgent, and with him partake
> Rural repast, permitting him the while
> Venial discourse unblamed: *I now must change*
> *Those notes to tragic; foul distrust, and breach*
> *Disloyal on the part of man, revolt,*
> *And disobedience*.
> (*PL* 9.1-8, emphasis added)

For the time being, intimacy between God and humankind is lost, and the sound of disobedience carries. The first ten generations of humankind pass from Adam to Noah. Disobedience mars them all. The result is a grieved and solitary divinity; not the first-person plurality of Genesis 1 and his generating *logos*, but an "I" of wounded grandeur, disappointed, unresponded to, talking to himself: "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart" (Genesis 6.5-6).[29] God mourns what has been lost: the freely willed harmonization of humankind to divine will, diapason. The mourning turns severe. As Torah scholar Avivah Zornberg points out, in the flood narrative

> [God's] name is transformed, from the Tetragrammaton (*Adonai)* to *Elohim*, the name of strict justice. At the moment of reversal, strikingly, the merciful name is used, together with a decree of doom: 'And *Adonai* regretted that He had made man on earth… *Adonai* said, I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created'

[28] For Milton's version of this moment, see *Paradise Lost* 10.116-43.

[29] Cf. *CD* (Yale 6:135).

> (Genesis 6.6-7), as though a habit of mercy is being undermined from *within*. And, conversely, when God remembers Noach and ends the Flood, his name of justice, *Elohim*, is still used, even as the tide turns toward mercy.[30]

To the divine voice of Justice Noah responds, but dutifully and in silence.

For Milton, duty is a sad and saddening substitute for obedience, not least because it is the intermediate form between obedience (before the fall) and subjugation (what obedience becomes after the fall).[31] Milton's God does not wants subjugation. In *Paradise Lost*, God commands Raphael to go to Adam, and "such discourse bring on, / As may advise him of his happy state, / Happiness in his power left free to will, / Left to his own free will, his will though free, / Yet mutable" (5.233-37). The sentence is instructive in its repetitions. Three iterations of "free" and of "will" are preceded by a doubling of "happy" and succeeded by "mutable"; that is, happiness and mutability frame free-will. The repetitions, in shifting syntax, evoke what is at stake for God with regard to humankind's free will. As Robert Alter and others have shown: what is at stake for

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[30] Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious* (New York: Schocken Books, 2009), 47-48. Zornberg's astute reading of the Flood narrative derives from Rashi's commentaries. Rashi (b.1040- d.1105), the great rabbi from Troyes, is considered the foremost commentator of the Torah and the Talmud. See Rashi, *Commentary on The Torah,* translated by Rabbi Yisrael Isser Zvi Herczeg (Brooklyn, NY: Artscroll/Mesorah Publications, 1995), 61-68. Citations to Midrash—rabbinical commentary on the Torah—are in Bruce Grigsby's words "notoriously complex," and just as notoriously not standardized. See Bruce H. Grigsby, "A Proposed Guide for Citing Rabbinic Texts," *Journal of the Evangelical Theology Society* 24.1 (March, 1981), 83-90. Following Zornberg's model, all subsequent citations to Rashi's *Commentary* in this study will be in the following form: Rashi to (book and verse). For example, the current citation would read, Rashi to Genesis 6.13. As Dr. Zornberg explained, the "to" refers to the particular verse, and is equivalent to "on" or "at" (personal email correspondence, 6/29/10). In his commentaries, Rashi is in turn heavily indebted to the 6th century CE midrash, *Bereshith Rabbah* (Genesis Rabba), and to the first Aramaic translation and commentary of the original Hebrew Torah, the *Targum Onkelos* (c. 5th century CE).

[31] It is not too much to speak of God's sadness in Genesis 6. Recall Genesis 6:6: "And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." With regard to this passage, James L. Mays speaks of the "effective contrast between the evil inclination of the human heart and the pained heart of God." *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, 90. And in his *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*, Robert Alter translates the verse as "And the Lord regretted having made the human on earth and was grieved to the heart" (Alter, 40), and notes that in the Hebrew equivalent for grieved, "The same verbal root, *'-ts-b*, is reflected in Eve's pangs, Adam's pain, and 'the pain of our hands' work.'"

God with regard to humankind's free will, and the right exercise of that free will, is God's happiness. Further, God's happiness appears at least in the Pentateuch to depend not only on human obedience but also on the quality of that obedience. Milton was particularly attuned to the distinction: any "Yes" to God that does not flow forth from a voluntary heart is not obedience, and is therefore neither what God wants nor what God commands.

Christ is the exemplar of this voluntary heart. In *Christian Doctrine* Milton writes, "Redemption is that act by which Christ, sent in the fullness of time, redeemed all believers at the price of his own blood, which he paid voluntarily" (Yale 6:417). In other words, following the example of Christ—as Milton gives it in *Paradise Regained*—obedience to God's will is and must be voluntary. Milton paraphrastically interprets Matthew 20.28 to make the point ("to give his life as a ransom for many").[32] In doing so, Milton describes what he takes as the essential act of Christian obedience, Christ freely ransoming himself for the sake of humankind. The essential act begins with complete exposure, of what we might call Christ's radical vulnerability; it proceeds to free will, and the power of conscious choosing; then the choice made from a position of total exposure opens up the possibility of Christian obedience; and in its most radical form, this Christian obedience becomes a kind of self-ransoming. The whole describes an imitation of Christ. In order, Milton cites John 10.18 ("I have power to lay it down and to take it up again"), Ephesians 5.2 ("he has given himself for us"), and Philippians 2.8 ("became obedient") to support his interpretation.[33] In *Paradise Regained*, Milton

[32] The complete verse in the AV reads: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

dramatizes this interpretation, or interpretative redaction of the cited scripture. In *Paradise Lost*, Christ first appears in the Argument to Book 3 at the right hand of the Father, a position of literally absolute safety, from which he freely chooses total exposure (to Satan first and foremost), and as such, articulates Christian obedience: "The Son of God freely offers himself a ransom for man" (*PL* 3, Argument). To put it another way, to redeem humankind the Son becomes the originary volunteer, the exemplar of obedience. He is the exemplar of obedience, not least because although the Father does not explicitly disclose his will, and the Son does not have foreknowledge of the Father's will, he knows it in time, or his knowing of it is a knowing of timing: he knows it right when he needs to know it. The example belongs to humankind.

As Raphael says to Adam in Book 5:

> Attend: that thou are happy, owe to God;
> That thou continu'st such, owe to thyself,
> That is, to thy obedience; therein stand.
> This was that caution giv'n thee; be advised.
> God made thee perfect, not immutable;
> And good he made thee, but to persevere
> He left it in thy power, ordained thy will
> By nature free, not overruled by fate
> Inextricable, or strict necessity;
> *Our volunteer service he requires*,
> *Not our necessitated, such with him*
> *Finds no acceptance*.
>
> (*PL* 5.520-31, emphasis added)

Reading Genesis 6 through the lens of *Paradise Lost* 5.520-31, what suggests itself is an amplification of God's grief, as sorrow, and a personification of it, as divine bitter-

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[33] See *CD* (Yale 6:417). The complete verses in the AV read: "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my father" (John 10:18); "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour" (Ephesians 5.2); and "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2.8).

sweetness, manifested in his repeated nomination of humankind. God wanted obedience and volunteers, he gets duty and the dutiful.[34] The genealogy of response is not done. At the time of the flood and the subsidence of the flood, there seems no other option for God but to establish the bond of obedience in its denigrated form, that is, the bond of duty.

The divine reasons for accepting and establishing the bond of duty appear to be driven by 1) divine regret, and 2) divine nostalgia. What leads to these, and to the subsidence of the flood, is divine remembrance, or perhaps more properly, divine recollection: "And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters assuaged" (Genesis 8.1). Although the attribution of ostensibly human attributes (e.g., regret, nostalgia, remembrance) to God may appear unorthodox, in *Christian Doctrine* Milton develops a scripturally-based justification for it, based upon the concept of *anthropopatheia*.[35] The passage is long, but is worth quoting in full:

> We ought not to imagine that God would have said anything or caused anything to be written about himself unless he intended that it should be a part of our conception of him. On the question of what is or what is not suitable for God, let us ask for no more dependable authority than God himself. If *Jehovah repented that he had created man*, Gen. vi. 6, *and repented because of their groanings*, Judges ii. 18, let us believe that he did repent. But let us not imagine that God's repentance arises from lack of foresight, as man's does, for he has warned us not to think about him in this way: Num. xxiii. 19: *God is not a man that he should lie, nor that son of man that he should repent*. The same point is made in I Sam. xv. 29. If

[34] Reading Scripture back through *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes* is an activity Milton intended his readers to perform. Milton understood himself as a prophet of God's word, and in many ways, his great poems as a kind of vatic exegesis. See *RCG* (Yale 1:801-05); William Kerrigan, *The Prophetic Milton* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974), especially 4, 8-11, 125-87; Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 442; and Anna Beer, *Milton: Poet, Pamphleteer, and Patriot* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008), 110.

[35] *Anthropopatheia* posits God as anthropomorphic and passible, that is, capable, if not susceptible to suffering. For a good discussion of Milton and *anthropopatheia*, see Michael Lieb, *Theological Milton: Deity, Discourse and Heresy in the Miltonic Canon* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006), 127-61.

> *he grieved in his heart* Gen. vi. 6, and if, similarly, *his soul was grieved*, Judges x.16, let us believe that he did feel grief. For those states of mind which are good in a good man, and count as virtues, are holy in God. If it is said that God, after working for six days, *rested and was refreshed*, Exod. xxxi. 17, and if he *feared his enemy's displeasure*, Deut. xxxii.27, let us believe that it is not beneath God to feel what grief he does feel, to be refreshed by what refreshes him, and to fear what he does fear. For however you may try to tone down these and similar texts about God by an elaborate show of interpretive glosses, it comes to the same thing in the end. After all, if *God is said to have created man in his own image, after his own likeness,* Gen. i. 26, and not only his mind but also his external appearance (unless the same words mean something different when they are used again in Gen. v. 3: *Adam begot his son after his own likeness, in his own image),* and if God attributes to himself again and again a human shape and form, why should we be afraid of assigning to him something he assigns to himself, provided we believe that what is imperfect and weak in us is, when ascribed to God, utterly perfect and utterly beautiful? We may be certain that God's majesty and glory were so dear to him that he could never say anything about himself which was lower or meaner than his real nature, nor would he ever ascribe to himself any property if he did not wish us to ascribe it to him. Let there be no question about it: they understand best what God is like who adjust their understanding to the word of God, for he has adjusted his word to our understanding, and has shown what kind of an idea of him he wishes us to have.[36]
>
> (Yale 6.135-36)

After the flood has subsided, Noah offers a burnt offering to the Lord. Here, to avail oneself as Milton did to the emotive power of the moment, one must remember the apocalyptic trauma, and the terrible loneliness Noah has just experienced. He has witnessed more than genocide; he has witnessed a world-ending, and the Lord authored it. Now Noah exits the ark, but only reluctantly, and not in strict accordance with God's commands.[37] He builds an altar and offers his sacrifice. His sacrifice affects the Lord: "And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground anymore for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from

[36] Cf. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 93: "Therefore in the consideration of figurative expressions a rule such as this will serve, that what is read should be subjected to diligent scrutiny until an interpretation contributing to the reign of charity is produced."

[37] Cf. Zornberg, 54; and Rashi to Genesis 9.9.

his youth; neither will I again smite any more every living thing, as I have done" (Genesis 8.21). God allows himself to be moved. Once moved, God renews the covenant.

In other words, it may be said that the concept of obedience develops collaboratively by nomination (divine) and response (humankind) over the course of the Torah, from Adam to Moses. First God gave Adam and Eve freedom and bounty, and *a single* prohibition. With Noah, God re-institutes a version of the Edenic law; this time he establishes a covenant, based again on freedom and bounty, and on prohibition. With the Noahide covenant, however, there appear to be two prohibitions, the first against cannibalism, the second against murder. Both prohibitions, although ambiguous enough to afford differing interpretations, provide substantially more concrete definitions of content than the mysterious and single prohibition of the Edenic law. No matter. Noah responds by planting a vineyard. It is the first thing he does after the covenant. Then he gets drunk and passes out.[38] Unspeakable shame follows, and out of it, as out of awful ground, grows the Tower of Babel.[39]

At this moment in Genesis human will is striving to make a name equal to God's, and is doing so out of a fear of dispersion, certainly of annihilation. The memory of the flood remains. The memory of the Lord's wrath remains. And the quality of humankind's fear—of God—is not reverential, but terrified. As such, humankind builds the tower, not to worship God, but to protect itself from God. The difference—the distinction—means everything from a theological perspective. Humankind's interactions

[38] For a discussion of the implications of the vineyard, the timing of its planting, and of Noah's drunkenness, see Zornberg, *The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious*, 56-67.

[39] See Genesis 9-11.

with divine will depend on it, and as the evolving story of Genesis and Exodus relates, so too does God's interactions with humankind.

For Milton, the way that humankind generates meaning and interprets experience for meaning depends on the character of humankind's awe, and following, its obedience. The one possibility—worship of God—involves choice, which in turn is the act of God-given reason. "Reason is but choosing," Milton writes in *Areopagitica* (Yale 2:526). In *Paradise Lost* he makes them synonymous, "Reason also is choice" (*PL* 3.108).[40] Further, as Nigel Smith has pointed out, both phrases are reworkings of a phrase from the earlier *Of Education*: "By this time, years and good general precepts will have furnished them more distinctly with that act of reason which in ethics is called *proaresis*, that they may with some judgment contemplate upon moral good and evil" (Yale 2:397).
The other possibility (exemplified by the Tower of Babel)—which might variously be characterized as fear of God, fearful antagonism with God, as *agon* with God—can have only disastrous consequences. Milton's Satan summarizes them all.

So God's nostalgia for Adam and Eve indicates his now "impossible" longing for humankind before the fall. The longing is "impossible" because it cannot be satisfied; it cannot be satisfied because the fall cannot be taken back. Since the fall cannot be taken back—since it is existent, now and forever—an approximation must be devised. God re-establishes a covenantal relationship with humankind, the Noahide covenant.
Of the Noahide covenant, an important distinction must be made: as Robert Alter has noted, "This is a pledge that God makes to Himself, not out loud to Noah…The silent promise in God's interior monologue invokes no external signs, only the seamless cycle

[40] Cf. *PL* 5.486-87.

of the seasons that will continue as long as the earth."[41] In other words, God does not disclose his will to Noah until after he has set the commands, and the prohibition. Here the silence of God's intentions will have profound implications generally on all future Judeo-Christian understandings of and relationships to divine will, and specifically on Milton's understanding of divine will.

With the Noahide covenant, the mystery of divine will takes on a second aspect. The first aspect is the sheer incomprehensibility of God, the creator, as apparent in the first book of Genesis (this is the God knowable by his energies—that is creation—but unknowable in his essence, the God Milton justifies to men in *Paradise Lost*).[42] The second aspect is now the unknowability of God's *intentions* toward and with humankind, that is, the unknowability of divine will in terms of its divine motives, in its relations with humankind. From the covenant with Noah onward, God's unknowability is thus double-fold, and, as I demonstrate in the final chapter, is the necessary condition for Miltonic obedience.[43]

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[41] Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 49.

[42] Cf. *CD* (Yale 6:133): "We know God, in so far as we are permitted to know him, from either his nature or his efficiency."

[43] For a good discussion of Milton and the unknowability of God, see Noam Reisner, *Milton and the Ineffable* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). I use the term "unknowable" to indicate that my understanding of the concept derives principally from, and is fairly strictly in accord with, the religious tradition of *apophasis*, and therefore should be understood primarily in its theological valence. Reisner uses the term "ineffable" to indicate that although his concept should also be understood theologically, his concept takes in and is in some ways developed against Lacan, and Lacan's idea of the "real" and Derrida's "there is nothing outside of the text." See Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*: *A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), x; and Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivack (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 158. Although different, both our terms are meant to emphasize the theological. As Reisner writes: "My use of the term 'ineffable', therefore, is confined to its religious theist uses which, while in themselves potentially having recourse either to positive or negative expression, ultimately proceed from the axiomatic assumption that God exists and that his existence is something about which nothing can be said using ordinary language, except through negation" (5). In the final chapter of this dissertation, on unknowability in *Samson Agonistes*, I take up Reisner's claims more vigorously, and in some places, I am in clear debt to those claims.

Further, the inward turn that God makes, God's interiorizing of God's divinity, is an instructive example for Milton: for Milton God's will is knowable only *within* individual conscience, becomes that which can only be *heard* in and by one's conscience. (It is for this reason that hearing is such an important motif in *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*, and in his prose tracts and earlier poems.)[44] To give one example: in *Reason of Church Government*, Milton quotes from the Book of Jeremiah ("His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones") to situate himself in a God-ordained destiny for which the culmination will be the writing of his great epics against the "timorous and ingratefull" he would otherwise "heare within my selfe" (Yale 1:804). Instead by dint of hearing of God's "Secretary conscience" (Yale 1:822), Milton will become the epic poet of God and England:

> Neither doe I think it shame to covnant with any knowing reader, that for some few yeers yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be rays'd from the heat of youth or the vapors of wine, like that which flows at wast from the pen of some vulgar Amorist or the trencher fury, of a riming parasite, nor to be obtain'd by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternall Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallow'd fire of his Altar to touch and pacify the lips of whom he pleases.
>
> (Yale 1:820-21)

Milton will become *the* vatic poet because of his obedience to God as revealed in conscience, heard rightly.

In the story of Noah, God takes the inward turn. Thereafter the obedient must take the inward turn. (Beginning with *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* in 1634, Milton pushes the idea of inwardness so far it becomes almost illegible. The Lady is Milton's first exemplar of this kind of obedience, entirely inwardly construed, and only

[44] Cf. Luke 11.28: "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it."

inwardly verifiable.)[45] Once God has established in the silence of his heart his covenant with Noah, he instructs Noah and his sons. The instructions are more than a mere echo of those God gave to Adam and Eve; they are synonymous. So the genealogy of response is in this case at least dramatically iterative. Genesis 1.28 begins, "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." Genesis 9 begins, "And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." The first sentence communicates what seem to be God's central concerns with regard to humankind: free will and obedience, concerns that Milton takes up as his own. The exact reiteration of the sentence verifies the ongoing primacy of these concerns to God. The genre of instruction indicates the theme of obedience; the open-ended content of the instruction indicates the theme of free will.

The two passages follow the same formal pattern. In both instances, command follows blessing, and command in turn is followed by prohibition. Critically, over the course of the two passages it becomes clear that Milton's monism, conventionally understood to be a species of heresy, is founded in scripture, and furthermore, is a necessary material condition for obedience. The "single prohibition" of the first book of Genesis, what Milton calls "one easy prohibition" in *Paradise Lost* (4.433), becomes in the ninth book of Genesis an unsettling iteration of that first "one easy prohibition." And the smallest change to the "prohibition" changes obedience. With the Noahide covenant, God re-enacts a version of the first covenant in a moment of divine re-visionary effort: "But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat" (Genesis

[45] See the introduction for my discussion of *Masque* and obedience.

9.4).[46] (This prohibition also corresponds directly to the silent, subsidiary prohibition against eating meat found in Genesis 1.29-30.) A relation between the fruit of the forbidden tree and human flesh suggests itself; and the prohibition of the Noahide covenant becomes the term with which to retroactively read the Edenic covenant. Further, as the prohibition develops the dynamic relation between the two covenants develops. Just as the dietary restrictions have been modified in the Noahide covenant, and therefore the quality of the prohibition, so too has the stated punishment for transgressing the prohibition, although to a less obvious degree. In the Edenic covenant, God declared the punishment for breaking the prohibition to be death (Genesis 2.17). In the Noahide covenant, the sentence becomes obscure in both its threats and its announced effects. The sentence is simple in Eden: Do this one thing I tell you not to do and you will die. (Perhaps the fact that Adam and Eve broke the prohibition and *did not die* serves as a dark influential memory in the mind of God, when it comes time to establish the prohibition with Noah and Noah's sons.) Death is in the Noahide prohibition but less obviously: "And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man" (Genesis 9.4). At this point the sentence corresponds to the prohibition against cannibalism. But then, it is as if in the silent space between verse five and verse six, the divine will meditates on both prohibition and sentence, perhaps recollecting Eden, and in verse six, the sentence is amended and intensified: "Whoso sheddeth man's

[46] In the first book of Genesis God commands Adam and Eve to be vegetarians, as it were: "And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat" (Genesis 1.29-30). In the ninth book of Genesis, the dietary restrictions have changed: "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things" (Genesis 9.3). I have neither the space here nor the exegetical expertise to expand on this revision of dietary restriction, particularly as it pertains to the character of the prohibitions; for a good discussion, see Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 50, n.1-7 and 6.

blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man" (Genesis 9.6). The amended sentence carries with it—begins with—an amendment to the initial prohibition (against cannibalism): the shedding of blood is now part of the prohibition. With this amendment, the Noahide prohibition is complete, and an exegetical instrument with which to read (to read back into) the Edenic covenant, and its "one easy prohibition." Doing so indicates a living relation between the Image of God (man), man as human (as mortal flesh), and the fruit of the forbidden tree. What was prohibited in the Edenic covenant becomes lifeblood in the Noahide covenant, the animating force for the image of God. Thus, what is prohibited is the ingesting of or otherwise assaulting of divine substance, whether material or metaphorical, bodied or mind. For Milton, the result of any such transgression is endlessly disastrous, the fall:

> So saying, her rash hand, in evil hour
> Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she ate:
> *Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat*
> *Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe,*
> *That all was lost*.
> (*PL* 9.780-84, emphasis added)

Milton's meaning derives precisely from the Hebrew Scriptures, in which the distinction between matter and spirit is a conceit of language at most—the world is God's, the ways of speaking about it are God's also. Milton takes the lesson entirely. To Milton, logos *is flesh*, flesh is itself as metaphorical, the littlest leaf is a soul-bearing attribute of God, and the briefest abstraction, the substance of God also. In *Christian Doctrine*, Milton writes: "Man is not double or separable: not, as is commonly thought, produced from and composed of two different and distinct elements, soul and body. On the contrary, the whole man is the soul, and the soul the man: a body, in other words, or individual substance, animated, sensitive, and rational" (Yale 6:318).

With regard to matter and spirit, to substance, Milton's thinking is, as Gordon Teskey and others have shown, remarkably similar to Spinoza's "substance monism."[47] Briefly, for Spinoza there are substances and there are modes. Ultimately, all substance can be referred to as one substance. This one substance is, necessarily, God. The conclusion Spinoza draws, philosophy terms "necessitarianism": "the actual world with its one substance is the only possible world." Since God is, in Spinoza's system, the only substance, then, as substance, God and world are synonymous: *Deus sive Natura*. Modes may be considered as properties, potential or actual, of substance.[48] Modes then, are *of* substance. That is, substance understood as mind, and modes understood as bodies, are indivisible; so Spinoza's theory of Substances and Modes provides a solution to mind-body dualism, a dualism Spinoza finds spiritually false and philosophically repellent, a deep and troubling misapprehension of truth.

Milton agrees. As Arthur Barker wrote almost seventy years ago in *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma*, "Dualism was unpalatable to one whose highest delight was the integration of form and substance in poetry."[49] In other words, and in the briefest terms,

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[47] See Teskey, *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 85; Philip Donnelly, "'Matter' versus Body: The Character of Milton's Monism," *Milton Quarterly* 33 (1999), 79-85; Stephen Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 102-17; and D. Bentley Hart, "Milton, Monism, and Narrative: An Essay on the Metaphysics of *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Quarterly* 30 (1996), 16-27.

[48] Samuel Newlands, "Spinoza's Modal Metaphysics," in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza-modal). Newlands' article provides a clear and accessible overview of Spinoza's system of Substances and Modes. Spinoza develops his theory of Substances and Modes in *The Ethics* (1677). See *A Spinoza Reader: The* Ethics *and Other Works*, translated and edited by Edwin Gurley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 85-129.

[49] Quoted in Teskey, *DM*, 207, n.2. The full passage reads: "Dualism was unpalatable to one whose highest delight was the integration of form and substance in poetry. Man must therefore be regarded as an indivisible unit…It is ultimately to this conviction of the unity of soul and body that one must trace the monism which issued in the several heresies of *De Doctrina Christiana*. It was because he could not accept any doctrine which involved a dualistic view of man or his world that Milton refused to believe that the

Milton's poetry was *matter*, at least to him, as was the soul that made it. Again, from *Christian Doctrine*: "Nearly everyone agrees that all form—and the human soul is a kind of form—is produced by the power of matter" (Yale 6:322). Matter makes and is spirit, a lesson learned from the book of Genesis, from the Edenic and the Noahide covenant most specifically, and also of course from the life, death and resurrection of Christ. For humankind, set in such a world, all hope of obedience to the divine will and the liberty that according to Milton comes from obedience to the divine will, depends upon the refutation of dualism, and upon the right recognition of what we might think of as mattering spirit, or spirited matter, all derived from "one first matter all," as Milton names it in *Paradise Lost*:

> O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom
> All things proceed, and up to him return,
> If not depraved from good, created all
> Such to perfection, *one first matter all*,
> *Endued with various forms, various degrees*
> *Of substance, and in things that live, of life*.
> (*PL* 5.469-74, emphasis added)

It is clear that the likeness between Milton's theory of "one first matter all" and Spinoza's "substance monism" is almost uncannily exact. However, Milton and Spinoza arrive at their theories from different directions, from different starting points. As Teskey writes:

> In general, philosophical systems develop either from the outside in or from the inside out; from speculations about the universe to theories about man, or from speculations about man to theories of the universe; and Milton, as perhaps befits a poet, followed the latter course. Milton did not decide how the cosmos is put together and then follow through consistently with a theory of humanity that fits into that cosmos. He decided first, from scripture, and from his own experience as a poet, what he thought about Man. Only then did Milton determine, under the

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universe 'was formed from nothing,' and insisted that 'the original matter' was intrinsically good, and the chief productive stock of every subsequent good,' since it was 'of God and in God.'"

> guidance of logic, what he thought about the universe. We might say that he was an *anthropic* rather than a *cosmological* thinker.[50]

After Noah gets drunk and is in some deeply shameful way trespassed against by his son, Ham, humankind falls to disobedience again, again for another ten generations. The thematic and numerical similarities between the Edenic and Noahic suggest the re-visionary efforts of the divine. In the first response, God nominated Adam and Eve. In the second response, with its iterative but altered prohibition, God nominated Noah. Dispersion follows the Tower of Babel: the "lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth" (Genesis 11.8). And then Genesis 12 begins with God's third nomination. It is of Abram, "Terah's faithful son," to recall Milton's youthful rendering. And Abram's response—the third in this genealogy of response—begins like Noah's, as wordless consent. The Lord commands Abram to "get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee." For Abram then, the journey begins in unknowing, and is divinely stipulated as a journey in the unknown (thematically, Abraham's journey in the unknown reaches its terrifying, singularly radical conclusion at Mount Moriah, in the eternal instant following Abram's preparation to sacrifice his beloved son, and before God's reprieve of his command for Abraham to do so). Abram consents. His status as father of Israel follows firstly from his dauntless consent, and his adherence to it over the course of his journey. Genesis 14 begins with the Battle of the Kings and ends with King Melchizedek's blessing of Abram, after Abram has saved Lot: "Blessed *be* Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth" (Genesis 14.19). And Abram replies: "I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth" (14.22).

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[50] Teskey, *DM*, 87.

At this moment and silently, as if lighting the words from below, Abram's humble praise to God—it is God who saved Lot, not I—reestablishes intimacy between the divine and humankind. Wandering becomes being-found, and the journey in the unknown is revealed as a walk in the palm of God. So Genesis 15 begins: "The Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I *am* thy shield, *and* thy exceeding great reward" (15.1). Here Abram begins to become Abraham, which is also a way of saying, he ceases to be prefigured by Noah. Noah's response to God from his nomination to his death was wordless, and possibly merely duty. But Abram, unlike Noah before him, *responds* to the Lord, and his response is freely willed: "And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?" (15.2). The solely vertical relationship between God and humankind, of straight-down command to straight-up duty, becomes something eminently more nuanced and geometric, vertical, angular, even in moments perhaps, surprisingly horizontal. To put it another way, the relationship becomes dialogic between divine will and free will, as the work of human obedience is discovered to be necessarily a work of collaboration, a fact learned both by God and by Abram. God nominated Abram, Abram responded, and in his devoted, freely willed and questioning responses to God, Abram articulated the first obedience. So God nominated him again, this time as Abraham, the "father of nations."

Abraham's obedience to God serves as the model for Moses' obedience to God, the fourth and culminating response in the genealogy of responses. Thus, it functions as the precedent for the giving of the Law. It also establishes the durable heritage, that heritage—a promise—which will sustain Israel throughout its exile. On his deathbed, Joseph in Egypt says to his brethren: "God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this

land unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Genesis 50.25). In other words, he forecasts the exodus.

The story of the exodus has as its locus the life of Moses, an orphan found on the banks of the Nile, who was raised in Egypt by the Pharaoh's daughter, and chosen by God as God's agent. God speaks first to Moses through the burning bush. Moses hides his face; God calls Moses, "Moses, Moses. Here *am* I" (Exodus 3.4). And a few verses later, "behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me" (Exodus 3.11). The first three words of Moses' response "*Who am I*" give back to God God's self-definition—Here am I—the syntax and the sound, but figured into questioning; not I am, but who. To mix senses if not metaphors, Moses' response is an image of the Lord's, with a single difference: the Lord has omniscience; Moses has wonder. From a theological perspective, the response is paradoxically a concise and vibratory unknowing: question (who), ontological status (am), person (I), and is precisely the only response God desires. For God's answer to Moses and then to all God's chosen people, is: You are mine, bound to me. The Law, given to Moses at Mount Sinai, is the full, realized expression of the bond. And obedience to it—the dialogic obedience of Abraham, the dialectic and interventional obedience of Moses—is the one and only reply to the Law. Milton took the medium, if not the message, entirely.

Pauline Conscience

With Moses, human obedience to divine will was given its summary expression as Law. The introduction of "conscience" by Paul's epistles provides Milton his means to read the

Law. Milton takes the irruptive force of Pauline conscience, the timing of that irruption, and its revolutionary interpolation of Mosaic Law, with complete seriousness. In his own reading of the Law, he re-enacts the irruption: Milton reads the Law, then Milton reads Pauline conscience, then Milton reads Pauline conscience reading the Law; then he retraces its interpolative extension from Moses' reception of the Law to the recapitulation of that receptive moment in individual conscience; then, Milton embodies the dialectic of the Law and conscience, and follows this dialectic to its extreme, almost unsustainable, and yet rigorously logical outcome. *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*, taken together, are the document and expression of this process. *Samson Agonistes* is its logical outcome.

It may be said that Milton's use of conscience speaks to his antinomianism. However, if Milton's theology was indeed antinomian, the foundation of all his theological thinking was the Bible.[51] Thus, even though Milton prioritizes individual conscience over any outside expression of God's law—he writes in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, "wee cannot safely assent to any precept writt'n in the Bible, but as charity commends it to us" (Yale 2:340)—Milton's understanding of individual conscience is oriented by his ongoing reading of scripture.[52] It follows then that Milton's understanding of free will and obedience derives in large part from his reading of scripture, in this case, from his reading of the Psalms and of Genesis and Exodus, and

[51] See *CD* (Yale 6:119): "I began by devoting myself when I was a boy to an earnest study of the Old and New Testaments in their original languages, and then proceeded to go carefully through some of the shorter systems of theologians"; and, "I, on the other hand, have striven to cram my pages even to overflowing with quotations drawn from all parts of the Bible."

[52] For a useful discussion of Milton's use of scripture to justify his prioritization of conscience, see Stanley Fish, "To the Pure All Things Are Pure: Law, Faith, and Interpretation in the Prose and Poetry of John Milton," *Law and Literature* 21.1 (Spring, 2009), 78-92. As Fish writes, "Milton supports an argument against any reliance on the visible and tangible by citing a very visible and tangible passage in scripture" (80).

from his re-visionary reading of Genesis and Exodus back through Psalm 114.[53] It is as Barbara Lewalski has shown that Milton did indeed define true religion as the "acceptance of scripture alone as the rule of faith, interpreted by the private conscience as informed by the Spirit's illumination."[54]

Lewalski's *order of presentation* (scripture, conscience, Spirit) should not be mistaken for Milton's *order of priority*. In Milton's order of priority, the sentence should read something like: The Spirit illuminates (informs) private conscience, and private conscience, once illuminated, may then interpret scripture; and the whole activity may be understood as the rule of faith. The crux of this activity Milton calls "the phenomenon of Conscience, or right reason," that which receives the Holy Spirit and then reads the Word by the light of the Holy Spirit (*CD*, Yale 6:132).[55] For Milton, such an understanding of conscience comes directly from Paul's epistles. More to the point, Milton's concept of conscience is Paul's concept of conscience, which in turn is a redaction and interpretation of Jesus' teachings on individual conscience, and a reformulation of both Stoic and Judaic ideas.

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[53] For a good discussion of the influence of the book of Genesis on Milton, see Dennis Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). See also J.M. Evans, Paradise Lost *and the Genesis Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); John Rumrich, "Milton's God and the Matter of Chaos," *PMLA* 110.5 (1995), 1039; Regina Schwartz, *Remembering and Repeating: Biblical Creation in* Paradise Lost (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 31-37; and Gordon Teskey, "From Allegory to Dialectic: Imagining Error in Spenser and Milton," *PMLA* 101.1 (1986), 10. For the influence of Genesis commentary on Milton, see Harris Fletcher, *Milton's Rabbinical Studies*; and Arnold Williams, "Milton and the Renaissance Commentaries of Genesis," *Modern Philology* 37.3 (1940), 263-78.

[54] Lewalski, *Life,* 362. Lewalski derives her definition most especially from her reading of Milton's *Second Defense of the English People* (*2Def,* Yale 7:239-40).

[55] Cf. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1958), 88: "For the hope of everyone lies in his own conscience in so far as he knows himself to be becoming more proficient in the love of God and of his neighbor."

"Conscience" appears nowhere in Hebrew scripture, nor in any of the formative or medieval commentaries on the Torah. The term is Hellenistic: *syneidesis*. Although *syneidesis* bears some relationship to the Stoic concept of the same name, it should not be confused with it. For the Stoic, *syneidesis* meant apprehension of the *lex naturalis*, and living morally in accord with *lex naturalis*. For Paul, a Roman citizen, educated Jew of the Diaspora, brought up in the Greek-speaking city of Tarsus, *lex naturalis* was insufficient as praxis, and false in essence.[56] As Guy Nicholls notes, "Conscience in St. Paul is always related to God as the hearing of His word, the acceptance of His will, consciousness of one's own position, and one's own responsibility before God, and therefore, ultimately of Divine judgment."[57] In other words, Paul's concept of conscience was influenced by the Stoic concept, but "wholly translated into Christian terms."[58]

Having said this, the concept that *syneidesis* denotes does correspond to a notable degree with the concept that *leb* ("heart") denotes in Hebrew scripture, e.g, "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!" (Deuteronomy 5.29).[59] So, as Rudolf Schnackenburg, the twentieth-century theologian, wrote, "In

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[56] See Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1974), 291.

[57] Guy Nicholls, "Conscience in the New Testament: The First Talk in the Oratory Series on 'Conscience'" (www.birmingham-oratory.org/uk/LinkClickaspx?fileticket=TrZF%2BTAnX1s%3D&tabid=54&mid=484, 2008).

[58] Schnackenburg, 293.

[59] For correspondence between "conscience" and "heart" see Nicholls.

speaking of conscience Paul was only giving us a definite name for something that had been known both to Old Testament Judaism and to Jesus."[60]

That "something known," articulated as heart, as *syneidesis*, as *conscientia*, as conscience, speaks to the individual's faculty of discernment, of judgment. This faculty is predicated on the idea of self-consciousness, and in turn it contributes to the description and formation of self-consciousness. In Hebrew, the "heart" refers to the essence of the self, known only by the Lord, and knowable only by the Lord. In its real form, the essence of the self is the seat of motive. In its ideal form, the essence of the self would be wisdom, for Milton the complete synchronicity of human will with divine will, what Paul terms simply enough "good conscience," and Milton, "conscience" and "pure conscience."

In Romans especially, Paul develops and articulates his (perhaps, *the*) Christian theory of conscience. It is considered the most influential of Paul's epistles for precisely this reason, and according to Joseph Fitzmyer, has affected "Christian theology more than any other New Testament book."[61] In his commentary on Romans (c.246 CE)—the oldest surviving commentary—Origen suggests, "by way of a preface what is usually

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[60] Schnackenburg, 287.

[61] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Letter to the Romans*, in Raymond E. Brown, Josephy A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 832. Fitzmyer continues: "Scarcely an area of theological development has not been influenced by its teaching. Its influence is manifest even in other NT writings (1 Pet, Heb, Jas) and subapostolic works (Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin). Patristic and scholastic commentaries on Romans abound, beginning with Origen; the chief interpreters were Chrysostom, Theodoret, John Damascene, Oecumenius, Theophylact, Ambrosiaster, Pelagius, Hugh of St. Victor, Abelard and Thomas Aquinas. Immeasurable is the part Romans played in the Reformation debates. Famous commentaries on it were penned by M. Luther, P. Melanchthon, and J. Calvin." Other relevant commentaries are those by Huldrych Zwingli (1525), Martin Bucer (1536), Heinrich Bullinger (1537), Philip Melanchthon (1540), Peter Martyr (1558), and David Paraeus (1644). Milton quotes from both Bucer's and Pareus's commentaries in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*. This is the same Paraeus Milton cites in "Of that Sort of Dramatic Poem which is called Tragedy" at the beginning of *Samson Agonistes*.

observed by the diligent, that the Apostle seems to have been more perfect in this letter than in the others."[62] Augustine, on the lip of conversion, recounts that "with avid intensity I seized on the sacred writings of your Spirit and especially the apostle Paul."[63] But conversion does not thereafter immediately occur. Backsliding, into lust predominantly, sinks Augustine to despair. Book VIII, "The Birthpangs of Conversion," recounts the despair, and then the conversion. Paul, again, plays a critical role. Augustine, "weeping in the bitter agony" of his heart, suddenly hears a child's voice singing, "'pick up and read, pick up and read.'"[64] Augustine receives the lyric as a "Divine command to me to open the book and read the first chapter I might find."[65] The book in question is Romans, present at the very moment of Augustine's conversion, and scripturally speaking, responsible for it.[66]

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[62] Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans Books 1-5*, translated by Thomas P. Scheck (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 53. With the exception of a few fragments in the original Greek, Origen's commentary has come down to us in the Latin translation by Rufinus (345-411). See Scheck, 10-14. For an in-depth discussion of the influence of Origen's commentary, see Scheck, *Origen and the History of Justification: The Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008). For a discussion of the Early Church Fathers' interpretations of Romans, see Kathy L. Gaca and L.L. Welborn eds., *Early Patristic Readings of Romans* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005).

[63] Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.27.

[64] *Confessions*, 8.29.

[65] Ibid. In this scene, Augustine has left his friend Alypius and gone off to weep alone beneath a figtree. He leaves the book he had been carrying, at Alypius' side. That book is the "Apostle's" Letter to the Romans. He returns to Alypius, and influenced by what he had heard told of Antony of the Desert, returns and opens the book at random.

[66] See also *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans* and *Unfinished Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, translated by Paula Fredriksen Landes (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982); and *The City of God against the Pagans*, edited by R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Augustine begins *The City of God* with a direct allusion to Romans 1.17.

Paul exercised a similarly formidable influence on Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). According to Jean-Pierre Torrell, the pre-eminent Thomist scholar of the twentieth century:

> When it comes to the Christo-forming character of grace, the connection with St. Paul is clear: Thomas merely states in theological language what He finds in the Pauline epistles. The same thing can be said for the theme of the imitation of Christ, the theology of the Holy Spirit, and the relation-ship between law and grace.[67]

In his commentary on Romans, Aquinas interprets the epistle exhaustively and persuasively as Paul's development of grace, as priority, and as doctrine.[68]

During the Reformation, Luther, Erasmus and Calvin all wrote commentaries on Romans. The same year that Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg, Erasmus published his *Paraphrase on Romans*. His *Annotations*, complete notes and commentary on his translation of the New Testament, came out in five editions between 1516 and 1535. In *Annotations to the Romans,* a typically copious Erasmian production, Erasmus identifies Paul's critical intention: "For the blessed Paul's chief concern in this letter is to take away from both groups their pride: to deprive the Jews of their confidence in the law of Moses and the Greeks of their security in philosophy, and consequently to unite both groups on an equal basis in Christ."[69] For just these reasons, Luther called Romans "the most important piece in the New

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[67] Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Aquinas's* Summa: *Background, Structure, & Reception*, translated by Benedict M. Guevin (Washington DC: The Catholic University Press of America, 2005), 73. What Torrell says about Aquinas, could be said of Milton.

[68] See Thomas Aquinas, *Lectures on the Letter to the Romans*, translated by Fabian Larcher (www.aquinas.avemaria.edu/Aquinas_on_Romans.pdf).

[69] Desiderius Erasmus, *Annotations on the Epistle to the Romans*, translated by John B. Payne et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 6. Origen's commentary (c.265 CE), Chrysostom's *Homilies*, and Lorenzo Valla's (1406-1457) *Annotations* all influenced Erasmus's interpretations, as did Mirandola's succinct characterization of Paul as the "vessel of election." See Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, translated by A. Robert Caponigri (Washington DC: Regnery Gateway, 1956), 14.

Testament. It is purest Gospel."[70] Similarly, Calvin writes of "the height [Paul] reaches, the profundities he reveals, the strength he exhibits."[71] And as William Bouwsma has pointed out, Calvin "compared his own calling to that of Paul."[72] Of all Paul's Epistles, Calvin considered Romans the most important, and he goes so far as to suggest that in a functional sense it is the most important book of the New Testament: "When any one understands this Epistle, he has a passage opened to him to the understanding of the whole Scripture."[73] To this end, Calvin cites Romans 486 times in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; only Psalms is cited more. Milton follows suit in *Christian Doctrine*.[74] There are 582 citations to Romans. Only the Gospels of Matthew and John are cited more.[75]

At the heart of Romans is the paradoxical relationship between law and conscience, scripture and inwardness. Paul announces this paradox in the first chapter. After characterizing himself as a "debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise," Paul declares that he is ready "to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also" (Romans 1.14-15). Two verses later, he announces the paradox: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: *as it is written, The*

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[70] Martin Luther, *Martin Luther's Commentary on the Book of Romans*, translated by Andrew Thornton (www.ewordtoday.com/comments/romans/luther/romansintro.htm).

[71] John Calvin, *Commentary on II Corinthians*, 11.6, quoted in William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 108.

[72] Bouwsma, 281, n.45.

[73] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*, translated by John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), xxiv.

[74] See for example, *CD* (Yale 6:128).

[75] See Michael Bauman, *A Scripture Index to John Milton's De doctrina Christiana* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1989), 177-78. Milton cites Matthew 631 times, and John 641 times.

just shall live by faith (1.17, emphasis added). In other words, as scripture commands, the just shall live by that which cannot be publicly verified (faith). With this, Paul has planted the seeds for his theory of conscience.[76]

Central to the theory is the priority of faith over law. In the next chapter, Romans 2, Paul establishes this priority, beginning at verse eleven. The verse announces a new and universal dispensation in which tribal preferment to the divine no longer has any place: "For there is no respect of persons with God" (2.11). Here, in a single sentence, Paul both associates all humanity with God, and levels all humanity with respect to God.[77] In the development of Christian theology, this is a crucial moment. By associating all humanity with God, Paul lessens the authority of the law, both secular and religious, the law of Rome, and the law of Torah. With regard to secular law, to the law of Rome, if all people are potential or actual associates of the divine, than all people are subject to a higher law, and not merely to that of a Pantheon which reflects and reinforces civic authority and civic authority's flaws. With regard to the Torah, if *all* people are potential or actual associates of the divine, than the Torah can only be a partial law,

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[76] For general studies of New Testament theology, see Rudolph Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols., translated by Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951, 1955); George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974); and Schnackenburg, *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament*. For Paul's theology see James D.G Dunn, *The Theology of the Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998); Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009); and Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity*. For specific discussions of Pauline "conscience" see Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 63-70; Pierce, *passim*; Schnackenburg, 287-96; and Ziesler, 12-13, 79. For commentaries on Romans, see Barth; Calvin; Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary: Romans* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988); and Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

[77] Cf. *Abingdon Bible Commentary,* 1140*; Eerdman's Commentary on the Bible*, 1286; also, Calvin's *Commentaries on the Epistle To The Romans*, 93. In his gloss of Romans 2.11 ("for there is no respect of persons with God") Calvin writes, "they [both Jew and Gentile] are both without any distinction exposed to eternal death." Further, Calvin's gloss of "persons" is particularly noteworthy: "The word *person* is taken in Scripture for all outward things, which are wont to be regarded as possessing any value or esteem. When therefore thou readest, that God is respecter of persons, understand that what he regards is purity of heart or inward integrity" (94).

applying as it does to Israel only. Taken together, these two responses to law diminish the generic authority of law. Law itself becomes understandable only in relation to some other authority. As such, law becomes a relative rather than an absolute authority, and adherence to the law becomes at best a relative rather than an absolute indicator of conscience.

Paul emphasizes this shift in the following three verses. Notably, in both the Authorized Version and the Geneva Bible, verses 13-15 are presented as a parenthetical between verse 12 ("For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law") and verse 16 ("In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel"). In other words, verse 12 and verse 16 are two parts of a complete sentence, which taken together read: "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." The first part of the sentence relativizes the authority of the law, and does so in preparation for the second part; the second part indicates that in this new dispensation divine judgment will concern not outer adherence to the law, but inward character, "the secrets of men." In terms of poetic effect and grammatical function, the parenthetical *as parenthetical* (and not yet in terms of its content) acts as a bridge from the first part of the sentence to the second part. Thematically, it serves as a bridge from law to conscience, from the old dispensation to the new. By the time one gets to the end of verse 16 the shift in priority has happened, and thus the attendant transformation in theology has happened.

The parenthetical (verses 13-15) accomplishes the work of this transformation. Staying with the analogy of the bridge for a moment, the parenthetical serves as a bridge for the work it does—for spanning from one bank to the other bank—and not for what it says, nor for any other reason. The grammatical fact of the parenthetical does the work of spanning by itself, regardless of its content. Its content, what is written within the parenthetical, must then be identified in terms of the analogy of the bridge, and explained in reference to this analogy. Verses 13-15 read:

> (For not the hearers of the law *are* just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.
> For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law unto themselves;
> *Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness*, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.)[78]

In the analogy of the bridge, the content of the parenthetical (verses 13-15) *is* the new dispensation, as written in verse 16 ("In the days when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my Gospel"), to be established on the other bank. This means that there is no other bank *until* the bridge is being built, becomes a spanning, and bears with it the content of that other bank: the content is the parenthetical, most especially, verse 15: "Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness."

This verse—Romans 2.15—is one of the most heavily cited verses of scripture in Milton's *Christian Doctrine*. Only Matthew 28.19 ("Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"), John 3.16 ("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"), Romans 3.25

[78] Emphasis added. Cf. Calvin's *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans* (2.15), 97.

("Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God"), Romans 8.39 ("For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren"), and 1 Corinthians 8.6 ("But to us *there is but* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom *are* all things, and we by him") are cited more.[79] Milton quotes Romans 2.15 to support his thesis that God is also within, and is to be found in and by individual conscience. Again, order of priority is important in understanding Milton's Pauline theory of Christian conscience. First, Milton establishes God-within; more specifically, that God *remains* within us, despite the catastrophe of the fall: "But he [God] has left so many signs of himself in the human mind, so many traces of his presence through the whole of nature, that no sane person fails to realize that he exists" (*CD,* Yale 6:130); and "It cannot be denied, that some traces of the Divine image still remain in us, which are not wholly extinguished by this spiritual death" (Yale 6:396). In both cases, Milton cites the same fragment of Romans 2.15: "Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness." By using this fragment, Milton, like Paul before him, begins the re-prioritization of individual conscience over law. As Stanley Fish notes, "Milton supports his case for the priority of

[79] The fact is particularly noteworthy because, as previously noted, Milton cites scripture more than 9000 times in *Christian Doctrine*. See Bauman, *A Scripture Index*, especially, 175-78. In Table III, Bauman compares citations between *CD* and Calvin's *Institutes*. As noted, *Christian Doctrine* has 9, 346 citations, almost twice as many as Calvin's *Institutes* (*Institutes* has 5, 574 citations). The point underscores the centrality of scripture for Milton, his breathtaking familiarity with *all* of scripture, and perhaps even suggests that in writing *CD* Milton intended to overwhelm and replace his two great predecessors in Christian doctrine, the recent (Calvin), and the Classical (Augustine), whose *De Doctrina Christiana* Milton obviously did not feel had ownership of the title, nor the doctrine the title announced.

unwritten over written laws with citations from a written law."[80] Milton then distinguishes the written (outward) law from the unwritten (inward) law:

> The law of God is either written or unwritten.
> The unwritten law is no other that that law of nature given originally to Adam, and of which a certain remnant, or imperfect illumination, stills dwells in the hearts of all mankind; which, in the regenerate, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, is daily tending towards a renewal of its primitive brightness.
> (Yale 6:623)

To support this point, Milton collapses Romans 2.14 and the first part of 2.15 into a single verse best suited to his purposes: "when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, then although they have no law, they are their own law: for they show the work of the law written in their hearts" (Yale 6:623). This verse bridges in Pauline fashion to the new dispensation. For once he has made the distinction between the outward and the inward law, Milton can then, in the most radical-seeming terms possible, eternally prioritize conscience over law with his paraphrastic translation of Romans 2.15: "Their conscience supplies evidence too, and their own thoughts will mutually accuse or excuse each other, on the day when the Lord will judge the secrets of men" (Yale 6:623).

I say the terms are radical-*seeming* rather than *radical* because the terms and the theology are, as I have been arguing, Paul's. So, if the terms are radical, the radicalism belongs to Paul. "The standard of judgment will be the individual conscience itself" is one of Milton's typical re-statements of Paul (Yale 6:623). It is also a concise if troubling summary of the theory of Christian conscience that Paul articulates in the second chapter of Romans, and reiterates, develops, and expands in his other epistles, as a

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[80] See n.24.

redaction of Christ's teachings on Christian conscience, most especially in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The reiterations occur in numerous places: for example, in Romans 2.28-29 ("For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter") and 2 Corinthians 3.3 ("*Forasmuch as ye are* manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."). Both verses derive from the Book of Jeremiah: "But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31.33). In *Christian Doctrine*, Milton cites this verse nearly as often as he cites Romans 2.15. The verse appears in the text, and in Milton's interpretative headings. To offer one example, Milton begins chapter XXVII of *Christian Doctrine*, "Of the Gospel, and Christian Liberty," with a direct and unequivocal allusion to Jeremiah 31.33, and justifies it as the pivotal step between Moses and Christ, in the development of Grace:

> The Gospel is the new dispensation of the covenant of grace. It is much more excellent and perfect than the law. It was first announced, obscurely, by Moses and the prophets, and then with absolute clarity by Christ himself and his apostles and the evangelists. *It has been written in the hearts of believers through the Holy Spirit*, and will last until the end of the world.
>
> (Yale 6:521)

The frequency of citation makes sense. Paul utilizes Jeremiah 31.33 to justify his theory of Christian conscience. Therefore, since Milton's theory of Christian conscience is

essentially Pauline, it follows that Milton would, as indeed he does, also rely on Jeremiah 31.33 to support his theory.

In the third chapter of Romans, Paul extends the implications of Jeremiah 31.33 to his revolutionary conclusion. Most theologians and biblical commentators consider 3.21-28 in particular to be the key to understanding the letter and the heart of the letter's meaning, to be the essence of Paul's theology.[81] Certainly, these verses exercised a formidable influence on Milton. Paul writes:

> But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;
> Even the righteousness of God *which* is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:
> For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;
> Being justified freely by his grace the redemption that in Christ Jesus:
> Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the emission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;
> To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.
> Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.
> *Therefore we conclude that man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law*.
>
> (Romans 3.21-28, emphasis added)

The last line summarizes the essence of both Pauline and Miltonic theology. With its joining of law and faith in a single evocative phrase, the penultimate line suits Milton's synthesizing imagination. According to Joseph Fitzmyer, Paul insists in Romans 3.21-28 "that his teaching on the justification by faith, apart from the observance of prescriptions of the law, not only suits God's new plan of salvation through Christ, but upholds the

[81] See D.A. Campbell, "Romans iii as a Key to the Structure and Thought of the Letter," *Novum Testamentum* 23 (1981), 22; Fitzmyer, 341-42; Luther Mays, *Harpers Bible Commentary*, 1139; and John Reumann, *Romans*, in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, 1287.

very nature and purpose of the Mosaic law itself."[82] (Of course, this is a Christian perspective.) As a result, "faith excludes all boasting, for either the Greek or the Jew."[83] The point reiterates Erasmus's summary of Paul's intention in Romans.[84] More importantly, particularly as it pertains to Milton's Hebraic-Pauline theology, "The purpose of the law was to silence all boasting. And yet, the role of faith in human life does not undo the law or prove it ineffective, but instead achieves the very purpose for which the Mosaic Law as a set of legal regulations was intended" (see parenthetical just above).[85]

In other words, according to Paul faith is necessarily an ongoing re-orientation of the individual to the law.[86] In this Pauline dispensation, the contingent (humankind) meets the absolute through the medium of the word. Furthermore, the contingent is always meeting the absolute by and in and through the word. Another way to put it: conscience meets the Law, ideally under the direction of grace. From a Puritan standpoint at least, the whole purpose of reading scripture is to sustain and deepen this meeting. For Milton it was the necessary practice, a kind of ongoing trial in which conscience and scripture debated in the hope of coming together as harmony, a harmony indicative of divine will—an echo of lost diapason. Milton lived this trial and arrived at

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[82] Fitzmyer, 359.

[83] Ibid.

[84] As quoted above, "For the blessed Paul's chief concern in this letter is to take away from both groups their pride: to deprive the Jews of their confidence in the law of Moses and the Greeks of their security in philosophy, and consequently to unite both groups on an equal basis in Christ." Erasmus, *Annotations*. See n.59.

[85] Fitzmyer, 359.

[86] Cf. Matthew 5.17: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill."

this harmony, more or less, whether by poetic or rhetorical slight-of-hand, by delusion, need, genius, or revelation cannot perhaps be known. Regardless, the effort authenticated the belief. For as William Kerrigan has pointed out, "faith not rationally tried by the believer [did] not in Milton's view qualify as authentic."[87]

In *Christian Doctrine* especially, Milton tries his faith, as it were, and comes away with various results—heretical, subjective, obscure and orthodox. These results flower into astonishing form: *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*. Each refracts a central tenet of Miltonic faith: obedience, first and foremost, and obedience's necessary component parts, those aspects without which there can be in Milton's view no obedience, right timing or *kairos* (*Paradise Regained*) and unknowing (*Samson Agonistes*). In the end Milton, like Paul before him, comes to the conclusion that "the law of God exact he shall fulfill / Both by obedience and by love, though love / Alone fulfil the law" (*PL* 12.402-04).[88] He speaks with Paul for the primacy of love, but his Pauline speaking is itself generated by, made coherent, and perhaps even pre-eminently haunted by the Mosaic Law. In other words, he is theologically Pauline, in just the way Paul was.

Miltonic Purity

As mentioned in the introduction, Milton's theology, and the flowering of it into poetic form, developed during an intense period of religious and political conflict, in the context

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[87] William Kerrigan, Introduction to *Areopagitica* (MLM 925).

[88] Cf. 1 Corinthians 1-13.

of revolution, civil war, restoration, and from Milton's perspective, failure. Milton engaged his moment along ecclesiological, theological, political, and aesthetic lines. The disputes he involved himself in and influenced, just as markedly engaged him back, and just as markedly exerted influence. In terms of Milton's relationship to scripture especially, it may be said that the conflicts of 1638-1660, and thereafter the Restoration, in some ways determined both the depth and idiosyncrasy of Milton's engagement with scripture. So, in his prose and in his poetry, Milton observed the tenets of biblical exegesis, as he reckoned them, in Lewalski's terms, "acceptance of scripture alone as the rule of faith, interpreted by the private conscience as informed by the Spirit's illumination."[89] (Of course, this strategy had the polemically convenient and effective result of allowing Milton to count his argument and discount his opponents' arguments, particularly when the strategy was allied with Milton's unmatched learning.)

In general terms, Lewalski's description develops, and does so accurately, out of an engagement with the entirety of Milton's work; specifically, the description is a synthesis of Milton's thinking in *Second Defense of the English People* (1654), *The Ready and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660), and in *Christian Doctrine.* Milton wrote *Second Defense* in his capacity as Secretary of Foreign Tongues in response to *Regii sanguinis clamor ad coelum, adversus parricidas anglicanos* (*The Cry of the Royal Blood to Heaven, against the English Parricides*) published by Adrian Vlacq at The Hague in 1652, and dedicated to Charles II. *Second Defense* was Milton's second major effort on behalf of the Commonwealth. (The first, *A Defense of the English People*, appeared in 1651 in response to Salmasius' *A Defense of Kingship* (1650)). The genre and intended audience of *Second Defense* is not incidental: for Milton, arguing for

[89] Lewalski, *Life*, 362.

the Commonwealth, therefore arguing retroactively for the regicide of Charles I, meant arguing for the *liberty of conscience* of the English people, as a chosen people of God. (Milton had not yet become disillusioned with the Commonwealth.) In *Second Defense*'s introduction or *exordium*, Milton first establishes the English people as "inspired by heaven" and "of purity of life and…blameless character which showed them the one direct road to true liberty" (Yale 4:550). By liberty Milton means life in accordance with truth. By truth Milton means God's will. In the second part or *narratio*, Milton writes, "God himself is truth! The more veracious a man is in teaching truth to men, the more like must he be to God" (Yale 4:585). Taking the two parts together, what Milton has just established by a kind of rhetorical slight-of-hand, which is nonetheless utterly sincere, is that the destiny of England is likeness to God. As such, the situation *in which* England will meet its destiny is liberty of conscience. With liberty of conscience, Englishmen will become, inwardly, the true Christians they are meant to be. Thus the promise of the revolution will be achieved. The vision is not Milton's alone. As Austin Woolrych has written,

> Cromwell too looked forward to the realization of Christ's kingdom and hoped for wonderful things from this new government [the Barebones Parliament]. He opened it on July 4 [1653] with a speech of visionary enthusiasm, trusting that its meeting would prove to be 'a day of the Power of Christ' – a stage, that is, on the road towards that cherished goal…His expectation was that Christ would reign 'in our hearts'.[90]

It is important to emphasize that Milton's political concept of liberty of conscience is inseparable from his religious understanding of the concept. The religious version of the concept of liberty of conscience is in fact the basis from which Milton develops the political version of that concept. In other words, while talking about

[90] Austin Woolrych, *England Without A King: 1649-1660* (London: Methuen & Co., 1983), 27.

political liberty in an official capacity, Milton is also and always talking about God, and about the will of God. The point is most explicitly apparent is *The Readie and Easie Way*, written just before the Restoration, and in mourning "for the good old cause" and as a last ditch effort to inspire the good old cause:[91]

> The whole freedom of man consists either in spiritual or civil libertie. As for spiritual, who can be at rest, who can enjoy any thing in this world with contentment, who hath not libertie to serve God and to save his own soul, according to the best light which God hath planted in him to that purpose, by *the reading of his reveal'd will and the guidance of his holy spirit?* That this is best pleasing to God, and that the whole Protestant church allows no supream judge or rule in matters of religion but the scriptures, and these to be interpreted by the scriptures themselves, which necessarily inferrs liberty of conscience.
>
> (Yale 7:456, emphasis added)

So what we have, having read *Second Defense* and *The Ready and Easie Way* in concert, is a seemingly incidental (for being found in Milton's political discourse) articulation of Milton's idiosyncratic nationalist theology. It may be summed up as: England possesses the road to liberty; by liberty is meant liberty of conscience; the goal of conscience, thus liberated, is truth; truth is God; the truth that is God is in scripture; scripture can only truthfully be read by a liberated conscience. As with Paul, conscience takes priority, but the ontology is absolute: God is truth. The epistemology is elusive: God is truth, known by individual conscience—an elusive property to be sure, particularly when proffered in ecclesiological and political debates. However, this elusiveness does not mean that Milton's epistemology is unclear, only that it is difficult to categorize in conventional philosophical and/or theological terms. One might legitimately, if perhaps

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[91] For a good, brief overview of the last years of the Commonwealth, under the Protectorate, see Austin Woolrych, 26-44.

unsympathetically, note that the most accurate designation of Milton's epistemology would be "Milton's thinking, about Milton's concerns."

In any case, what Milton develops in *Second Defense* and *The Readie and Easie Way*, he summarizes with bald concision in *Christian Doctrine* (and perhaps the privacy of *CD* allowed him to do so):

> God has revealed the way of eternal salvation *only* to the individual faith of each man, and demands of us that any man who wishes to be saved should work out his beliefs for himself. So I made up my mind to puzzle out a religious creed for myself by my own exertions, and to acquaint myself with it thoroughly. In this the only authority I accepted was God's self-revelation, and accordingly I read and pondered the Holy Scriptures themselves with all possible diligence, never sparing myself in any way.
>
> (Yale 6:118, emphasis added)

Milton takes "God's self-revelation" not to be the Holy Scriptures, but the reading of the Holy Scriptures. And Milton insists on individual conscience as the first instrument of devotion, of obedience, and Holy Scripture (that is to say, Law) as the second instrument, to be employed by individual conscience. He writes, "God has revealed the way of eternal salvation only to the individual faith of each man." This means that God's first revelation occurs by faith *within* the individual. Recognized, this faith, from God, orients individual conscience. And this conscience, thus oriented, is in the right state with which to "read and ponder the Holy Scriptures," God's self-revelation. In this way, individual human beings are both mediums for and participants in divine activity: God-within, justified by faith, recognized by conscience (necessarily by an individual conscience), reads God-without, that is, Holy Scriptures; in turn, the God-without (Holy Scriptures) reads back through conscience, God-within. So that in this activity, what comes out of the individual conscience is divine will, and what goes into the individual conscience is

divine will, returning to itself through the medium of humankind. This circuit describes the action of what Milton calls "double scripture" in *Christian Doctrine*, and which I cited above: "…the external scripture of the written word and the internal scripture of the Holy Spirit, which he, according to God's promises, has engraved upon the hearts of believers" (Yale 6:587).[92]

With his doctrine of double scripture, Milton is drawing out the full implications of Pauline conscience, in reference both to exegetical practice and the nature of obedience.[93] (Exegesis must be commended first and foremost by charity, as charity must be the "animating principle of interpretation."[94] And obedience must issue from a pure conscience.) To the point, in 1 Timothy, Paul introduces the quality of "purity" to his theory of conscience: "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a *pure* heart, and of good conscience, and of faith unfeigned" (1 Timothy 1.5). It is a quiet but critical addition: the end of God's commandment(s) to humankind can now be distilled to charity, which issues from a pure heart, which is directed by a good conscience. The reasoning is almost circular. Because it is so, God's law and individual conscience become temporarily blurred, a situation Milton certainly welcomed (perhaps Paul did as well). A Miltonic rendering of 1 Timothy 1.5 would read: The end of the commandment is a good conscience. In 1 Timothy 3.9 this good conscience becomes a pure conscience: "…holding the mystery of faith in a pure conscience." Conscience is now fundamentally characterized by purity, as Paul intends it. So too then is obedience. Milton takes the update, and then its culmination, in the Epistle to Titus: "Unto the pure all things are

[92] Cf. Jeremiah 31.33.

[93] Fish, "'To the Pure All Things Are Pure,'" 80.

[94] Ibid., 83.

pure" (Titus 1.15). With this formulation, Paul most accurately redacts the teaching of Christ in the Gospel of Luke: "The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness" (Luke 11.34). I do not think it is too much to say that with these two verses, and most succinctly that verse from Titus, Milton's theology is summed up: "To the pure all things are pure." Purity—the pure—was for Milton the essential dictate and radically unverifiable quality of his concept of obedience. What Paul suggested, Milton realizes. What Paul situated as a corollary, Milton re-situates as center. In other words, for Paul, obedience requires purity; for Milton obedience perfectly realized is purity, a distillation to Edenic disposition, to the prelapsarian state of being-as-essence in which humankind receives God and God receives humankind, as intimate meeting intimate, in "perfect diapason."[95]

[95] "At a Solemn Music" (MLM 58).

CHAPTER 2

KNOWLEDGE BEFORE THE FALL

In *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486), one of the most representative and culturally influential texts of Renaissance humanism, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola begins with a description of "God, the Father, the Mightiest Architect" just after he has made creation, from the "supercelestial region" all the way down to the "dung-heap of the inferior world."[96] Mirandola's God wants to be seen and known with intelligence and awe: "But when this work was done," Mirandola writes, "the Divine Artificer still longed for some creature which might comprehend the meaning of so vast an achievement, which might be moved with love at its beauty and smitten with awe at its grandeur."[97] Here, with something like blitheness, Mirandola describes—and the description is really a theological position—God's motive for making humankind. By describing divine motive, Mirandola implicitly allows us to consider obedience from the divine-point-of-view, as it were. Taken together, his descriptions of divine motive and divine prescription serve to answer Adam's *original* questions in Book 8 of *Paradise Lost*:

> But who I was, or where, or from what cause,
> Knew not; to speak I tried, and forthwith spake,
> My tongue obeyed and readily could name
> Whate'er I saw. 'Thou sun,' said I, 'fair light,
> And though enlightened earth, so fresh and gay,
> Ye hills and dales, ye rivers, woods, and plains,

[96] Pico della Mirandola, 5. Mirandola exercised a marked influence on Milton, as he did on numerous other luminaries of the Reformation and the Renaissance, among them Erasmus, Machiavelli, Thomas More, Martin Luther, Johannes Kepler, John Donne, and Pierre Gassendi. See M.V. Dougherty, ed., *Pico della Mirandola: New Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1-13.

[97] Ibid.

> And ye that live and move, fair creatures, tell,
> Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?
> Not of myself; by some great Maker then,
> In goodness and in power pre-eminent;
> Tell me, how may I know him, how adore,
> From whom I have that thus I move and love,
> And feel that I am happier than I know.'
> (*PL* 8.270-82)

Before the fall Adam responds to what he does not yet know—the source of his and all creation—with quick and agile wonder. And the wonder is so open and immediate, so expressly intuitive, because Milton intends it to be understood as genetic, a responsiveness "moved with love" and "smitten with awe" issuing from Adam's essential disposition. As Milton writes in *Christian Doctrine*, "For man was by nature good and holy, and was naturally *disposed* to do right" (Yale 6:352). Adam's language use shows the point: his usage is not an acquired property but a given.[98] He is disposed to perfect apprehension. As "each bird stooped on his wing," Adam says, "I named them, as they passed, and understood / Their nature, with such knowledge God endued / My sudden apprehension." (*PL* 8.352-54). As such, Adam is mere being before the fall, the seminal and substantial attribute of Milton's endlessly resonant monist cosmos.[99] He is a figure of essence with no alternative, sympathetically organized by and as part of divine harmony.

In this chapter, I examine the condition of knowledge before the fall in *Paradise Lost*, most particularly in relation to obedience, presented first as "the sole command" (*PL* 3.94) and singular term of discourse and value of relation between God and

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[98] For a good discussion of language and knowledge in *Paradise Lost*, to which I am indebted, see John Leonard, "Language and Knowledge in *Paradise Lost*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, 97-111. As Leonard notes, "Unlike his descendants, Adam has no need to *acquire* language laboriously. In a word, Adam's language is natural, not conventional" (97, emphasis added).

[99] I've borrowed the phrase "mere being" from the title of Wallace Stevens' poem "Of Mere Being."

humankind. As early as "At a Solemn Music" (c.1632), Milton had already made his paramount valuation of obedience, and had begun to conceptually intuit what he meant by obedience, and its opposite, disobedience:

> With those just spirits that wear victorious palms,
> Hymns devout and holy psalms
> Singing everlastingly;
> That we on earth with undiscording voice
> May rightly answer that melodious noise;
> As once we did, till disproportioned sin
> Jarred against nature's chime, and with harsh din
> Broke the fair music that all creatures made
> To their great Lord, whose love their motion swayed
> In perfect diapason, whilst they stood
> In first obedience, and their state of good.[100]

The examination of Miltonic obedience that follows requires looking at the condition of knowledge for both God and for Adam and Eve before the fall. Therefore, it also demands a discussion of the issue of foreknowledge and foreordination. There is perhaps no more fraught and disputed issue in the history of Christian theology. The review I provide contextualizes Milton's presentation of foreknowledge and foreordination in *Paradise Lost*, and Milton's development of his idea in the aftermath of the dispute between Calvin and Arminius.

To describe Milton's position on the issue of foreknowledge as Arminian is true enough if the frame of the discussion is limited to the dispute between Calvin and Arminius. Milton indeed did not subscribe to Calvin's doctrine of double predestination, but to Arminius' more amenable proposal of grace as the predestinational condition available to all humankind. However, as Maurice Kelley has pointed out, "though this intestine struggle took place in the early seventeenth-century Netherlands, its ultimate

[100] "At a Solemn Music" (MLM 58). Cf. "Nativity Ode," XII-XIII.

origin was in the fifth-century Christendom of Pelagius and Augustine."[101] To Kelley's point, I would add that the grounds of the dispute between Pelagius and Augustine are to be found in Paul's Letter to the Romans, and subsequently in Origen's *Against Celsus* (c.248 CE).[102] Projecting forward, the issue of foreknowledge after Augustine is most influentially taken up by Boethius and Aquinas before coming to a head in the Reformation, in Luther, and again in Calvin and Arminius.[103]

The point is that the context of Milton's position on foreknowledge is not the dispute between Calvin and Arminius, nor more broadly that of the Reformation and its effects, but the whole history of the dispute from Paul to Milton himself. Milton engages with this entire history. And out of that engagement his ideas on the matter develop, doctrinally and exegetically in *Christian Doctrine*, and poetically in *Paradise Lost*. In other words, in *Christian Doctrine* Milton develops his idea of foreknowledge, and in *Paradise Lost*, most especially in Book 3, he gives the idea its fullest expression.[104]

For Milton, the differences in the conditions of divine knowledge before the fall and the condition of human knowledge before the fall are as great as those between divinity and humanity. These differences illustrate my central argument: before the fall

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[101] Maurice Kelley, Introduction to *Christian Doctrine* (Yale 6:74). See pp. 74-86 for Kelley's discussion of Milton's Arminianism.

[102] Romans 8.28-30; *Against Celsus*, Book 4. I touch on these arguments below.

[103] See Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* 5.3-6; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1a.14.8-13.

[104] The standard discussion on the productive relationship between *Christian Doctrine* and *Paradise Lost* remains Maurice Kelley's *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's* De Doctrina Christiana *as a Gloss upon* Paradise Lost (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941). Although Kelley's over-reliance on parallels between the two texts at times makes for tedious reading, the copiousness and rigor of his examples are impressive. Kelley also provides an excellent reading of the sources and idiosyncrasies of Milton's theology. However, Kelley insists numerous times that *CD* is Milton's systematic theology. The point is overstated, and becomes more and more overstated with each reiteration. I would suggest that *CD*'s Table of Contents (and thus its organization) provides the appearance of system, but that the text itself is a compilation of Milton's meditations on scripture, retroactively organized. In other words where Kelley sees systematic thinking, I see retroactive systematization.

there is no need for interpretation, understood as a retrospective engagement with acquired knowledge, for the purpose of making sense, or perhaps even of gaining mastery of the human condition. There is a mysterious figure: the tree of interdicted knowledge. The only thing that Adam and Eve know about the tree is that it is prohibited them. God has foreknowledge (which is not at all the same thing as knowledge). And Adam and Eve have responsivity, a genetic condition comprised as much by dream and recollection as by physical disposition. The condition is immediate and essential apprehension, an unfallen mode of perception akin to Milton's angels.[105] But almost immediately this condition is also on its way to becoming something else.

For Adam and Eve, knowledge begins with the fall, and begins as a condition of alienation for Adam and Eve (cf. *PL* 9.9), and also for God. As a condition it is a roar of discord founded on a single act of disobedience, the "tragic" revolt (*PL* 9.6). So the condition of knowledge after the fall is disorientation, and thus disorder, a peerless catastrophe. The catastrophe must be rectified by humankind's response to it. The formulation of this response depends first that the condition of knowledge be organized. The organization can only be effected by the right orientation of knowledge. For Milton, the sole means for effecting this right orientation is obedience. So obedience becomes and is the knowledge that Adam and Eve must come to after the fall. Adam says,

> Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best,
> And love with dear the only God, to walk
> As in his presence, ever to observe
> His providence, and on him sole depend.
> (*PL* 12.561-64)

[105] For a discussion of the similarities between humankind's prelapsarian perception and Milton's angels' (Gabriel, Raphael, Michael, Uriel, Abdiel) unfallen mode of perception, see Leonard, "Language and Knowledge in *Paradise Lost*," 99.

He, so humankind after him, will seek to become again the reverent and comprehending creature the divine artificer longed for and created, to recall Mirandola's *On the Dignity of Man*. The condition of his knowledge will be obedience, the fruit of an inward reformation. And this obedience will restore man to God, by creating the "paradise within" (*PL* 12.587).

From the Divine Point of View

For Milton, the prelapsarian world is not just harmonious; it *is* harmony, diapason. The fall destroys harmony, not least because it produces a disastrous antagonism between matter and spirit:

> Their inward state of mind, calm region once
> And full of peace, now tossed and turbulent:
> For understanding ruled not, and the will
> Heard not her lore, both in subjection now
> To sensual appetite, who from beneath
> Usurping over sov'reign reason claimed
> Superior sway.
> (*PL* 9.1125-31)

The antagonism between matter and spirit, the frightful noise, replaces humankind's essential disposition, that which comprehends immediately with love and awe "the meaning of so vast an achievement." That disposition was the direct result of divine motive, of the divine will's "longing for reception": divine will created humankind as faithful audience for itself and its creation. Thus for Milton the fall alters humankind at a genetic level.[106] Before the fall, obedience is synonymous with being, with Adam and

[106] For a discussion of Milton's prelapsarian and postlapsarian worlds, see Kathleen M. Swaim, *Before and After the Fall: Contrasting Modes in* Paradise Lost (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1986).

Eve's pure responsivity to God's creation, and may be understood as the seamless and entirely integrated reception of the divine, its will and creation. After the fall, obedience recovered becomes the only hope of *return*, or some approximation of return, both for God and for humankind, to the previous state of relation.

Milton's God desires human free will to synchronize flawlessly with divine will. This synchronization is what Milton intends by obedience. As he writes in *Christian Doctrine*: "Obedience is that virtue which makes us determine to do God's will above all things, and to serve him" (Yale 6:663). In *Paradise Lost*, Milton redacts and re-presents his definition, situating it after the fall, and near the close of the epic. The fall happened, the original and incommensurate disaster. In the ruins, as it were, Adam *longs* for direction, any direction that he can hold as hope.[107] Michael tells him about the Son:

> Now amplier known thy saviour and thy Lord,
> Last in the clouds from Heav'n to be revealed
> In glory of the Father, to dissolve
> Satan with his perverted world.
> (*PL* 12.544-47)

Adam listens to the story. Perhaps he is reminded of himself as he was before the fall. The guarantee of redemption through the Son finally produces actual comprehension of the "sole command." Adam understands that the only hope for humankind lies in obedience.

The necessity of obedience is not a new idea to Adam, but it is newly received by him. The fall having happened, Adam now retroactively apprehends the meaning of the

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[107] From a Christian point-of-view, hope may be the intended and certainly necessary compensation for the fall. In *The Principle of Hope*, philosopher Ernst Bloch writes: "Hope, superior to fear, is neither passive like the latter, nor locked into nothingness. The emotion of hope goes out of itself, makes people broad instead of confining them, cannot know nearly enough of what it is that makes them inwardly aimed, of what may be allied to them outwardly": Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, translated by Paice et al., 3 vols. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 3.

single prohibition.[108] It is that the dissonance produced by the fall has simultaneously produced the need for interpretation as a response to this dissonance, and the event that caused it. What the fall has produced is the experience of shame, and of disorientation, a force of shaming unto itself. The only way of bearing such shame and disorientation is by interpreting both one's response and then one's understanding of that response. Human beings, having no alternative, become interpreters. And the interpretive project that stands before us is a negative mode of knowledge with the fall at its core. As Milton writes in *Areopagitica*:

> It was from out the rinde of one apple tasted, that the knowledge Of good and evill, as two twins cleaving together leapt forth into the World. And perhaps this is that doom which *Adam* fell into of knowing good and evill, that is to say of knowing good by evill.
> (Yale 2: 514)

This turn to being-as-interpretation begins with the fall, but is, as it were, subliminally conceived before it. In book 5, Eve, recounting her troubling dream to Adam, calls the tree the tree of "interdicted knowledge" (*PL* 5.52). Interdiction, understood as a spoken prohibition made with authority, specifically as an interposition by speaking made with authority, functions as the absolute and mystical threshold in Eden. It is mystical for being a threefold paradox: it is the limit that produces freedom; it is the ignorance that produces knowing; it is the separation that produces intimacy. Limit, ignorance, and separation are the necessary conditions for freedom, knowing, and intimacy. Further, the intelligible activity of Eve and Adam in Eden before the fall is

[108] In *Paradise Lost*, the scene of prohibition (Genesis 2.17) appears first as summary, second as recollection, and third as dramatically rendered recollection. In other words, Milton does not dramatize the prohibition directly. For the Son's sake, God obscurely summarizes the prohibition in Book 3. He also speaks of the fall, which has not yet happened, as a foregone conclusion for him, but not for Adam and Eve, e.g. "For man will hearken to his glozing lies, / And easily transgress the sole command" (*PL* 3.93-94). The prohibition is recalled by Adam in Book 4; his recollection begins as a description, and ends in ignorance (4.223-26). And in Book 8, Adam dramatically recalls the moment of prohibition to Raphael (8.319-30).

exactly one of freedom knowing intimacy. Limited, Eve and Adam are free to know, and their knowing is that of intimacy with the divine. The knowing does not result in intimacy with the divine: it *is* intimacy with the divine. As such the tree of interdicted knowledge is the cohering force in Eden, that which organizes and binds together. One might think of it as the keynote of Edenic harmony, and to mix metaphors, the lynchpin of the entire structure of Eden.

The fall silences the note, pulls the pin, and transmogrifies choosing into a labor of alienated crisis. For once the interdiction is transgressed, the threshold, and its threefold paradox, becomes a serpentine system of strict and sorrowful division: things fall apart; the center cannot hold.[109] So that in *Paradise Lost* the fall is a fall in modes of perception, from nuance to rudeness, from paradox to either orthodox or heresy. Limit, ignorance, and separation now imprison Adam and Eve in a closed, panicking, obsessive realm of self-consciousness:

> Soon as the force of that fallacious fruit,
> That with exhilarating vapor bland
> About their spirits had played, and inmost powers
> Made err, was now exhaled, and grosser sleep
> Bred of unkindly fumes, with conscious dreams
> Encumbered, now had left them, up they rose
> As from unrest, and each other viewing,
> Soon found their eyes how opened, and their minds
> How darkened.
> (*PL* 9.1046-54)

[109] See *Paradise Lost* 9.784. The final words in the sentence of course echo W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," l.3.

For Adam and Eve, the fall is an absolutely *complete* movement: every mote, every single cell of their being, and every single word, spoken and unspoken, and their dreams, the entire breadth and depth and consciousness of them, falls.[110]

Before the effects of the fall are felt however, there is a pause, a suspension built by the illusory force of fancy. It is as if harmony pauses before its own fall into time, *kairos* on a cliff-edge, as it were, with *chronos* below. For Milton the pause is that made at the last moment before history begins. It occurs in the brief moment after Adam eats "his fill" and before Adam and Eve *cognize* the disaster,

> They swim in mirth, and fancy that they feel
> Divinity within them breeding wings
> Wherewith to scorn the earth: but that false fruit
> Far other operation first displayed,
> Carnal desire inflaming; he on Eve
> Began to cast lascivious eyes, she him
> As wantonly repaid; in lust they burn.
> (*PL* 9.1009-15)

In the moment, their lust is a force so apparently beautiful and strong it vanquishes not only the divine but the need for and threat of the divine: "if such pleasure be / In things to us forbidden, it might be wished, / For this one tree had been forbidden ten" (*PL* 9.1024-26). Here, Adam is literally out-of-his-mind, taunting divine will and doing so *playfully* ("now let us play" (*PL* 9.1027)). Eve is out-of-her-mind also: she is a "contagious fire." They are falling into history, and it feels like pleasure.[111] Then "the exhilarating vapor" exhales, and Adam and Eve realize that they have in a lust-fed blink of delusion become figures antagonistically far from God's choice, when "God created man in his *own* image,

[110] As William Kerrigan notes in *The Prophetic Milton*, "Milton represents the origin of psychological "dis-ease" in *Paradise Lost*. The curse of first disobedience extends beyond physical labor to the restlessness of the mind" (269). Cf. *Paradise Lost* 9.1120.

[111] Cf. *PL* 2.552-55.

in the image of God created he them" (Genesis 1.27). Few moments equal the tragic power of this one in Western literature. Milton frames Adam and Eve in the brief pause after transgression and before consequence, and in that frame they appear appallingly lost, as inept and graceless figures of noise: "Thus they in mutual accusation spent / The fruitless hours" (*PL* 9.1187-88).[112]

The tragedy is not theirs alone. If we recall the passage from *On the Dignity of Man* ("The Divine Artificer still longed…), and extend the God's-eye view it suggests, the fall may be seen as a catastrophe not just for humankind, but for God also.[113] For humankind it is a catastrophe warned of, but impossible to know before its occurrence. For God, it is *the* catastrophe, the image of himself falling. In *Paradise Lost*, God makes humankind in a revisionary act of creation, a response to the fall of Satan and the loss to heaven of his associated angels. Satan, at first God's high angelic creation, becomes his deep creative failure. The experience haunts the mind of the creator. Apparently the plan of action Satan describes to Beelzebub near the very beginning of the epic has achieved some demonstrable effect:

> If then his providence
> Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
> Our labor must be to pervert that end,
> And out of good still to find means of evil;
> Which ofttimes may succeed, so as perhaps
> *Shall grieve him, if I fail not, and disturb*

[112] The line contains one of Milton's etymologically based puns: the fruit contains "ruit," a form of Latin "to fall."

[113] As noted in the previous chapter, Milton in *Christian Doctrine* justified through scripture the attribution of human qualities to the divine, and depended on this justification in his poetic rendering of God in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*: "If *God is said to have created man in his own image, after his own likeness,* Gen. i.26, and not only his mind but also his external appearance (unless the same words mean something different when they are used again in Gen. v.3: *Adam begot his son after his own likeness, in his own image),* and if God attributes to himself again and again a human shape and form, why should we be afraid of assigning to him something he assigns to himself, provided we believe that what is imperfect and weak in us is, when ascribed to God, utterly perfect and utterly beautiful?" (Yale 6:135-36).

His inmost counsels.
(*PL* 1.162-68, emphasis added)

The God of Adam and Eve is a haunted God.

The degree to which God is haunted by Satan, by creative failure, manifests in his speech to the Son (3.80-134). This speech also contains God's discourse on foreknowledge and foreordination. The two are critically related. Just as God foreknows the fall, but does not foreordain it, he foreknows the Son but does not foreordain the Son as savior. The Son ordains himself in a perfect act of free will, perfect because it conforms perfectly to divine will.[114] The Son's choosing of the divine will of the Father counters Satan's choosing *against* divine will, and makes possible the future God foretells: "So Heav'nly love shall outdo Hellish hate" (*PL* 3.298).

First, however, God begins with all his attention fixed on Satan:

> Only begotten Son, seest thou what rage
> Transports our Adversary, whom no bounds
> Prescribed, no bars of Hell, nor all the chains
> Heaped on him there, nor yet the main abyss
> Wide interrupt can hold.
> (*PL* 3.80-84)

What is the tone of his speaking here? It seems to be mocking, admiring, and filled with both regret and longing. It is as if God begins his characterization of Satan from a position of the severest criticism, as to a hateful object (thus the mocking). But the mocking belies the threat of other responses should he hold his gaze. He holds his gaze. And those qualities of Satan's rebellion, other than its irrefutable folly, come into view: Satan's ambition ("what rage / Transports"), Satan's toughness ("nor all the chains heaped on him there"), and Satan's energy ("nor yet the main abyss / Wide interrupt can hold"). God, the Father, sees a son he has lost, a son who will only return to him as his

[114] Cf. *Paradise Lost*, Book 3, Argument; 3.238-40.

singular enemy. And from this divine perspective, Satan, having so far loomed, now appears very small, crawling on the surface of the world or flapping his weary wings.

But Satan is the seed and the eternal provocation to a divine crisis. In this state of crisis, God fashioned Adam and Eve. Now God, seeing simultaneously Satan "in the precincts of light" (*PL* 3.88) and Adam and Eve in "the new-created world" (*PL* 3.89) cannot keep them separated in his gaze. Satan, and God's long, paternal memory of Satan, overwhelm the distinction. Satan as a haunting in the mind of God works as a centrifugal force pulling in Eve and Adam to himself until God sees—God's gaze is entirely comprised of—a single figure of disappointment. In this single figure, God sees only disobedience, which perhaps explains, if unsatisfactorily, the fact that he speaks of the fall as a foregone conclusion: "For man will hearken to his glozing lies, /And easily transgress the sole command" (*PL* 3.93-94).

It must be remembered that God has given the command twice. The "sole command" of obedience applied to Satan, before it was ever given to Adam and Eve. Here the phrase ("sole command") reaches back to Satan and forward to man, as does the phrase that follows, "sole pledge of his obedience" (*PL* 3.95). The memory of the command as given to Satan forecloses the future of Adam's pledge of obedience, and appears to produce divine anxiety, out of which God's discourse on foreknowledge and foreordination flows:

> For man will hearken to his glozing lies,
> And easily transgress the sole command,
> Sole pledge of his obedience: so will fall
> He and his faithless progeny: whose fault?
> Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of me
> All he could have; I made him just and right,
> Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
> Such I created all th' ethereal Powers

> And spirits, both them who stood, and fell who fell.
> Not free, what proof could they have giv'n sincere
> Of true allegiance, constant faith or love,
> Where only what they needs must do, appeared,
> Not what they would? What praise could they receive?
> What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
> When will and reason (reason also is choice)
> Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,
> Made passive both, had served necessity,
> Not me. They therefore as to right belonged,
> So were created, nor can justly accuse
> Their Maker, or their making, or their fate,
> As if predestination overruled
> Their will, disposed of absolute decree
> Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
> Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
> Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
> Which had no less proved certain unforeknown.
> So without least impulse or shadow of fate,
> Or aught by me immutably foreseen,
> They trespass, authors to themselves in all
> Both what they judge, and what they choose; for so
> I formed them free, and free they must remain,
> Till they enthrall themselves.
>
> (*PL* 3.93-125)

In this passage Milton achieves a double-effect, the first effect expressive of the limits of humankind's intelligence, and the second expressive of the divinely clear—meaning, beyond mortal understanding—single rendering of different times and destinies (Satan's, Adam and Eve's, their progeny's) into a simultaneous expression of outcome. (It is something like listening to God speaking of all at once.) So that what is heard by mortal ears (in this case, Milton's readers) as strange confusion, is the perfect expression of divine crisis—not recollected, but in time unfolding—and is heard and received as such by the Son (he is God's audience) as well as by God himself.[115] If so, it may be understood as the one, only and necessary catalyst for the Son's intervention (3.144-66),

[115] This ordering puts us squarely in the territory of Milton's Arian heresy.

God's renovated strategy of mercy (3.173-212), and the Son's offering of himself as the sacrifice for the redemption of humankind:

> Behold me then, me for him, life for life
> I offer, on me let thine anger fall;
> Account me man; I for his sake will leave
> Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee
> Freely put off, and for him, and for him lastly die
> Well pleased, on me let Death wreck all his rage.
> (*PL* 3.237-41)

The Son will step between divine anger and humankind. He will be a new *threshold*, performing the work the tree of interdicted knowledge performed before the fall. The idea implicit here that God, as Milton renders him, put the tree in Eden to keep humankind from his own anger, shatters conception. How could one ever recover from such knowledge? For Milton, the answer is the Son.[116] Not only will he be the restored threshold, he will be that which conducts intimacy—atonement (literally, at-one-ment)—between humankind and God. Facing God, the Son will be man; facing man, the Son will be God.

To the Son, the Father speaks a many-layered expression of divine anxiety, a discourse seemingly always on the verge of slipping from a vague admission of foreknowing the fall, to an outright confession of foreordaining the fall. As noted above, God tells the Son that man will "hearken to the glozing lies" of Satan, and "easily transgress the sole command." At this moment, God is still clearly speaking about Adam and Eve. But in the two lines that follow, the object of God's discourse becomes the merged object of Satan and man in terms of transgressing the "Sole pledge of his obedience." Speaking of both Satan and humankind, God says that they "will fall / He

[116] Here Milton's identification of himself as a prophet merges with his less disclosed identification of himself with the Son. To the question posed above ("How could one recover from such knowledge?"), Milton offers his strong response in three parts, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*.

and his faithless progeny," and asks rhetorically, "whose fault?" Following lines 93-94 ("For man will hearken…) the subject of these two lines (95-96) at first appears to be man. But two things complicate this reading: 1) the subject of the *sentence* of which these four lines are a part sits back in line 87 ("…all restraint broke loose he wings his way"), and is clearly Satan; 2) lines 95-96 are enjambed at exactly the same moment, after eight syllables, and by the same punctuation, the colon.[117] The formal character of the lines, and the sequential repetition of that formal character, obscures the subject. If the "he" of line 96 can still be taken for Adam, the object of "whose fault?" cannot as safely be assumed. Line 97 recalibrates the question at the end of line 96, with a rhetorical question that now appears to have its object in clear sight: "Whose but his own?" And/or God is speaking still of Adam, foreordaining his disobedience. But what follows the rhetorical question that begins line 97 complicates reading the object of God's description as definitively humankind rather than Satan: "Ingrate, he had of me / All he could have." Further, the shift from future tense (ll.93-96) to past tense (l.97, and continuing through to l.119) seems to imply that Satan is now the object. If so, however, Satan remains the object of God's description for a mere two and a half lines: "Ingrate, he had of me / All he could have; I made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall." In the very next line, God generalizes his object ("Such I created all th' ethereal Powers"). Here it is as if the mere indirect mention of free will ("Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall") necessarily effects a meditation on it—God prompting

[117] It is worth noting that *PL* 3.95-96 in MLM identically reproduces the meter and punctuation of 3.95-96 in both the 1667 and 1674 editions. Given the mediating role of compositors in early modern book production, it can be difficult to assign authorial intention in such matters as punctuation, capitalization, even spelling. Milton has sometimes been argued as supervising such matters more carefully than many of his contemporaries, but the case remains unproven: see Stephen B. Dobranski, "Editing Milton," *Oxford Handbook of Milton*, 480-95 (esp. 483-85). Nonetheless, we can discuss the effects of punctuation in the texts we have, and the consistency of punctuation here in the early editions encourages confidence in our ability to read the effects it creates.

himself to the essential theme, and a definition of it. Nominally, the object of the lines that follow (grammatically, their subject) remains "th' ethereal powers and spirits." Thematically, the object becomes the nature of free will.

God's speech is part of what David Loewenstein has called "the celestial colloquy" of Book 3.[118] Throughout, the Son is listening. From a Trinitarian standpoint, God is speaking to himself. And the speaking may be understood as a motion of the Trinity, of the three persons: Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, where the Holy Spirit is the speaking, and distillation of concern to the nature of free will and obedience, moving between the Father and the Son: "What pleasure I from such obedience paid, / When will and reason (reason also is choice) / Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled, / Made passive both, had served necessity, / Not me" (ll.107-10). I would also suggest that from an Arian standpoint, God is also speaking to himself. He is speaking to himself, intimately, in front of his Son. With the Son before him, as witness and prompt, God fashions the meaning of free will, and its necessary conditions. In other words, the Son, as audience to his Father, works as the silent, present catalyst for the Father to clarify and explain his sole command.

God's meditation on the nature of free will is necessarily an explication of what he has meant all along by *obedience*, his critical term in his relation to humankind (ll.102-11). God is describing the workings—the mechanics—of obedience to himself. For the time being, Adam and Satan are nowhere to be found. The object that has taken their place is God himself. In lines 112-19, God speaks as subject about the object of his

[118] David Loewenstein, *Milton: Paradise Lost* (London: Longman, 1993), 76. Loewenstein borrows the phrase from Adam in Book 8. In Adam's usage, the phrase describes the discourse between Raphael and Adam: "He ended, or I heard no more, for now / My Earthly by his Heav'nly overpowered, / Which it had long stood under, strained to the highth / In that celestial colloquy sublime" (8.452-55).

speaking, the nature of God as creator. The narration is paradoxical: God speaks in the first person, but the narrative is in the third person. Or to render it as I think Milton intends here, God speaks in the first person a narrative in the third person: "They therefore as to right belonged, / So were created, nor can justly accuse / Their maker, or their making, or their fate" (*PL* 3.111-13). God retains the divine point-of-view throughout. However, by speaking of himself in third person he creates a perspectival distance with which to see himself, again perhaps, and also perhaps with which to recollect. From this distance, and by it and with it, God then provides himself the perspective of humankind with regard to him. From this perspective (l.112), God can then anticipate the concerns and questions *implicit* in humankind's reception of obedience ("the sole command"), those questions concerning predestination and divine foreknowledge:

> They therefore as to right belonged,
> So were created, nor can justly accuse
> Their maker, or their making, or their fate
> As if predestination overruled
> Their will, disposed by absolute decree
> Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
> Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
> Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
> Which had no less proved certain unforeknown.[119]
> (*PL* 3.111-19)

The accusation implicit in questions of predestination and divine foreknowledge vanquishes God's double narrative, and with it, for a moment, his double perspective. The narrative becomes merely first person, a first person defending its actions and hedging its bets ("not I: if I foreknew").

[119] In Book 10, after the fall, God returns to the issue of who decreed what, and again imputes humankind by acquitting himself (an indirect rhetorical strategy, the indirectness raising questions of its own): "no decree of mine / Concurring to necessitate his fall, / Or touch with lightest moment of impulse / His free will, to her own inclining left / in even scale" (*PL* 10.43-47).

The narrative tone here perhaps suggests that the opposite of what God is saying may have at least once in the creating mind of God been the case—syntactically, the difference of two words. Not: "As if predestination overruled / Their will, disposed by absolute decree"; but "Predestination overruled their will, disposed by absolute decree." The "as if" is spoken through a flinch at the front of the actual line, pressured by the subterranean possibility of the suggested line. Is God in some sense revising his creative past in these lines? If what the tone suggests is the case, then the answer is yes. There was a time—the time before Satan fell—when God had given an absolute decree. The results of that decree—Satan's falling—and the immanent prospect of another fall, instantiated a revision in God's plan. That revision is the institution of free will, applied present and forward to Adam and Eve, and retrospectively suggested backward to Satan.

It is important here to keep in mind that God is justifying himself to his only begotten Son, before the assembled heavenly host. The fact of the double audience—the Son is audience to the Father, the host is audience to the Father and the Son—requires that the question posed above be augmented to: is God revising his creative past before the host in some sense because of the attention of his Son, and because of what he needs from his Son? If because of the attention of the Son, we return to the scenario envisioned in *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, but with a difference: "the Divine Artificer still longed for some creature which might comprehend the meaning of so vast an achievement, which might be moved with love at its beauty and smitten with awe at its grandeur." The difference is that now the witnessing is not of God's visionary effort, but of God's revisionary effort. The divine longing remains the same, to be "comprehended," "moved

with love," and "smitten with awe." The Son—exactly—fulfils all three. Moved with love and smitten with awe, he comprehends the Father.[120]

If we ask instead if God is revising his creative past because of what he *needs* from his Son, we are asking a question about God's strategic intentions, in the moment. If God foreknows that humankind will need a redeemer, and if God suspects that he is speaking to the redeemer—which is close to being just another way of saying, if God plans on redeeming humankind with a redeemer, the identity of which only he knows—then God must present his creativity as blameless.[121] Otherwise, 1) Satan's rebellion would be his (God's) fault, and therefore his direct responsibility; and 2) his creativity would be imperfect for having had a mistaken moment (the original institution of absolute decree, as the necessary means for obedience, instead of free will). And if God the Father is the author both of the fault and the mistake, then only God the Father could be the redeemer of them. By presenting his creativity as blameless ("they themselves decreed / Their own revolt, not I") God establishes the necessary grounds for the Son to become aware of his revolutionary sympathy for humankind. With the Son watching and listening to him, the Father flourishes, and the divine will passes into the Son. Further, by saying that God must present his activity as blameless, I am also saying that Milton must present his God as blameless, this divine blamelessness being an important part of Milton's theodicy.

In lines 114-19, God does not clearly deny predestination. The phrase "as if predestination overruled / Their will" is an equivocation that admits the competing

[120] See *Paradise Lost* 3.144-66. This is the Son's response, and it is a model of love, reverence and comprehension; it is therefore also a model of expert rhetoric.

[121] Cf. *CD* (Yale 6:166).

possibilities but confesses to neither. By the power of the rhetorical "as if" at the beginning of the line, the line allows the possibility that predestination overruled their will *and* the possibility that predestination did not overrule their will. Further complexity of expression follows. If predestination unequivocally did not overrule their wills—if this is an absolute and eternal fact—nothing more would seem to be needed, but the reiterative summary of "they themselves decreed / their own revolt." But God qualifies rather than concludes: "As if predestination overruled / Their will, disposed by absolute decree / Or high foreknowledge." Not incidentally, Milton situates human "will" and "absolute decree" in the same line. And not incidentally, Milton situates "high foreknowledge" and "they" together in the following line. So that line 115 may be compressed to the order of human will, divine will; and line 116 to divine will, human will.

Milton continues the strategy in lines 117-18. To recollect lines 114-18:

> As if predestination overruled
> Their will, disposed by absolute decree
> Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
> Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
> Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault.

In line 117 Milton situates human will first ("their own revolt"), followed by divine will, equivocally given ("not I; if I foreknew"). In line 118 divine will, this time abstracted ("Foreknowledge"), precedes human will ("their fault"). So, as with lines 115-16, lines 117-18 may be compressed to the order of human will, divine will; and divine will, human will.

The effect produced by these lines (114-18) is manifold. Of principal importance, Milton emphasizes the inextricable relationship of human will and divine will. In some

way, they are reactive to each other. Milton's God, at least here, appears to give place of precedence to human will, rather than divine will, perhaps suggesting that in the domain of human experience, divine will *responds* to human will (this suggestion would accord with the idea of God's blameless self-presentation to the Son).[122] But the suggestion, once made, fails to hold. For lines 114-18 are part of a larger discourse, spoken by God. The lines are themselves the effects produced by divine will, and as such, are subsumed in that will. In other words, the suggestion that divine will is responding (here) to human will does the rhetorical work it can—to introduce the possibility of a situation that is not actually the case—and then becomes a suggestive echo behind the lines. The echo remains to influence interpretation, chiefly the Son's interpretation, and also the reader's (as instance of fallen humanity, thus child of Adam and Eve).[123] Finally, Milton may have intended the difficulties attendant for the reader in keeping free will and divine will separate and clear in these lines, to 1) blur the two wills so much that they can no longer be understood apart from each other, and 2) to emphasize the necessity of free will in terms of obedience. By bringing human will and divine will so close together in these lines that they become almost indistinguishable, Milton simultaneously brings free will and obedience so close together that they cannot be understood apart from each other; they become almost synonymous.

Both predestination and foreknowledge complicate any discussion of free will and obedience. God necessarily addresses them both. As noted above, it is possible he equivocates subtly on the issue of predestination, with his use of "as if" at the start of line

[122] Cf. *Paradise Lost* 3.685. Milton characterizes the will of God as "permissive."

[123] See Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in* Paradise Lost, 2nd edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

114. The equivocation is not so subtle with foreknowledge, but it is more sophisticated: "they themselves decreed / their own revolt, not I; if I foreknew, / Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault." If God had said to the Son, "they themselves decreed their own revolt" the issue of predestination would be clearly settled. If God had said to the Son, "they themselves decreed their own revolt, not I" the issue would be settled, although less clearly. For why would God need to add "not I" at the end of a clear, declarative sentence? As it is, God qualifies twice, using a conditional clause, and then elaborates the second qualification. This elaboration of the second qualification unsettles any clear and confident reception of what God is saying here. The first qualification ("not I") begins the work of unsettling the meaning. The second qualification and its subsequent elaboration ("if I foreknew, / Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault") renders the meaning elusive and quite difficult to interpret, foreknowledge being primarily a form of immortal rather than mortal epistemology. (I qualify the claim with 'primarily' because we can as human beings imagine knowing the possibility that something is going to happen, while having no possibility of influencing the event.) Firstly, the "I" as a recognizable subject disappears, and is replaced by this thing called foreknowledge in the following line.[124] The fact that the subject of the conditional clause ("I") becomes "foreknowledge" perhaps indicates the impossible hermeneutic distance: foreknowledge is a form of knowledge reserved for God.[125] As a result, humankind can have nothing to

[124] I do not think the transition from "I" to "foreknowledge" can be read as a swift, momentary transition into allegory. Following Milton's own logic on the question of foreknowledge, since foreknowledge is literally beyond the realm of human intelligibility, the word itself cannot, paradoxically, be read in any other way but literally. Any other reading would be an interpretation, the practice of which is predicated on some degree of knowledge.

[125] This claim holds for angels, and for prophets through whom God speaks. For the former, cf. *PL* 1.626-30. For the latter, the condition of being a prophet is an activity, an enthralling being-used by God, not a role, nor an identity, and certainly not a job, called or otherwise.

say about foreknowledge beyond attributing it to God. To God's claim that "foreknowledge had no influence on their fault," the most accurate response is, okay.[126] And this "okay" is God's point exactly. God either did or did not have foreknowledge. Humankind cannot know. That is, the direct meaning of the claim cannot actually be interpreted in terms of the knowledge it articulates. (Possibly then, foreknowledge is *the* form of prohibited knowledge.) Only the implications of the claim can be interpreted, insofar as these implications, by slant, address the formal relation between divine will and human will, unless of course God is not speaking about (or only about) human will but about the will of the rebel angels, chiefly Satan.[127]

What becomes apparent when reading this passage carefully is that Milton is attempting to articulate nothing less than the organization of the divine's eternal perspective, and the mechanics of it. To recall: what God is qualifying in lines 115-19 is his claim that "they themselves decreed / Their own revolt." The first qualification is "not I." The second qualification, and its subsequent elaboration, is "if I foreknew, / Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault." The next line ("Which had no less proved uncertain unforeknown) at first reads as further elaboration, thus as part of the second qualification. However, the line makes its own qualifying claim, and therefore registers as the third qualification.

Of all three qualifications, the meaning of this third qualification is the most elusive, not least because the qualification begins with a relative pronoun ("Which") and

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[126] Cf. *CD* (Yale 2:514).

[127] "By slant" alludes to the first stanza of Dickinson's Poem #1129:

> Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—
> Success in Circuit lies
> Too bright for our Infirm Delight
> The Truth's superb surprise.

is presented negatively ("had no less proved uncertain unforeknown"). Further, the negative is not concisely, but ambiguously given. A concise formulation would read, "had not proved uncertain unforeknown." But the line reads, "had no less proved uncertain unforeknown." The "less" of the line, and the absence of a following, explanatory clause (such as might be clumsily rendered along the lines of, "had no less proved uncertain unforeknown, *then if their fault had been foreknown*[128]) obscures the meaning. In my view, Milton intended the obscuration. Firstly, he could have just presented the third qualification positively: their fault proved certain unforeknown. Secondly, and less directly, he could have rendered the negative formulation clearly (see parenthetical just above), but chose not to. The question then is why does he present this third qualification thusly? I would suggest that the syntactical formulation of the third qualification obscures its discursive meaning (thus the ambiguity of the qualification), but clarifies its intuitive and constitutional point: God in his divine constitution is speaking crisis into some kind of resolution.[129] And what eludes discourse—literally, the mind of God—is represented by Milton in the precisely obscuring syntax of the lines.

The meaning of this third qualification is also elusive because the implications it makes are less obvious than those made by the first two qualifications. With the first two qualifications the equivocations occur in and by way of a declarative and then a conditional clause (e.g., "not I:" and "if I foreknew / Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault"). With the third qualification the equivocation occurs in and by way of a shift in the verb tense (I address this in a moment). In other words, the first two qualifications

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[128] The emphasized phrase indicates the possible explanatory clause.

[129] The darkness of God may indicate the *logos* in and working through crisis. Cf. *Paradise Lost* 2.262-65. Mammon argues: "This deep world / of darkness do we dread? How oft amidst / Thick clouds and dark doth Heav'n's all-ruling Sire / Choose to reside."

occur in the realm of the concrete, as it were, while the third qualification occurs in the realm of abstraction.

Lines 118-19: "Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault, / Which had no less proved certain unforeknown." Line 119 is a subordinate clause; thus, the meaning of the line is subordinate to that of line 118. That is, the meaning *with authority* is line 118: "Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault." However, the subordinate clause (line 119) that follows is not merely subordinate, but is also *ostensibly subversive* (Milton intends it to be so) as yet another expression of divine anxiety. Line 119 perhaps appears to undermine the clear, strong authority of line 118, by introducing obscurity. And this implied obscurity may at first appear to function as a critique of the claim made by line 119. To the clear "this" of line 118, line 119 adds perhaps a quietly corrosive "sort of," but it is also a clear re-statement, from the other side of the assertion as it were—a kind of chiasmus.

The first word of line 119 is a relative pronoun referring directly back to the last two words of line 118, "their fault." So the nominal subject of the line can be understood as "their fault." After this fairly straightforward beginning however (the identification of the subject), the meaning of the line becomes elusive; the shift in verb tense from the past indicative of line 116 ("they themselves decreed) to the pluperfect of lines 118-19 ("had no influence" and "had no less proved") is initially responsible for the elusiveness. The shift to pluperfect seems to result from the conditional clause ("if I foreknew") introduced in line 117. But the result is not required grammatically. The conditional given in the past tense does not require that the subsequent clause be given in the pluperfect; it could also be given in the past indicative, the present, or the future tense. In

this case, the shift to pluperfect must refer to a past *before* the past of "they themselves decreed." But this past can only be indefinitely known since 1) the grammatical nature of the pluperfect is indefinite, and 2) in this specific instance, the pluperfect usage concerns not time (a human category) but eternity (the divine condition).

The density of meaning in the lines increases when one remembers that the object of God's discourse here is itself difficult *for the reader* to clearly discern (which does not mean that it is unclear). It is: Satan and his rebel angels, or Adam and Eve, or Satan and the rebel angels and Adam and Eve, or Satan and the rebel angels and humankind, and may be any or all of these. But since eternity cannot be a position from which or out of which one speaks, but only a condition in which one is speaking, then God must be talking at least to some degree about all of them at once. This being the case, the shift to pluperfect cannot indicate from the divine point-of-view a reference to a time before "they themselves decreed" but a discursive shift in divine priority, in emphasis, a recollecting of a different aspect of the all that God is always apprehending.[130] In other words, the "they" of "they themselves decreed" is all of them (Satan, rebel angels, Adam and Eve, humankind), not in a general sense, however, but in a manifold sense.

Constructing the object of discourse here as a manifold figure allows one aspect of the "they" to be emphasized as the subject of "they themselves decreed" without excluding the other aspects. And this construction allows Milton's God to proceed almost oxymoronically, by way of obscure declaration. "They" can refer to Satan and the rebel angels, and also to Adam and Eve, without becoming necessarily predestinarian. Since the object of God's discourse in lines 115-19 is not clearly and absolutely identified, what is emphasized cannot be named. It is instead emphasized implicitly, and

[130] Cf. *Paradise Lost* 1.189-90.

made intelligible by the context of the lines (in this case ll.115-19) in which the implicit emphasis appears. The implicit emphasis for "they" in line 116 is on Satan and the rebel angels. This emphasis affects a de-emphasis on Adam and Eve. De-emphasized, Adam and Eve for the moment (the moment that is this discourse) cease to be candidates for the clearly identifiable and clearly intended subject of "they themselves decreed." As a result, the question of predestination and foreknowledge as they concern humankind is elided. The moment is one of *Paradise Lost's* most remarkable instances of poetical and theological finesse. Milton achieves the double feat of articulating foreknowledge and of effacing his articulation of it, by obscuring subject, object, and narrative time, at different critical moments throughout the passage. The effect produced is this: in this passage, the moment of decreed revolt is the moment time begins. And this moment appears to belong both to Satan, and to Adam and Eve, depending on the designation being made by divine emphasis. By extension, one might say that the object of God's discourse throughout the passage is not Satan, nor Adam and Eve, nor creation, nor humankind, but God's emphasis, functioning as a barometer of his priority of attention. For if his gaze comprehends all, then the only possible mode of distinction between the parts of that all is emphasis, a foregrounding or illuminating of a given part by divine emphasis.

It is perhaps important to recall that the passage under discussion here is, as I have been arguing, an expression of divine crisis. One of the chief aspects of this crisis is the obscuring of God's gaze. In this obscured gaze, God sees only a single figure of disappointment, rather than Satan, or Adam, or Eve. The resolution of the divine crisis depends in large part on the clarifying of the obscured gaze. This clarifying is

accomplished by divine emphasis, as just noted. Thus, the emphasis may be understood as the divine power of resolution.

Line 119 ("Which had no less proved certain foreknown") ends with a period. Here grammar and meaning are perfectly attuned. The punctuation mark illustrates (and in terms of sound, articulates) a close to the crisis of lines 93-119. The articulation of the resolution begins in the very next line (120). The line begins with "So." The word does the work of indicating that resolution is to follow, particularly as it comes after the period of line 119. Unlike "therefore" (and other similar possibilities), however, "so" elides a simple cause-and-effect construction and meaning. It does so by being more ambiguous. The most that can explicitly be said of "so" is that it signals a transition. Paradoxically, the very generality of its application allows Milton's usage of it to imply that the resolution "so" is setting up is absolutely inevitable, a fact-of-the-world, beyond the more unreliable dictates of cause and effect. In other words, the resolution spoken of is not caused; it simply *is*.

So there is the crisis, ended with a period, a mark in time and a mark of timing; and resolution of the crisis, begun with so. God speaks:

> So without least impulse or shadow of fate,
> Or aught by me immutably foreseen,
> They trespass, authors to themselves in all
> Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
> I formed them free, and free they must remain,
> Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change
> Their nature, and revoke the high decree
> Unchangeable, eternal, which ordained
> Their freedom: they themselves ordained their fall.
> (*PL* 3.120-28)

The only subject of the lines, in the narrative time they occupy, is the comprehensive "they" (introduced at line 122, followed by "trespass," the action of disobedience, and

then repeated five more times). This usage of "they" would seem to suggest that God's gaze is still comprehensive, or still obscured, not yet made distinct by emphasis, following the logic of lines 111-19. However, in lines 120-21 the tense has shifted from the past tense of lines 115-19 to present tense: "They trespass"; "they judge"; "they choose." This shift in tense is the grammatical equivalent of divine emphasis, and articulates it. The subject is the comprehensive "they"; but the shift in tense, functioning as divine emphasis, specifies which part of the comprehensive subject God is now speaking of: Adam and Eve.

The following lines make this emphasis clear, and do so by evoking a finalized past, and a foreknown if not finalized future: "I formed them free, and free they must remain, / Till they enthrall themselves." (Here Milton's God avoids the charge of predestination, by leaving humankind's future actions as yet uncommitted. And Milton's God does so, while retaining absolute foreknowledge.) Divine emphasis is now on Adam and Eve, and remains so for the next three and a half lines ("Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change / Their nature, and revoke the high decree / Unchangeable, eternal, which ordained / Their freedom"). But then, in the second half of line 128, the emphasis disappears: "they themselves ordained their fall." The shift back to past tense indicates that "they" is no longer the specified "they" of Adam and Eve, but a comprehensive "they." The following three lines make it so: "The first sort by their own suggestion fell, / Self-tempted, self-depraved: man falls deceived / By the other first: man shall therefore find grace" (*PL* 3.129-31). Perhaps most importantly these lines illustrate that throughout God has always been speaking of Satan and the fallen angels *and* of Adam and Eve, in their near and troubling likeness, as figures of free will created by him.

Foreknowledge and Predestination

Theologically, the passage discussed above—Book 3, lines 80-134—may be the most central passage in *Paradise Lost*.[131] In terms of Milton's theodicy, his stated claim to "justify the ways of God to man," it certainly is.

Milton's justification depends in large part on persuasively distinguishing foreknowledge from foreordination. As John Rogers has noted, Milton

> needs to prove theologically, not just poetically or narratively, that God did not place Adam and Eve in the garden with the intent or with the purpose in mind of punishing them for eating the fruit. He needs to convince himself and he needs to convince his reader that the fact of God's foreknowledge of the Fall doesn't in any way cause the Fall.[132]

What Rogers is pointing to here is not just Milton's dilemma, but the disputatious history of foreknowledge in Christian theology—as noted above, an issue seemingly *a priori* in dispute.[133] W.H. Poteat summarizes the problem:

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[131] I am here in full accord with the more or less accepted judgment of Milton criticism that Book 3 is the most important, theologically, of *Paradise Lost*. See, for example, Thomas N. Corns, *Regaining* Paradise Lost (London: Longman, 1994), 15; Dennis Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study of Literary Theodicy*, *passim*; David Loewenstein, *Milton: Paradise Lost*, 76-77; and John Rogers, "Milton: Lecture 13" (http://oyc.Yale.edu/english/milton/content/transcripts/transcript-13-paradise-lost-book-iii, October 22, 2007).

[132] Rogers, "Milton: Lecture 13." As Rogers goes on to note, Milton needs to establish first for himself and then for all Christians, that "free will is a genuine faculty."

[133] I will provide a brief review of the dispute in the following few pages, paying attention to those thinkers whose formulations of the problem explicitly influenced Milton. This means that I do not rehearse the arguments made by Aristotle, and after him, Aquinas, even though these arguments are of tremendous importance, and probably affected Milton, at the very least as cultural inheritance. Nor do I give an account of those important arguments made by medieval philosophers other than Aquinas, most notably Boethius, Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham. Neither do I mention the philosophies of the Spanish Jesuits Luis Molina (1535-1600) and Francisco Suarez (1548-1617); their work on foreknowledge exerted a heavy influence on future philosophy on these questions, Molina for his highly original doctrine of *scientia media* (middle knowledge), and Suarez for his support of Molina's doctrine, out of which developed his own doctrine, *De scientia Dei futurorum contingentium*. But Molina and Suarez, more or less contemporaneous with Milton, cannot be said to have influenced Milton, even though their positions are similar, most

> If God knows the world in a fashion analogous to that in which we are thought to know it, but, as is appropriate to omnipotence, without the element of contingency which infects all *our* knowing of it, he must know all the past and all the future as though they were present. From this it seems to follow that what will be for us in the future is, since already known in a present to God, what it *is*, for God, and is already what it *is to be*, for us. And this being so, these questions arise: Is it conceivable that the activity which we take to be one of freely choosing and deciding could really, under these circumstances, be what it seems to us to be? Even if we can answer this affirmatively, can the activity of freely choosing be thought to have any efficacy in the course of the world which it appears must be determined to be what it is to be, if God is to be thought of as knowing it in, for him, a present?[134]

Poteat's *précis* is a more or less theoretical account. As such, it contrasts usefully with what is conventionally understood to be the Christian source-text of the issue, Romans 8.28-30, where the point of foreknowledge is not an abstract valuation but individual human beings, called or perhaps not called by God:

> And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

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especially in terms of prevenient grace and free will. In other words, even if there was agreement, Milton did not have ears for Counter-Reformation doctrine. It should also be reiterated that to some degree Milton developed his views on free will contra the Socinian doctrine of God's *restricted omniscience*, even as he was debatably sympathetic to other Socinian positions, especially its denial of the trinity.

For a review of foreknowledge and predestination see those entries in *The Westminster Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983). For an in-depth if at times highly specialized historical survey and discussion of the problem, including studies on all those philosophers just mentioned, see especially William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden: Brill, 1988). See also William Hasker, "The Foreknowledge Conundrum," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 50:1 (December, 2001), 97-114; W.H. Poteat, "Foreknowledge and Foreordination: A Critique of Models of Knowledge," *The Journal of Religion* 40:1 (January, 1960), 18-26; William L. Rowe, "Augustine on Foreknowledge and Free Will," *The Review of Metaphysics* 18.2 (December, 1964), 356-63. For a brilliant discussion of the development of free will in the ancient world, see Michael Frede, *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). This volume is the distillation of Frede's forty-year philosophical engagement with the question of free will. Strikingly, Frede proposes that neither Plato nor Aristotle yet had a concept of free will, and that credit for the concept should not go principally to Augustine, as conventionally it does, but to the stoic Epictetus, from whom Augustine developed his concept.

[134] Poteat, 18.

Interpretation of these verses has been at the heart of Christian theodicy ever since, including Milton's.

Following the death of Paul in 67 CE, a growing and ultimately productive confrontation developed between Neoplatonism and Early Christianity.[135] In 178 CE, Celsus—a Greek Platonist—composed the first known polemic against Christianity, entitled *True Discourse*.[136] As William Lane Craig notes, Celsus "objected to Christianity on the basis of the fatalistic consequences of Christ's predictions of his betrayal [by Judas]."[137] For Celsus, the fact that Christ foreknew his betrayer can only mean that Judas was *fated* to betray Christ, with no alternative. (Here, Celsus provides a foundation for theological fatalism, which posits that omniscience and free will cannot be compatible.) Further, Celsus sees in this situation a deeper, more appalling betrayal—Christ's betrayal of his own disciples. In Celsus' view, Christ, by the very fact of his foreknowledge, made his disciples co-conspirators with Judas, thus co-conspirators with

[135] To say that the confrontation between Neoplatonism and Early Christianity was productive understates the matter. In terms of seminal influence on Christianity, Neoplatonism, and more broadly the Hellenic culture of which it was a part, was second only to the Hebrew Bible, and the Judaism of which it was a part. For an account of this influence see Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans* 8.1-14.

[136] No copy of *True Discourse* survived. We know of it only as Origen presents it in his response to Celsus (itself one of the first, if not the first, work of Christian apologetics), *Against Celsus*. Origen apparently wrote the work at the request of "pious Ambrosius," a convert to Christianity. In his preface, he tells Ambrosius that he has attempted to fulfill Ambrosius' request: "we have endeavored to the best of our ability, to suggest, by way of answer to each of the statements advanced by Celsus, what seemed to us adapted to refute them, although his arguments have no power to shake the faith of any (true) believer" (Preface, 3). To this end, Origen begins each successive chapter with a summary of one of Celsus' points, bolstered by quotations from Celsus. Of course, since there is no extant copy of *True Discourse*, one must choose to accept Origen's account of Celsus as more or less reliable, or reject his account of Celsus as the most convenient of manipulations, or accept the account in a provisional manner, as a necessary structure of Origen's polemic.

[137] Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, 59.

the suffering and death of God on the cross.[138] To put it in the vernacular, Celsus convicted Christ of rigging the game.

Some seventy years after Celsus' polemic, Origen wrote his famous rebuttal, *Against Celsus*. The seventy-year lapse suggests that Celsus' polemic had continued to disquiet early Christians since its appearance in 178. In *Against Celsus*, Origin refutes Celsus' fatalism and its implications, by pointing out Celsus' misapprehension of the meaning and function of prediction. Origen writes:

> Celsus imagines that an event, predicted through foreknowledge, comes to pass because it was predicted; but we do not grant this, maintaining that he who foretold it was not the cause of its happening, because he foretold it would happen; but the future event itself, which would have taken place though not predicted, afforded the occasion to him, who was endowed with foreknowledge, of foretelling its occurrence.[139]

In other words, according to Origen, God's foreknowledge is chronologically but not causally prior to any given moment.[140]

At the beginning of the fourth century, Pelagius, a monk from Britain sojourning in Rome, articulated a series of theological positions which were to become known as the Pelagian heresy. For Pelagius, the problem of foreknowledge had little practical, and perhaps less theological importance. This was so because Pelagius denied both Edenic paradise and original sin. He also denied the resurrection of the body, and the necessary grace of God. Primarily stoical in outlook, Pelagius considered man's will, rightly trained, sufficient in itself for the virtuous flourishing of humankind. As part of Pelagius'

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[138] See Origen, *Against Celsus* 2.20.

[139] *Against Celsus* 2.20.

[140] See Craig, 59.

belief in self-sufficiency, he viewed Christ primarily as an exemplar of virtuous and unshakeable faith, a view amenable to if not synonymous with Arianism.

Most of these positions Pelagius set out in his *Commentarii in epistolas S. Pauli*, written sometime around the sack of Rome in 410, and brought to the attention of Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, soon thereafter. Of all the controversies Augustine was involved in (e.g., Manichaeism, Donatism), the dispute with Pelagius was the most challenging, ultimately the most productive, and certainly the most important in the formation of Christian doctrine in the West.[141] Augustine had already addressed the problem of divine foreknowledge in *On the Free Choice of Will*, completed in 395, the same year he became Bishop of Hippo, and just two years before he began writing his *Confessions* (completed c. 398). Out of the dispute with Pelagius, Augustine composed three more tracts, all of which addressed divine foreknowledge and free will, by way of refuting Pelagianism, and most particularly its denial of grace: *On Grace and Free Choice* (426-427), *On Reprimand and Grace* (426-427), and *On the Gift of Perseverance*.[142] He also addressed the problem of divine foreknowledge, contra Pelagius, in *The City of God Against the Pagans*, initially conceived of in 410 as a response against those who blamed the fall of Rome on Christianity. The scope of the work broadened considerably over the following decade. It was completed in 426, four years before Augustine's death.

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[141] Peter King notes firstly that "Augustine formulated some of his most subtle and original doctrines when confronted by views with which he disagreed"; and secondly, that "without a doubt the most sophisticated challenge Augustine had to confront was the movement inspired by British monk Pelagius, beginning in the early 400's." See King, introduction to Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, xv.

[142] Augustine wrote the first two tracts in response to questions raised by the monks of Hadrumetum, and the third to the monks of Marseilles and Lérins. See King, xvii.

In *The City of God* Augustine counters theological fatalism where he finds it first, in Cicero's *De divinatione* (44 BCE). For Cicero, divine foreknowledge and human free will are not compatible.[143] Philosophically, the presence of one necessitates the absence of the other. A stoic, Cicero chooses free will. In Book 5 of *The City of God* Augustine recounts Cicero's philosophical rationale, and the philosophical argument he develops from it: "In his book *De divinatione*, however, Cicero in his own person most plainly opposed the belief in foreknowledge of things to come. But he does this, it seems, in order to avoid admitting the existence of fate and so losing freedom of will;"[144] and "He [Cicero] restricts the mind of the religious man to a choice between two alternatives: either there is something which lies within the power of our own will, or there is foreknowledge of the future."[145]

Augustine, however, sees no contradiction between foreknowledge and free will. The crux of Augustine's argument lies in his estimation of human will. As he proclaims to his interlocutor, Evodius, in *On the Free Choice of the Will*, "nothing is so much in our power as the will itself."[146] With this statement, Augustine is in ringing agreement with

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[143] See *De divinatione* 2.56.

[144] *The City of God Against the Pagans* 5.9.

[145] Ibid. In this same paragraph, Augustine makes his now famous declaration on Cicero: "Thus, because he wished to make men free, he made them ungodly." Cf. *Paradise Lost* 9.1074: "And force upon free will hath here no place."

[146] *On the Free Choice of the Will* 3.3.7.27. Cf. *The City of God* 5.10: "It is not true, then, that, because God foreknew what would be within the power of our wills, nothing therefore lies within the powers of our wills. For when He foreknew this, He did not foreknow nothing. Therefore, if He who foreknew what would lie within the power of our wills did not foreknow nothing, but something, then clearly something lies within in the power of our wills even though God has foreknowledge of it." Cf. *CD* (Yale 6:160): "We imagine nothing unworthy of God if we maintain that those results, those conditions which God himself has chosen to place within man's free power, depend upon man's free will. In fact, God made his decrees conditional in this way for the very purpose of allowing free causes to put into effect that freedom which he himself gave them." Also cf. *Confessions* 13.12: "For I am, and I know, and I will. I am a knowing and a willing being; I know that I am and that I will; and I will to be and to know."

stoicism, with Cicero. The agreement is necessarily fleeting. For Augustine, free will does not cancel out divine foreknowledge. He writes: "The religious mind, however, chooses both, confesses both, and confirms both by the faith of godliness."[147] Augustine then lays out his rationale for the double choice:

> Thus it turns out both that we do not deny that God has foreknowledge of everything that will be, and nevertheless that we do will what we will. For although He has foreknowledge of our will, it is the will of which he has foreknowledge. Therefore, it is going to be our will, since He has foreknowledge of our will. Nor could it be our will if it were not in our power. Therefore, He has foreknowledge of our power. Hence power is not taken away from me due to His foreknowledge—it is thus mine all the more certainly, since He whose foreknowledge does not err foreknew that it would be mine.[148]

As Craig notes, for Augustine "foreknowledge, far from being incompatible with free will, actually serves to guarantee it."[149] In other words, where Cicero sees incompatibility between foreknowledge and free will, Augustine sees absolute and necessary relation. As such, he is able to proclaim, contra Cicero: "We embrace both. Faithfully and truly do we confess both: the former that we may believe well, and the latter that we may live well."[150]

Augustine's influence on all future thinking about divine foreknowledge and free will is perhaps incalculable, but as Maurice Kelley points out, "Augustine's true heirs were heretics—the Protestant leaders of the early Reformation, who made him the

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[147] *The City of God* 5.9.

[148] Ibid., 3.3.8.34-3.3.8.35. By power, Augustine means the power of the individual will to choose.

[149] Craig, 68.

[150] *The City of God* 5.10. By "former" Augustine is referring to foreknowledge, by "latter" to free will. However, in the context of the full paragraph the formulation is not as clear, as Augustine switches their order in successive sentences (the clever master rhetorician at work!). N.61 records the first seven lines of the paragraph, and Augustine's heavy, albeit inexact use of anadiplosis. The lines following continue the effect: "We are, then, in no way compelled either to take away freedom of will in order to retain the foreknowledge of God, or (which is blasphemous) to deny that He has foreknowledge of things to come in order to retain freedom of the will." And then, the effect continues with the lines quoted above.

foundation upon which they reared their formidable dogma of absolute decree and unconditional predestination."[151] (Here Kelley is paying Augustine a backhanded compliment.) It is possible that Kelley's decided aversion to Augustine, coupled with his decided admiration for Milton, disallows him from explicitly including Milton in his list of Augustinian heirs, with regard to divine foreknowledge and free will.[152] But Milton's position on foreknowledge and free will is decidedly, if idiosyncratically Augustinian.[153] It is from an Augustinian position that Milton refutes both the Socinian doctrine of restricted omniscience and the Calvinist doctrine of foreknowledge *as* predestination.

After a prefatory chapter defining his terms and their constituent parts, Milton begins *Christian Doctrine* with a chapter entitled "Of God." In "Of God" Milton begins by quoting Psalm 14.1: "for the fool says in his heart There is no God" (Yale 6:130). In *The City of God* Augustine quotes the same verse at the start of his polemic against Cicero (specifically, against Cicero's view of foreknowledge and free will). In "Of God" and the two chapters that follow it, "Of Divine Decree" and "Predestination," Milton develops and presents his views in doctrinal form. They are fundamentally a re-statement

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[151] Kelley, Introduction to *Christian Doctrine* (Yale 6:76-77). The Protestant leaders Kelley has in mind are, of course, Luther and Calvin. As Kelley points out, in *Discourse on Free Will*, Luther writes "'With regard to God, and in all things pertaining to salvation or damnation, man has no free will, but is a captive, servant and bondslave, either to the will of God, or to the will of Satan'": *Discourse on Free Will*, 113, quoted in Kelley's Introduction to *CD* (Yale 6:77). Kelley also gives a useful although pointedly unsympathetic account of Augustine's influence on Calvin's doctrine of double predestination, and the reasons for it: "'the mind of man has been so completely estranged from God's righteousness that it conceives, desires, and undertakes, only that which is impious, perverted, foul, impure, and infamous,' and 'the heart so steeped in the poison of sin, that it can breathe out nothing but a loathsome stench.' 'Man,' consequently, 'has now been deprived of freedom of choice and bound over to a miserable servitude,' so that his sole hope of salvation lies in the grace of God": Calvin, *Institutes* 2.4.9, 2.2, as quoted in Kelley's Introduction to *CD* (Yale 6:77). One final point to be made: Calvin's doctrine of *double* predestination is such because it predestines both the elect and the damned, whereas Augustine predestined (more or less) only the elect. Arminius follows a version of Augustine's doctrine, as does Milton after him.

[152] See Kelley, Introduction to *CD* (Yale 6:74-77).

[153] For the still standard discussion of Milton and Augustine, see C.S. Lewis, *A Preface to* Paradise Lost (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), 66-72.

of Augustine's. The difference between the two views (Augustine's, Milton's) is perhaps a difference of emphasis. As regards foreknowledge, in "Of God" Milton writes, "God has complete foreknowledge, so he knows what men, who are free in their actions, will think and do, even before they are born and even though these thoughts and deeds will not take place until many centuries have passed" (Yale 6:150). In "Of Divine Decree" Milton specifies what he means by divine foreknowledge: "God's foreknowledge is simply his wisdom under another name, or that idea of all things which, to speak in human terms, he had in mind before he decreed anything" (Yale 6:150).[154] After this, Milton utilizes the same rhetorical strategy Augustine does. Just as Augustine follows his first, unequivocal declaration of divine foreknowledge with an equally unequivocal declaration of free will (*The City of God* 5.9), so too does Milton: "So we must conclude that God made no absolute decrees about anything which he left in the power of men, *for men have freedom of action*" (Yale 6:155). A few pages later, Milton sums up his argument thusly: "By virtue of his wisdom God decreed the creation of angels and men as beings gifted with reason and thus with free will" (Yale 6:164).[155]

Having established his position, an Augustinian embrace of both divine foreknowledge and human free will, Milton goes on to elaborate that position, most notably in relation to predestination. Here, Milton's Arminianism comes to the fore. In a brief passage, Milton effectively refutes the efficacy and coherence of double predestination:

> According to their [Reformed theologians] theory we shall have to jettison entirely all man's freedom of action and all attempt or desire on his part to

[154] Cf. *The City of God* 5.11.

[155] Cf. *Paradise Lost* 9.351-52: "But God left free the will, for what obeys / Reason, is free, and reason he made right."

> do right. For what follows? If God has decreed I shall be saved whatever happens, no matter what I may do to prevent it, then I shall not perish. But he has also decreed that, as a means to salvation, man should do good. Therefore, if God has really made this decree as well, I cannot possibly help but do good some time or other. Meanwhile I may do what I like, and if I were never to do good, I should discover that I was never destined to be saved after all, which would mean that whatever good I might have done would have been of no use anyway.[156]
>
> (Yale 6:157)

Milton also claims, justifiably, that there is not a single verse of scripture to support double predestination (Yale 6:157). He writes: "In academic circles the word 'predestination' is habitually used to refer to reprobation as well as to election. For the discussion of such an exacting problem, however, this usage is too slapdash. *Whenever the subject is mentioned in scripture, specific reference is made only to election*" (Yale 6:168). His claim rests principally on his interpretation and his *presentation* of Romans 8.29-30 (the verses with which this section began): "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Milton presents the verses (that is, freely translates them according to his needs) as follows: "he predestined that they should be shaped to the likeness of his son: and those whom he has predestined he has also called, justified and made glorious" (Yale 6:168).

Milton elaborates his interpretation of the verses—that is, that they refer only to election—by citing other biblical verses: 1 Corinthians 2.7, Ephesians 1.5 and 1.11, and Acts 2.23 and 4.28 (Yale 6:168). The verses are as follows, in Milton's fragmentary

[156] The Reformed theologians Milton has in mind include William Perkins, Polanus, Wollebius, Turretinus and Zanchius. As Kelley points out, Reformed theologians were sensitive to the kind of challenge Milton makes. For Calvin, there was simply a logical disconnect between free will and predestination, a disconnection which led him to articulate the position he did.

translations: 1 Corinthians 2.7: "the wisdom which God predestined, before the creation of the world, to our glory"; Ephesians 1.5: "he has predestined us to adoption"; Ephesians 1.11: "in whom, indeed, we have given our share, as we were predestined according to his purpose"; Acts 2.23: "when he had been given to you by the deliberate counsel and foreknowledge of God"; and Acts 4.28: "that they might do everything which your power and your counsel predestined would have done."

This mode of exegesis (predominant in *Christian Doctrine*) in which biblical verses are interpreted by way of other biblical verses allows Milton 1) to demonstrate the simultaneity of scripture to itself, and 2) to extract from scripture the meaning he intends.[157] Here, Milton gives his thesis (that whenever predestination is mentioned in scripture, specific reference is made only to election).[158] He then makes his first interpretation of Romans 8.29-30 by way of 1 Corinthians 2.7. In Romans 8.29-30 predestined refers to "they" (humankind); in 1 Corinthians predestined refers to God's wisdom. Thus in a single interpretive maneuver, Milton has associated the idea of humankind as predestined with God's wisdom. What we might think of as the Miltonic weave of interpretation is made even stronger when we recall that Milton defined foreknowledge as "simply his [God's] wisdom under another name." (Yale 6:154). As a result, Milton has collapsed foreknowledge and predestination, and then subsumed them under the more plastic because almost totally abstract concept of God's "wisdom." This

[157] It is also the mode of biblical interpretation set out by Augustine in *On Christian Doctrine* 3.28: "When, however, a meaning is evolved of such a kind that what is doubtful in it cannot be cleared up by indubitable evidence from Scripture, it remains for us to make it clear by the evidence of reason. But this is a dangerous practice. For it is far safer to walk by the light of Holy Scripture; so that when we wish to examine the passages that are obscured by metaphorical expressions, we may either obtain a meaning about which there is no controversy, or if a controversy arises, may settle it by the application of testimonies sought out in every portion of the same Scripture."

[158] See Yale 6:168.

concept Milton takes to mean God's bestowing of free will to humankind as the potential *election* of all humankind. For Milton the prerequisite for election is obedience to divine will; the prerequisite for obedience to divine will is free will.

So for Milton free will is the decisive characteristic of humankind in relation to God.[159] And divine foreknowledge is the decisive characteristic of the divine in its relation to humankind's free will. They are not incompatible but mutually necessary, if not dependent. Without free will there can be no obedience. In *Areopagitica*, Milton for example writes:

> many there be that complain of divin Providence for suffering *Adam* to transgresse, foolish tongues! when God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificiall *Adam*, such an *Adam* as he is in the motions. We our selves esteem not of that obedience, or love, or gift, which is of force.
> (Yale 2:527)

Here Milton's very Augustinian emphasis on the *necessity* of free will does not, however, lead him to join up with the Socinians of his day, who limited God's omniscience for the sake of free will. (Socinians believed that limited divine knowledge was the necessary precondition for free will. Their argument registers as a kind of theological fatalism.) Contra all incompatibilist views, Milton emphasizes divine foreknowledge as exactly that precondition necessary for free will. Just before God begins his discourse at 3.80-134 (the passage discussed in detail above), Milton characterizes God and God's perspective as "from his prospect high / Wherein past, present, future he beholds, / Thus to his only

[159] For a concise discussion of Milton's concept of free will, see especially Dennis Danielson, "The Fall of Man and Milton's Theodicy," 117. Danielson writes: "A vital component of Milton's theodicy is the 'Free Will Defence', the model or argument according to which God, for reasons consistent with his wisdom and goodness, created angels and human begins with freedom either to obey or disobey his commands. Such an act of creation represents a self-limitation on God's part: it means that he cannot manipulate the free choices of angels and humans, though this claim is no mark against his omnipotence, because the 'cannot' is a logical entailment of his own exercise of power." For the "Free Will Defense," see especially Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 30-53, from which Danielson derives his understanding of the concept.

son foreseeing spoke." Then, in the course of his speech, God reiterates the primacy of humankind's free will (e.g., "I formed them free, and free they must remain"), and free will as the necessary precondition for humankind's obedience: "What pleasure I from such obedience paid, / When will and reason (reason also is choice) / Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled, / Made passive both, had served necessity, / Not me."[160] For Milton's God, the answer is none. In that answer is found the essence of Milton's theodicy. Milton's God beholds "from his prospect high," the past, present and the future. He foreknows. *And* Milton's God wants obedience, issuing from a free will. Thus, as Milton writes in *Christian Doctrine*, "neither God's decree nor his foreknowledge can shackle free causes with any kind of necessity" (Yale 6:166).

From the Human Point of View

In Book 5, God "to render man inexcusable sends Raphael to admonish [Adam] of his obedience, of his free estate, of his enemy at hand" (*PL* 5, Argument). The "enemy at hand" (Satan) animates "free estate" and "obedience" and suggests the necessity of the relationship between the two. Without the pressure of the opposing force ("the enemy at hand"), freedom and obedience remain from the prelapsarian and mortal point-of-view impracticably ambiguous, dangerously obscure, too near to meaningless, and mistakable as the most effortless-seeming of commands. Adam knows *about* disobedience and obedience, but he does not know disobedience, and he does not know obedience either; it is simply his disposition. Further, Adam knows only the prohibition, which exists for

[160] *Paradise Lost* 3.107-11. The lines are a poetic re-rendering of those given in *Areopagitica* and quoted above.

him as a sign that signifies no meaning but consequence. Do this, and you will die. The "this" only means in terms of the effect it will produce. Similarly, Adam neither does nor can know freedom; for freedom merely *is* the situation in the Garden. The ecology of Eden, of which Adam and Eve are attributes, coheres as the most perfect harmony, God-given.

Thus, when Raphael descends to Eden he is met by the non-functioning epistemology of original innocence. There can be no theory of knowledge, because there is no knowledge understood in epistemological terms. Therefore, there is no interpretation going on. Adam has wonder, Eve something approaching trepidation, for Satan whispered in her dreams. (In other words, in *Paradise Lost* wonder, then apprehensiveness, precedes knowledge). And when Raphael arrives, Adam and Eve, beyond a dream and the recounting of a dream, seem to have no acquired meaning whether systematized or simply gathered. They have a kind of dream consciousness, but they have no historical consciousness. The dream follows the prohibition, as if it is the prohibition as much as Satan who haunts. The transgression of the prohibition will as God dictates result in death. But death they can sense not as something they know or apprehend, but only as something they do not want to happen:

> This one, this easy charge, of all the trees
> In Paradise that bear delicious fruit
> So various, not to taste that only Tree
> Of knowledge, planted by the Tree of Life,
> So near grows death to life, whate'er death is,
> Some dreadful thing no doubt.
> (*PL* 4.421-26)

Their situation then, in the garden, before the fall, is—to state the obvious—innocent. They have been given terms, but instead of an explanation for those terms—that is, an

explanation of the concepts the terms denote, and an explication of those concepts—they have been given only an emphasis on the importance of those terms, by consequence. Their situation is not unlike that of a child taught terms of virtues, and the importance of those virtues in terms of the consequences following the performance or transgression of those virtues, but not the meaning of the virtues themselves. To attempt to put it briefly, Adam and Eve, before the fall, are recipients of signs, the signification of which they must take entirely on faith. This faith, however, in the context of *Paradise Lost* (and *Paradise Regained*) may be understood as generated by or synonymous with the product of Adam and Eve's essential disposition of obedience. In other words, according to God, faith is all Adam and Eve need.

Properly speaking then, if overstated, the conditions upon which knowledge depends—time as successive, and comparison—do not exist before the fall. Therefore, it becomes increasingly difficult to speak of Adam and Eve before the fall as either literary representations (that is, representations of persons), or as persons, two distinct figures of humankind. As Gordon Teskey notes, "Adam and Eve are not characters until two-thirds of the way through the poem [when the fall occurs] because before that they have little to accomplish, and nothing to endure. We think about them not dramatically but, as it were, environmentally."[161] This reading points to Milton's monist perspective. It is precisely the case that even though Adam and Eve are the parents of humankind, the first-born among us, they are before the fall not so much persons in any individual sense, but modes of the divine.

The fall instantiates knowledge understood epistemologically, by creating the requirement (the critical need) for interpretation. However, it is in Book 5 that Raphael's

[161] Teskey, *DM*, 92.

instruction and Adam's reception of it begin to conceive knowledge as a human enterprise. It is a troubling development. For if knowledge as defined above, and dependent upon the conditions set out above, begins with the fall, then the seeds of knowledge reside not only in Satan's whispering to Eve (*PL* 5.31-93), and Adam's preternaturally apt response, but in Raphael's instructions, and before them, in God's single prohibition: God sends Raphael to explicate the single prohibition. So both Eve and Adam hear what they do not know, as a faraway sound that cannot be identified. For Eve, the hearing comes in a dream, and is the strong whisper of absolute temptation. For Adam, it is twofold, a recounting of the dream, and a lecture from an angel. To the first: without having heard what Eve heard, Adam can only understand the stakes by proxy. Eve senses, in a kind of preternatural version of monistic genius: she is her body speaking to herself the truth of her and Adam's vulnerability. Adam does not know they are vulnerable. Further, Adam does not know vulnerability as one among many possible states of being. Further, Adam does not know states of being. In Milton's still residually masculinist perspective, Adam is the purer of the two. He is also the less intelligent. In a dream, Eve has seen creation: "Forwith up to the clouds / With him I flew, and underneath beheld / the Earth outstretched immense, a prospect wide / And various" (*PL* 5.86-89). In this moment Milton looks to Job and to Jesus, recalling both simultaneously. The Lord speaks to Job out of the whirlwind, and the Voice of the Whirlwind gives the panorama of creation, a poetic tour of the living world in its conception and particulars, pronounced with overwhelming force by repeated rhetorical questions.[162] And in the

[162] See Job 38-41.

Gospels of Mathew and Luke, Satan takes Jesus to the mountaintop and shows him "all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time."[163] Eve echoes both.

Raphael begins with a discourse on the refining work of creation:

> O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom
> All things proceed, and up to him return,
> If not depraved from good, created all
> Such to perfection, one first matter all,
> Endued with various forms, various degrees
> Of substance, and in things that live, of life;
> But more refined, more spirituous, and pure,
> As nearer to him placed or nearer tending
> Each in their several active spheres assigned,
> Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
> Proportion to each kind.
> (*PL* 5.469-79)

The process of refinement describes a monist universe, and culminates, potentially, in the ascent of the human spirit to the Angelic or heavenly realm. However, the culmination is offered as a potentiality, rather than a given, because it depends on human behavior. And so, Raphael ends his lecture with a caveat:

> And from these corporal nutriments perhaps
> Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,
> Improved by tract of time, and winged ascend
> Ethereal, as we, or may at choice
> Here or in Heav'nly paradises dwell;
> If ye be found obedient, and retain
> Unalterably firm his love entire
> Whose progeny you are.
> (*PL* 5.496-503)

Milton's use of a semi-colon at line 500 is precise and telling. The semi-colon indicates connection between clauses, with the first clause dependent on the second. This grammatical situation is exactly the thematic situation. In the first four lines of the passage Raphael tells the promise (the potential) of ultimate refinement. Then the semi-

[163] Luke 4.5. Cf. Matthew 4.8.

colon at line 500 indicates that the promise is and will be dependent on something other than itself for realization. The three lines that follow are that something other upon which the promise depends: human obedience, self-evident to Raphael perhaps, and certainly to God, but a mystery in Eden, a term without context, in a place without history.

Adam responds emotively and with praise to the tale of refinement Raphael tells: "O favorable spirit, propitious guest" (*PL* 5.507). But Adam, having only wonder, can only wonder at Raphael's instruction: "If ye be found obedient…" That is, he cannot *interpret* the instruction as it applies to himself and his future behavior. The very idea of future behavior does not exist for Adam. And the idea of obedience exists *only* as the first instruction he is given. That is, Adam knows it primarily in terms of priority and genre. Since it is the first instruction he is given, he knows it is important; and since his will is immediately disposed to concord, he can immediately assume that he is entirely and irreversibly concordant with the instruction. But in terms of the instruction's meaning and application, Adam does not have any practicable knowledge. There is simply no other option than this thing obedience described in this first instruction, not even imaginatively. So Adam asks:

> But say
> What meant that caution joined, 'If ye be found
> Obedient'? Can we want obedience then
> To him, or possibly his love desert
> Who formed us from the dust, and placed us here
> Full to the utmost measure of what bliss
> Human desires can seek or apprehend?
> (*PL* 5.512-18)

From our perspective, that is, the perspective afforded by the fall (therefore situated after the fall), the answer is, "Of course!" Eve, having been whispered to, knows the answer.

This distinguishes her in the moment from Adam. But Eve's knowing the answer does not confirm to a state of knowledge, but to an experience of haunting.

In response to Adam's question ("Can we want obedience then…"), Raphael explains the supreme import of obedience for Adam and Eve, for humankind: "Attend: that thou are happy, owe to God; / That thou continu'st such, owe to thyself, / That is, to thy obedience; therein stand" (*PL* 5.520-23). The meaning is unequivocal, as is the instruction. Adam's happiness depends entirely on Adam being Adam as he is before the fall, the living embodiment of obedience, fashioned by God. No reiteration would seem to be needed, no further emphasis. Raphael gives both: "That was that caution giv'n thee; be advised." He might have said, You've been warned! And "Be advised" abstracts "therein stand" to a formidable regulation. Raphael then reiterates again the critical and essential importance of obedience, as if by force of reiteration he might make Adam understand by *hearing* that which Adam cannot understand by interpretation. Further, Raphael includes himself and the angels as subject to the same charge of obedience as humankind, an inclusion which does the rhetorical work of giving experiential authority to Raphael's instruction (it is a sophisticated version of "trust me, I know what I'm talking about, and I know it by my own experience"):

> Myself and all th'angelic host that stand
> In sight of God enthroned, our happy state
> Hold, as you yours, while our obedience holds;
> On other surety none; freely we serve,
> Because we freely love, as in our will
> To love or not; in this we stand or fall.
> (*PL* 5.535-40)

At the close of book 8 (the last book before the fall), Raphael reiterates his instruction yet again, before departing: "Be strong, live happy, and love, but first of all / Him whom to

love is to obey, and keep / His great command" (*PL* 8.633-35). It is perhaps the most absurd of understatements to say the following: the instruction doesn't take.

Milton begins Book 9 with a confirmation of the fact (the fall), before the dramatization of it: "I now must change / Those notes to tragic; foul distrust, and breach / Disloyal on the part of man, revolt, / And disobedience" (*PL* 9.5-8). The fall happens and all its sorrowful effects. After it, God sends Michael to evict Adam and Eve from Paradise. But, as the Argument to Book 11 attests, God also sends Michael down to "reveal to Adam future things" (*PL* 11, Argument). These future things are the generations of the flood, the generations of Abraham, the exile and the nomination of Moses, and the redemption of humankind by the life, death, and resurrection of the Son.[164] This is the knowledge Michael imparts to Adam. Now Adam must learn it rightly, to have it as knowledge. If he does so, he, thus humankind, will experience paradise again:

> *This having learnt, thou hast attained the sum*
> *Of wisdom*; hope no higher, though all the stars
> Thou knew'st by name, and all th' ethereal powers,
> All secrets of the deep, all nature's works,
> Or works of God in heav'n, air, earth, or sea,
> And all the riches of this world enjoyedst,
> And all the rule, one empire; only add
> Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add faith,
> Add virtue, patience, temperance, add love,
> By name to come called charity, the soul
> Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath
> To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
> A paradise within thee, happier far.
> (*PL* 12.575-87, emphasis added)

[164] See *PL* 12.1-573.

CHAPTER 3

THE TIMING OF CHRIST

In *Paradise Regained*, Milton establishes right timing as the essential characteristic of the Son's obedience.[165] It is the *essential* characteristic because it is that part of the Son that Satan does not understand. As such it is the quality that informs the Son's resistance to temptation, and ultimately, makes the Son the savior. If from the divine point-of-view the temptation in the wilderness is the trial of the Son's obedience, from the satanic point-of-view the temptation is the trial of the Son's divinity—for Satan still doubts, or wills to doubt the Son's divinity deep into book 4: "For Son of God to me is yet in doubt" (*PR* 4.501). The Son's resistance—that is the performance of his obedience—is made as a man. The perfection of his resistance is the fulfillment of his divine destiny.[166] To attempt an analogy: when the Son lifts his foot to step, he does so as human; when he brings that foot down, most especially on the pinnacle, he does so as God.

How this timing works as the indispensable mechanism of obedience is the primary concern of this chapter. What I mean by timing as a Miltonic concept is roughly Milton's sense of the key classical concept of *kairos* as it is refracted in the three Miltonic motifs of waiting, hearing, and stepping. These motifs appear throughout Milton's work, and are decisively present in the late masterpieces. A presentation of the first two, and suggestion of the third (stepping), is given in the first section of the chapter. In the

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[165] It may be useful here to think of time more or less along Aristotelian lines ("Time is the measure of motion") and to think of timing as the right recognition of moments in time. See *Physics* 220.15, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941).

[166] In *CD* Milton writes, "His Nature is double, divine and human" and "the entire fulfillment of the Father's promise resides in, but is not *hypostatically* united with Christ as a man" (Yale 6:418-19, emphasis added). In other words, Milton accepts the dual nature of Christ (divine, human), but does not accept the orthodox doctrine of the trinity. Cf. *CD* (Yale 6:414-29).

second section of the chapter I delineate the philosophical and literary context by which I intend *kairos* to be understood. This study of *kairos* pays particular attention to the formulations of this multivalent concept which most correspond to Milton's, particularly the antecedental forms of *kairos* in Homeric epic, and then its conceptual development and use in Pindar, and especially in Plato. The chapter concludes with a reading of the seminal moment of timing in *Paradise Regained*, the Son on the pinnacle—for Milton the emblem of the triumph of obedience.

Waiting, Hearing, Stepping

There are three components of Miltonic timing: waiting, hearing, stepping. A sustained examination of the first two of these components—with the third implied—tells us how Milton's concept of timing works, and thus provides a persuasive, operational definition of obedience. My sense of "operational definition" should be understood in the context of Wittgenstein's theory of "family resemblances" developed in *Philosophical Investigations*.[167] The operational definition of a thing cannot point to its essence, individually, or to its essential relation to other like operations, but to its use in any given situation, and its resemblances to like operations in similar situations. The operational definition of obedience, together with the ostensive definition provided in previous chapters, will go a long way in establishing a full reading of Miltonic obedience—the concept of obedience, the structure and mechanics of obedience, and the necessary

[167] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: MacMillan, 1968), §§ 65-71.

conditions for obedience (this last is addressed in the chapter to follow). By "ostensive definition" I mean that definition which is made by a literal or figurative "pointing."[168]

If timing is thought of as a mechanism of obedience, waiting, hearing, and stepping may be understood as mechanisms of that larger mechanism. So that waiting, hearing, and stepping may more generally be understood as aspects of obedience. It is important to keep the relation between these aspects and obedience in mind, because for Milton timing as a concept independent of obedience to divine will is valueless; so too the structuring mechanisms of timing, no matter how elegant. For Milton, timing is in the service of obedience. The waiting is a state of readiness, ready to hear the will of God, and thus confirmed by that hearing.[169] Hearing the will of God then becomes stepping (acting) in precise accordance with the will of God. So the waiting is a devout waiting, a waiting to discern the divine will. The hearing is the discernment of divine will. The stepping is the action which follows the hearing of the divine will.

Further, waiting, hearing and stepping characterize Milton's Christian heroism, and find their corollaries in the very Christian language of patience and martyrdom. To

[168] In the first Book of *Confessions*, Augustine gives one of the most famous and influential descriptions of ostensive definition: "When people gave a name to an object and when, following the sound, they moved their body towards that object, I would see and retain the fact that that object received from them this sound which they pronounced when they intended to draw attention to it. Moreover, their intention was evident from the gestures which are, as it were, the natural vocabulary of all races, and are made with the face and the inclination of the eyes and the movements of other parts of the body, and by the tone of voice which indicates whether the mind's inward sentiments are to seek and possess or to reject and avoid. Accordingly, I gradually gathered the meaning of words, occurring in their places in different sentences and frequently heard; and already I learnt to articulate my wishes by training my mouth to use these signs. In this way I communicated the signs of my wishes to those around me, and entered more deeply into the stormy society of human life" (1.8). Wittgenstein begins *Philosophical Investigations* by quoting this section from *Confessions* (as the exemplum of Augustine's theory of language acquisition) and then deconstructs it. This deconstruction is the guiding purpose of the entirety of Part I of *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein bases his deconstruction on the view that Augustine's theory applies only to nouns (§ 1).

[169] The formulation corresponds to Luke 8.8: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

be obedient as Milton conceives of it is to risk suffering and death for the sake of truth (martyrdom), and so to suffer with calm endurance (patience).[170] The Son says,

> But if there be in glory aught of good,
> It may by means far different be attained
> Without ambition, war, or violence;
> By deeds of peace, by wisdom eminent,
> By patience, temperance.
> (3.88-92)

Satan does not hear the countermand the Son is speaking. Moreover, Satan *cannot* hear. This inability is what sets him endlessly and negatively apart from the Son and potentially from humankind (just as the Son's ability to hear sets him apart from Satan, and, ideally, not from humankind). As Laurie Zwicky notes, "Satan has no comprehension of the rightness of a moment; he comprehends only opportuneness."[171] Thus Satan's interrogation presses on: "The prophets old, who sung thy endless reign, / The happier reign the sooner it begins; / Reign then; what canst thou better do the while?" (3.178-80). The rushing into action—and its rushing will-to-power—is itself a temptation. In response the Son first obliquely remarks that his time has not yet come (3.182-83). The lines are a direct quotation from John 7.6 ("My time is not yet come"). He then suggests an explanation for seeming (only seeming) inaction:

> What if he hath decreed that I shall first
> Be tried in humble state, and things adverse,
> By tribulations, injuries, insults,
> Contempts, and scorns, and snares, and violence,
> Suffering, abstaining, quietly expecting
> Without distrust or doubt, that he may know
> *What I can suffer, how obey*? *Who best*

[170] See "patience" and "martyrdom" in the *OED*.

[171] Laurie Zwicky, "Kairos in *Paradise Regained*: The Divine Plan," *ELH* 31.3 (September, 1964), 276. "Opportuneness" is Satan's misreading of *kairos*, a discussion of which follows below. Cf. *Paradise Regained* 4.475-76: Satan says, "each act is rightliest done, / Not when it must, but when it may be best."

> *Can suffer, best can do*; *best reign, who first*
> *Well hath obeyed*.
> (3.188-96, emphasis added)

Taken together, the two passages express a crucial truth for Milton: to be obedient—which means to be able to wait for the right time, to hear when that time is come, and to step (act) at that time—is to be heroic in Christian terms.

Poetically, waiting, hearing, and stepping are the central motifs by which and around which *Paradise Regained* is organized, and to a large degree those motifs around which *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* are also organized. Further, one might say that they serve as central motifs throughout the corpus of Milton's work, from the "Nativity Ode" onward. They work in concert, revolvingly: stepping, waiting, hearing, stepping, waiting, hearing, stepping and so on, and are as much about Milton's very Pindaric sense of his own poetic destiny, as they are motifs of and in the poems themselves.[172]

Waiting appears in Milton's early work, and he returns to the idea with striking presence in the later poems. Hearing and stepping are the animating principles of this waiting, without which waiting is for Milton misguided, or outright meaningless. As Northrop Frye wrote more than forty-five years ago in *The Return of Eden*:

> In the temptations of Adam and Samson the same theme recurs of an action not so much wrong in itself as wrong at that time, a hasty snatching of a chance before the real time has fulfilled itself. Christ is older than Milton was at twenty-three when he wrote his famous sonnet, and Satan is constantly urging him, from the first temptation on, to be his own providence, to release some of his own latent energies. *The discipline of*

[172] The example of Pindar is discussed below. For now, it is enough to note that Pindar distinguished the true poet by his inborn sense of *kairos*, and *kairos* as moments of ripeness preceded by long periods of waiting. When Milton famously remarks in *An Apology for Smectymnuus* (1642), "that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem" he has begun fully to imagine himself as the poet of perfect timing, both in his career, and in his poems (Yale 1:890).

> *waiting is not only more difficult and inglorious, but constantly subject to the danger of passing insensibly into procrastination*.[173]

The sonnet Frye refers to is Sonnet 7 (1633) in which Milton reimagines what he took at the beginning of the poem to be the distressing onset of his twenty-third year.[174] Milton achieves this work of re-imagination, of re-vision, with an appeal to timing and its heroic subsidiary, waiting. In other words, Milton stops thinking about himself in relation to time, and starts thinking about himself in relation to timing.[175] This shift in attention produces what we may think of as Miltonic waiting—a waiting of steady alertness, the steady alertness poetically represented by hearing.

Sonnet 7 is a poem of compressed and remarkable transformation. Taking Milton at his word ("How soon hath Time the subtle thief of youth, / Stol'n on his wing *my three and twentieth year*"), the sonnet was written in 1631.[176] It was then included in "Letter to an Unknown Friend," if we accept Parker's dating, two years later. It is then that Milton shared the accusation and accepted the implied charge of wasting time (a charge presumably leveled in the letter by the unknown friend to which Milton was responding), re-envisioned it in grander terms by way of turning the adjectival belated (defined in the *OED* as "Overtaken by lateness of the night; *hence*, overtaken by darkness, benighted")

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[173] Northrop Frye, *The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 136 (emphasis added).

[174] In a letter to an unknown recipient, conventionally designated "Letter to a Friend," Milton wrote: "Yet that you may see that I am something suspicious of myself, and do take notice of a certain belatedness in me" (MLM 771). Parker dated the poem to 1633. Perhaps not incidentally, this is the first of two examples the *OED* offers in its definition of belatedness.

[175] Blair Hoxby points out that, "as early as the 'Nativity Ode', written when he was twenty-one, Milton began to refigure his anxiety of belatedness as its opposite: as a temptation to impatience": Hoxby, "Milton's Steps in Time," *Studies in English Literature* 38.1 (Winter, 1998), 157. It is also worth noting that Milton's sense or perhaps fear of belatedness either created or was the effect of a disdainful estimation of time, as exemplified perhaps in "On Time" (MLM 59).

[176] For a discussion of the dating of Sonnet 7, see Lewalski, *Life*, 60; and John Gouws, "The Date of Milton's Sonnet VII," *Notes and Queries* 57.1 (2010), 39-41.

into a state of being, a subtly heroic condition possibly, and then refuted the charge with Sonnet 7. In other words, Milton communicated that he had already shared and addressed with great skill and imagination his interlocutor's concerns.

The sonnet begins with belatedness; it ends with readiness. It is almost as if Milton is inscribing his destiny, or the next long step of it. Also, the sonnet itself has a destiny. It begins, "How soon hath Time the subtle thief of youth." In the following eight lines, this particular, personified version of Time corners the speaker (23-year-old Milton) with a blank appraisal: if you were really meant to be a great poet, you would have produced something great by now. But in line 9, Time personified is replaced by timing, and the corner becomes a vista (at least for the moment) of an as yet undisclosed promise overseen by a rigorously attentive God:

> Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,
> It shall be still in strictest measure even
> To that same lot, however mean or high,
> Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven;
> All is, if I have grace to use it so,
> As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye.[177]
> (ll.9-14)

The destiny of the poem is the poet's destiny, made clear: "Apparent delay becomes appropriate preparation. Time the thief becomes Time the guide."[178] And time as guide (more precisely, Milton's understanding of timing as registered in the sonnet's sestet) calls Milton to attention.

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[177] In a short undated letter written at about the time of "Letter to a Friend," Charles Diodati (d.1638), the dearest friend of Milton's youth, expressed his longing for Milton's company: "So much do I desire your company that in my longing I dream of and all but prophesy fair weather and calm, and everything golden for tomorrow." He ends the letter: "Only do you be ready to set out when called, or even uncalled, to come to me, who long to see you. 'For Menelaus, good at the war-cry, came to him unbidden'" (MLM 767). The quotation is from the *Iliad* (2.408) (the relationship between the *Iliad*, *kairos*, and Miltonic timing is discussed below). Perhaps Diodati's recommendation of classically heroic readiness influenced Milton's sense of timing to a greater degree than might be expected from a swift and informal letter.

[178] MLM 134.

This kind of attention—steady, alert—Milton figured as angelic in his poetry written before Sonnet 7 ("Nativity Ode"), after it as chaste (*A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle*), and then as explicitly self-directed and potentially heroic in human terms (Sonnet 19). In the "Nativity Ode" (1629), Milton's first great poem, waiting is the work of angels, and is vigilant: "the spangled host keep watch in squadrons bright" (l.21). In this single line, Milton associates—*brings together*—the stars ("spangled"), the angels ("host"), and soldiers ("squadrons") under the defining rubric of "bright."[179] With these three words Milton first articulates to himself the characteristics of what will become his concept of waiting: that it is at once star-like, angelic, and martial (its perspective is from-on-high, its relation is one of concern, its attitude is one of vigilance). What binds the three together is "brightness," that necessary condition for Miltonic waiting, which is in "Nativity Ode" defined by what it binds metaphorically: stars, angels, soldiers. The famous final line of the ode (l.244) distills the angelic waiting of line 21 to the will of God: "Bright-harnessed angels sit in order serviceable." The angels are harnessed by the brightness of God—that is, their enormous angelic energy is equipped for directed use. Because they are harnessed by the brightness of God, they *are* bright. So "bright" refers to the brightness of God's harnessing, to the brightness of angels so harnessed, and thus to the brightness of that relation. The relation extends from that between God and angels, to that between angels and angels, who "sit in order," who are composed in ranks (the martial valence is intended) of mutual brightness in what Pseudo-Dionysius (c. 5th

[179] "Bright" is one of Milton's favorite terms, and appears throughout his work, e.g., 63 times in *Paradise Lost* alone. He uses the term both poetically (as a descriptor) and theologically (to note a condition). Further, "squadron bright" appears again in *PL* 4.977: "While thus he [Satan] spake, th' angelic squadron bright / Turned fiery red."

century BCE) called their "celestial hierarchies."[180] Finally, they sit in order "serviceable," that is, ready to serve, alert and waiting to be so called.

In *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634) Milton associates waiting with the virtue of chastity. The elder brother's confidence in the ability of his sister, the Lady, to *spiritually* withstand Comus' proto-Satanic heat, regardless of physical outcome, rests squarely on his estimation of purity and on his belief in his sister's purity.[181] For the Elder brother, "He that has light within his own clear breast / May sit i'th' center, and enjoy bright day" (ll.381-82).[182] The lines resonate with both line 20 and line 244 from the "Nativity Ode," particularly with its use of "bright," but also of "sit." Together the words suggest radiant poise, again, a steady alertness, but this time the alertness belongs not to the realm of angels, but to humankind (albeit humankind in the excessively virtuous figuration of the Lady).[183] And the use of "enjoy" and "bright" with "day"

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[180] See Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, in *The Complete Works*, translated by Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 143-92. For a recent and comprehensive discussion of Milton's angelology, see Joad Raymond, *Milton's Angels: The Early Modern Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[181] I say Comus' "proto-Satanic" heat to emphasize *A Masque's* relationship to *Paradise Regained* as the proto-type for it, from the characters of the Lady (the Son) and Comus (Satan), to the shared themes of temptation and resistance.

[182] The lines correspond with Luke 11.34: "The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light." The Elder brother is referring here to his sister.

[183] As I note in the introduction, Milton's first sustained formulation of purity—the Lady in *Masque*—a condition critical to his understanding of obedience, is in fact a misreading of chastity. The Lady's chastity is a "defensive virginity" dependent in large measure for its efficacy upon a separation of spirit and matter that Milton opposed in his mature poetry and prose. See J.M. Evans, "*Lycidas*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, 35-50; Stephen Orgel, "The Case for Comus," *Representations* 81 (Winter, 2003), 31-45; Kimberly Reigle, "Defensive Virginity from Spenser to Milton," PhD diss., University of North Carolina Greensboro, 2010 (http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/listing.aspx?id=3698); and Debora Shuger, "'Gums of Glutinous Heat' and the Stream of Consciousness: The Theology of Milton's Maske," *Representations* 60 (Autumn, 1997), 1-21.

signals an important development in Milton's conceptual formulation of waiting: "enjoy" implies a pleasing calm, a receptivity to the day's offering ("and enjoy bright day"). This positive qualification of waiting also indicates the quality of which the waiting is decidedly not comprised: anxiety. In other words, for Milton the waiting is alert, but it is not anxious. The poised and receptive quality of Miltonic waiting must be grasped, if his concept of timing—and the utter importance of this timing to his concept of obedience—is to be understood. Thus, in *Masque* the bright-harnessed angels "sit"; they do not burn or lean or flail; and the Lady "sits" enjoying the day. The situation recalls Milton's pensive and one might say angelic dream for himself considered in *Il Penseroso*: "And may at last my weary age / Find out the peaceful hermitage, / The hairy gown and mossy cell, / Where I may sit and rightly spell, / of every star that heaven doth show" (ll.166-71).

Finally, the troubling designation of virginity in the masque becomes less troublesome when it is aligned with Milton's conceptual priorities. If what makes the Lady a virgin is her chastity, what makes her chaste is obedience (to the will of the divine). Her obedience is characterized by waiting. Her waiting, her ability to not-act, is a force which Comus feels and fears and cannot counter. Like Satan in *Paradise Regained* for whom he is the rehearsal, Comus in his temptation of the Lady meets with (the Lady's) imperviousness. What Comus wants is the Lady's consent. What he gets is her refusal, and then her disdain. Thus (again like Satan) he must amplify the rhetoric of his temptations. He must dislocate her from her virtue, from her ability in obedience to wait. So he presses on, mystified maybe, and ends his appeal with an almost coy, "Think what, and be advised, you are but young yet" (l.755).

Young or not, the Lady is inside herself as bright-harnessed as an angel, thus a figure of force, contained. Just as Comus is a prototype for Satan in *Paradise Regained*, so the Lady is a prototype for the Son; and the debate (a mild word perhaps for such a moral showdown) between the Lady and Comus prefigures that between the Son and Satan. When the Lady replies to Comus with the full force of mockery at her disposal, she is prefiguring the Son's threatful and mocking response to Satan in *Paradise Regained*. The Son's mockery of evil rests on the surety of his obedience, and because he is the only begotten Son of God, his obedience is synonymous with his destiny. To Satan he says,

> Know therefore when my season comes to sit
> On David's throne, it shall be like a tree
> Spreading and overshadowing all the earth,
> Or as a stone that shall to pieces dash
> All monarchies besides throughout the world.
> (*PR* 4.146-50)

In *Masque* the Lady proclaims to Comus the revelation of her potential (a proclamation which is at the same time the revelation of *his* impotence). The surety of her claim cannot be as the Son's, but is qualitatively like the Son's: "Thou art not fit to hear thyself convinced," she says,

> Yet should I try, the uncontrolled worth
> Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits
> To such a flame of sacred vehemence
> That dumb things would be moved to sympathize,
> And the brute earth would lend her nerves and shake,
> Till all thy magic structures reared so high
> Were shattered into heaps o'er thy false head.
> (*Masque* ll.793-99)

In other words, the person who sits restrained in Comus' enchanted chair *is* she who has "light within [her] own clear breast" (l.381) and sits ("in order serviceable") in the *center*,

poised and without anxiety. What center? one might ask. *The* center, Milton replies, comprised of God, and the figuring space at God's right hand. So, Comus is in a spiritual fight he was not perhaps prepared for. He acknowledges the possibility, and his own fear of it: "She fables not, I feel that I do fear / Her words set off by some superior power" (ll.800-01). Two lines later he likens her proclamation to wrathful Jove speaking thunder (ll.803-04).

It is worth remembering here that the threat Comus feels, the holy heat of it, follows not from an act of aggression but from the Lady's poised waiting, and perhaps what's more, to the strength of her commitment to that waiting. So that the famously obscure "sage and serious doctrine of virginity" (l.787), which the Lady speaks to Comus, refers for its power not to mere virginity but to the rapt and focused condition of waiting. The doctrine is serious because of its commitment to waiting; it is sage because of the visionary aspect of this waiting. The waiting is visionary because it is connected as if by an invisible *unbreakable* thread—what the Lady calls the "sun-clad Power of Chastity" (l.782)—to what is not but what will be, to the fullness of time expressed as the sum of all the moments of right timing; and it is connected by the activity at the center of waiting, that is, a rapt and quiet listening for, which becomes a *hearing of*.

If in Sonnet 7 Milton first admitted in a poem his fear of belatedness, of having missed his mark (a catastrophic possibility of disobedience), in Sonnet 19 (c.1652), Milton returns to the theme, this time as a blind man in his early forties, a revolutionary, a regicide, a widower. The possibility is catastrophic because for Milton, missing his time would have meant failing to hear the will of God, thus failing to act in accordance with the will of God, thus being disobedient to the will of God. On the one hand, Milton's

valuation of obedience generated enormous spiritual pressure, pulverizing in its dark possibilities; on the other hand, Miltonic obedience relied on individual conscience, and was intended for liberty. Thus, Milton replies to the pressures of political and social convention (bishops, curricula, divorce laws, etc…) with the pressure of the Holy Spirit.

Milton brings to Sonnet 19 the formulations produced in Sonnet 7, in "Nativity Ode," and in *Masque.* Like Sonnet 7, Sonnet 19 begins in near despair, as Milton ponders again, with suspicion, his own belatedness:

> When I consider how my light is spent,
> Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
> And that one talent which is death to hide,
> Lodged with my useless...[184]
> (ll.1-4)

What makes the openings of the two sonnets different is that the stakes of Sonnet 19 are so very much higher. The belatedness described in the first lines of Sonnet 7 is the belatedness of the young and mightily ambitious poet whose creative sap may be congealed, and whose dream of fame is vanishing ("My hasting days fly on with full career, / But my late spring no bud or blossom showeth"). For a fleeting moment, the speaker of the poem (young Milton) admits the terrible possibility that he has overestimated his poetic gift, and its resultant destiny. The moment registers as genuinely existential, but it registers as such in the limited and entirely self-referential realm of a young poet: I thought I was destined for singular poetic greatness; am I

[184] In line 3 Milton is referring to the Parable of the Talents, Matthew 25.25-30: "And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

wrong? Sonnet 19, on the other hand, begins where Sonnet 7 ends: "All is, if I have grace to use it so, / As ever in my great *Taskmaster's eye*" (emphasis added). The stakes now are nothing less than the judgment of God, bearing down on the poet who hid his God-given talent, rendering the talent useless by lodging it in the dimmest inner reaches of a blind and exasperated self (ll.3-4). And the self is exasperated because it cannot believe that God would "exact day labor" from a man (Milton) "light denied" (l.7).

Just like Sonnet 7, however, Sonnet 19 turns at the octave/sestet division; at line 9 in both sonnets the speaker begins to extract himself from the vision of belatedness proposed by the first eight lines, and moves into the alternative, expansive visions of lines 9-14. The clamor of near-despair, and its despairing message (ll.1-8 in both sonnets) becomes in Sonnet 19 a "murmur" (l.9). That is, Milton characterizes it as a murmur from the mouth of patience: "but patience to prevent / That murmur soon replies" (ll.8-9). It is possible that murmur here suggests a dual analogy: the murmur of Satan, and the murmur (rather than the quake) of the earth. Both are perennial forces, but diminished in form, quieted to the background by a bona fide appeal to patience.[185] Thereafter, Milton calls himself to right attention by reminding himself that "God doth not need / Either man's work or his own gifts." Necessarily, the reminder begs the question (well, what does God require then?) that the following two lines address, "Who best / Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best" (ll.10-11).[186] The lines echo back to the "Nativity Ode" ("Bright-harnessed angels sit in order serviceable") and forward to the triumphantly

[185] Cf. *Paradise Lost* 4: "He [Satan] mounted scale aloft: nor more; but fled / Murmuring and with him fled the shades of night" (4.1014-15); "With gentle voice, I thought it thine; it said / Why sleep'st thou Eve? Now is the pleasant time" (5.37-39). In these lines Eve recounts Satan whispering in her dreams.

[186] Cf. Matthew 11.29-30: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

patient conclusion of Sonnet 19, "They also serve who only stand and wait" (l.14). With this line Milton has completed the transfer of waiting, from the angelic realm, through the excessively idealized human realm, to the merely human realm. If in "Nativity Ode" waiting is the disposition of angels, in Sonnet 19 it has become the disposition of men and women and poets, Milton foremost among them.

However, the line ("They also serve who only stand and wait") in its very syntax begs a critical question: how is it that waiting serves? We know "they" serve because serve comes first in the sentence, unadorned to describe what "they" do. And we learn at the conclusion of the sentence that their service is performed by "waiting." To know how they serve then—to know it mechanically—depends upon the quality of the waiting, of what that waiting is comprised.

The answer to this question brings us to the second key motif in Milton's conception of obedience: hearing. It is listening that promotes waiting to the potential rank of service. Then it is hearing that makes of waiting, service. One serves by waiting to hear what is, in terms of service, to be heard. In other words, one waits to hear the will of God. The service is rendered legitimate, however, not by the hearing (the intended *outcome*) of the waiting, but by the quality of the waiting itself.[187] The quality of the waiting is rapt listening, a vigil illustrative of the Great Commandment in the Synoptic Gospels, and the revisionary New Commandment in the Gospel of John.[188] In Matthew

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[187] Cf. Acts 1.7: "And he [Christ] said unto them, it is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power."

[188] Shema refers to the first command in the Synoptic versions (to love the Lord thy God); the Great Commandment refers to the second command, in John's revisioning of the Shema (to love thy neighbor as thyself). In the Hebrew, Shema is a central prayer of Judaism, expressive of the foundational commitment of monotheism, and found in Deuteronomy 6.4-5: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

Jesus' words are given as: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22.37-38).[189] The New Commandment of the Gospel of John is: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13.34). In Book 4 of *Paradise Regained*, the Son cites the New Commandment to illuminate the force and reason of his waiting, and thus to refute Satan's temptation to rush:

> But I endure the time, till which expired,
> Thou hast permission on me. It is written
> The first of all commandments, 'Thou shalt worship
> The Lord thy God, and only him shalt serve.'
> (*PR* 4.174-77)

Whenever Milton uses the motif of waiting, hearing is always, if sometimes silently, being used as well. In those cases in which waiting is used without explicit reference to hearing, hearing is an implied motif, as the soul of waiting. In those cases in which hearing is written, it is done so in reference to waiting. Further, hearing as a motif is given both by the word itself ("hearing") and by its associative emblem, "ear(s)."

In the "Nativity Ode" Milton asks (the asking is a kind of ordering prayer) the "crystal spheres" to "once bless our human ears" (ll.125-26). Crystal spheres refers to the music of the spheres, the angelic harmony usually beyond the realm of human hearing.[190] So the disposition of the hearing is angelic in the Ode, just as the disposition of waiting was

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[189] Cf. Mark 12.30-31: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"; and Luke 10.27: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."

[190] As the editors of the Modern Library Milton point out, "Each of the planetary spheres was believed to produce a unique note of the overall 'music of the spheres' normally inaudible on the fallen Earth. Here Milton imagines that vast music joining in the higher harmony of the *angelic symphony*" (MLM 24, n.125).

angelic. Further, the object of the hearing is itself angelic, belongs to and comes from that higher realm.

Like waiting, hearing oriented in this fashion—as a kind of prayerful longing to hear divine harmony, figured as external and far—appears throughout and is developed in Milton's early poems: as for example, in "The Passion" (ll.1-2), *Arcades* (ll.62-64), "At a Solemn Music" (ll.17-24) and "Upon the Circumcision" (ll.1-3).[191] The speaker in all of these poems (versions of Milton as a young man) waits to hear the music of the spheres, and understands that "melodious noise" as external, far. The point bears repeating because it indicates that hearing, as waiting before it, is first formulated by Milton as an angelic disposition (a profound otherness, second only to the otherness of God). The speaker in these poems does not pray so much to be angelic, so to hear the harmonious sphere, as to be either visited by the spheres as by an angel, or momentarily possessed by the angelic spirit capable of hearing the harmonious sphere.

Having transferred his motif of waiting from the angelic to the human, Milton does the same with hearing. The work of transference begins in the early prose tracts, the workshops for Milton's mature concept of obedience, thus of its requisite mechanism, timing, thus of waiting, hearing, stepping. The transfer made is an inward turn, resonant with Milton's prioritization of conscience, in terms of obedience. The formulation is made negatively in *Reason of Church Government* (1642), in which Milton addresses his

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[191] "Erewhile of music, and ethereal mirth, / Wherewith the stage of air and earth did ring" ("The Passion" ll.1-2); "then listen I / To the celestial sirens' harmony, / That sit upon the nine enfolded spheres" (*Arcades* ll.62-64); "That we on earth with undiscording voice / May rightly answer that melodious noise; / As once we did, till disproportioned sin / Jarred against nature's chime, and with harsh din / Broke the fair music that all creatures made / To their Great Lord, whose love their motion swayed/In perfect diapason, whilst the stood / In first obedience" ("At a Solemn Music" ll.17-24); "Ye flaming Powers, and winged warriors bright, / That erst with music, and triumphant song / First heard by happy watchful shepherds' ear" ("Upon the Circumcision" ll.1-3).

fundamental reason for writing the tract, more generally for entering the dispute over prelacy (one might say, for stepping in):

> But this I foresee, that should the Church be brought under heavy oppression, and God have given me ability the while to reason against that man that should be the author of so foul a deed, or should she by blessing from above on the industry and courage of faithfull men change this her distracted estate into better daies without the least furtherance or contribution of those few talents which God at that present had lent me, *I foresee what stories I should heare within my selfe*.[192]
>
> (Yale 1:804)

In other words, in his disposition of bright attention—serving by waiting—Milton *heard* (the version is obviously Milton's, thus strategic and maybe self-valorizing). What he heard at this point recounted in *RCG,* is not however the clarion absolute of divine will, but some faint sound of it powered by visionary fear ("I foresee") of disobedience, as threatening a potential fate for burying talent, as it is in Sonnet 19. So Milton's timing—from waiting, to hearing, to stepping (in this case, stepping into the political and ecclesiological disputes of his age)—in part results from his now elusively but nonetheless *persuasive* fear of its absence, of missed timing. By extension, one might suggest that Milton's visionary obedience develops out of his vision of disobedience.[193]

It is important to note that hearing, as a motif developed by Milton, transpires in worlds of noise, from the fantastic clamor of *Masque* to the very real and pitched discordancy of England on the verge of civil war, and the momentous events following it—the "barbarous dissonance" of Restoration culture Milton implicitly invokes in the invocation to Book 7 of *Paradise Lost* (7.32). That is, the context for hearing (as motif of Milton's concept of timing) is noise, the sheer punishing din within which one must

[192] Milton's mention of "talents" hearkens back to his meditation on that subject in Sonnet 19.

[193] The point then would seem to suggest that *Paradise Lost* (the epic of disobedience) necessarily came before *Paradise Regained* (the brief epic of obedience).

discern the beckoning of divine will. And since the motif of hearing becomes figured inwardly by Milton, the context of noise must also be figured inwardly. Otherwise, the hearing would be without its justifying context. This work—the internal realization of hearing as productive aspect of timing, and the interiorizing of noise as the necessary context—is the work of the Son in *Paradise Regained*. Hearing corresponds to his divine nature; noise to his human nature. To be both fully divine and human, the Son must be both the singular beneficiary of divine will, and the just as singular vessel of human noise. The Son's timing develops out of his dual condition, or rather out of the condition (waiting), the act (hearing), and the context (noise). Moreover, it is in the Son's experience of his dual condition that his timing begins.[194]

Kairos

This section focuses on a single Greek concept, *kairos*, used here along poetic, philosophical, and theological lines, and less so as a term and strategy of rhetoric. To understand Miltonic timing, requires not only an understanding of *kairos,* but also of the way Milton's concept of timing derives from *kairos*, most especially as it is used by Plato and by Paul.[195]

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[194] Cf. *Paradise Regained* 1.196-99.

[195] Laurie Zwicky established the importance of *kairos* in "Kairos in *Paradise Regained*: The Divine Plan." Northrop Frye pointed the way to a discussion of Milton and *kairos* generally in *The Return to Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics*, 136. Edward Tayler *Milton's Poetry: Its Development in Time* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1979) remains an indispensable guide to the development of Milton's idea of time and concept of timing, from the "Nativity Ode" to *Samson Agonistes*. Perhaps most influentially, Tayler argued that the distinction between *kairos* and *chronos* is at the heart of Milton's thinking on time (27-149). Following Tayler, Michael Schoenfeldt argues for the importance of the distinction between *kairos* and *chronos* in Milton's work. Schoenfeldt identifies *kairos* as the prelapsarian temporal situation and *chronos* as the postlapsarian temporal situation, or more simply put, what we call time. Schoenfeldt

Kairos is a nimble term, capable of suggesting much at once. For classicist William H. Race, *kairos,* simply put, is "one of the most interesting—and *elusive*—words in Greek.[196] To John R. Wilson, *kairos* is a "beautifully flexible word of moral and aesthetic significance."[197] And long before both scholars, Aristotle defined *kairos* as simply "the good in the category of time."[198]

The conceptual heritage of the word is complex, with antecedents in Homer's epics and also Hesiod's *Works and Days* (c.750-650 BCE).[199] The term becomes a concept as such around the 5th century BCE. Pindar (522-443 BCE) and the Greek tragedians adopt the term as a literary motif, the itinerant Sophists as a term of rhetoric, as does Isocrates (436-383 BCE), who nonetheless defined himself against the Sophists; Plato (428-348 BCE), perhaps borrowing the term from the Sophists, deploys it as a term

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cautions against an overestimation of the distinction however, because of its neat reductiveness. In other words, the distinction is accurate, if a bit of a simplification. See Schoenfeldt, "Obedience and Autonomy in *Paradise Lost*," in *A Companion to Milton*, edited by Thomas N. Corns (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 363-76. For the importance of *kairos* in *Paradise Regained*, see especially, Mary Ann Radzinowicz, *Milton's Epics and the Book of Psalms*, 62-69; Teskey, *DM*, 164-76; and Zwicky, "Kairos in *Paradise Regained*: The Divine Plan," 271-77. Ken Hiltner argues that the temptations of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes* cannot be understood without continual reference to *kairos* (I agree): see Hiltner, *Milton and Ecology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 113-24.

[196] William H. Race, "The Word Kairos in Greek Drama," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 111 (1980), 197. In the same article, Race notes that it is "often impossible to isolate one sense of such a complex word as *kairos*" (198). From a conceptual perspective, particularly with regard to Miltonic *kairos*, this complexity (and its attendant resistance to reducibility) is the point.

[197] John R. Wilson, "Kairos as 'Due Measure,'" *Glotta* 58 (1980), 177.

[198] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* 1.4, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941).

[199] A discussion of the complex, antecedental relationship of Homeric epic to *kairos* follows below. Hesiod's use of *kairos* appears in *Works and Days*: "Do not put all your goods in hallow ships; leave the greater part behind, and put the lesser part on board; for it is a bad business to meet with disaster among the waves of the sea, as it is bad if you put too great a load on your wagon and break the axle, and your goods are spoiled. *Observe due measure:* and proportion is best in all things" (*Works and Days* 694, emphasis added). See Hesiod, *The Works and Days*; *Theogony*; *The Shield of Herakles*, translated by Richard Lattimore (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

denoting political expertise, along the lines of "correct timing."[200] Thereafter, the word appears and is decisive in the Gospel of John (7.6), in reference to the timing of Christ and of his mission, and then is established by Paul as a fundamental if somewhat elusive aspect of Christian theology.[201]

In English, the word has been translated variously as: due measure, fitness, opportunity, mark, target, opening, improvisatory readiness, and in the definition that most fully accords with Milton's usage (not least for including so many of the other connotations), the moment of opening rightness.[202] All of these translations—what we

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[200] I discuss below the use of *kairos* by Pindar, Aeschylus, Euripides, Plato, and Paul, all of whom Milton read extensively. For Isocrates' use of *kairos*, see *Panathanaicus and Against the Sophists*, in volume 2 of *Isocrates*, translated by George Norlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929). For a gloss of Isocratic *kairos*, see Michael Cahn, "Reading Rhetoric Rhetorically," *Rhetorica* 7.2 (Spring 1989), 133. For the development of *kairos* in Ancient Greece and Rome, I am indebted to Richard Broxton Onians, *The Origins of European Thought: about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), especially 343-51.

[201] Cf. 1 Timothy 6.14-15.

[202] In the last forty years there has been a good deal of work done on *kairos*, most notably by rhetoric and composition scholars. Their interest in *kairos* dates to James Kinneavy, *A Theory of Discourse* (1972; rpt. New York: W.W. Norton, 1983). See also Kinneavy, "Kairos: A Neglected Concept in Classical Rhetoric," in *Rhetoric and Praxis: The Contribution of Classical Rhetoric to Practical Reasoning*, edited by Jeanne Dietz Moss (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 1983), 79-105; and *The Greek Rhetorical Origins of Christian Faith: An Inquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). For more recent studies, see Eric C. White, *Kaironomia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), esp. 3-13; Phillip Siporia and James S. Baumlin, eds., *Rhetoric and Kairos: Essays in History, Theory, and Praxis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002); and Christopher J. Keller and Christian Weiser, eds., *The Locations of Composition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002). In *The Locations of Composition* see especially Thomas Rickert, "Inventions in the Wild: On Locating Kairos in Space-Time," 71-89. Rickert provides a brief overview of the difficulties attendant with *kairos* (e.g., its resistance to formalization and to mastery), and rehearses the history of the word, and the main arguments about it in the field of rhetoric and composition. According to Rickert, "in most of the scholarship that has appeared since Kinneavy's call, *kairos* is understood more or less in line with his original definition: *kairos* 'is the right or opportune time to do something'" (Rickert, 71; Kinneavy, "Kairos: A Neglected Concept in Classical Rhetoric, 80). In my view Kinneavy's definition is an overly plainspoken rendering (perhaps Kinneavy had *Paradise Regained* in mind!), because by ending the form with "something" a vague yet limited specific, Kinneavy's translation empties the term of its expansiveness. Of course, his translation may be apt along rhetorical lines, and among scholars of rhetoric and composition. Because I am interested in the poetic, philosophical, and theological sense of the word, more precisely, in Miltonic *kairos*, I prefer Gordon Teskey's formulation, "moment of opening rightness" (*DM,*169). Finally it should be noted that in William Race's view, most translators and commentators have overemphasized the temporal sense of the word at the expense of its normative sense. As an example, Race translates *kairos* in its normative sense as "proper

might think of as connotative translations—trace back to the technical language of archery and weaving.

The derivation from both archery and weaving is not incidental. As R.B. Onians points out, there is an analogy in Ancient Greek culture between the archer and the weaver.[203] In the discourse of archery, *kairos* referred to the exact and narrow path an arrow must take to strike its target, the target itself, and the power sufficient to penetrate that target. In Homeric epic (thereafter in Euripides' tragedies) the word *kairos*, however, appears only once, in adjectival form (*kairion*) to describe "that place in the body where a weapon could easily penetrate to the life within."[204] Drawing on this sense of the word, the Romans translated *kairos* as *tempus*. The stem of the word retains the definitional association "of time." The word itself translates as "the temples of the head," the most vulnerable part of the skull.[205] From the Roman *tempus* derives the English "temple." In English, "temple" refers both to a religious dwelling and to that part of the human skull. They are associative, and can without strain be seen as analogies for each other.

Like archery, weaving also depends on timing. In weaving, there is the exact moment when the weaver must pull the woof-thread through the warp (the momentary opening of the cloth) with precision and with a kind of delicate force. Archery penetrates

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amount," and offers several examples, drawn primarily from Aeschylus and Euripides. Most recently however, Melissa Lane has argued against Race, noting that "even where, as sometimes happens, the explicit reference (to *kairos*) is not temporal, temporality provides a necessary context in almost all cases for the notion of the *kairos* to make sense": Lane, *Method and Politics in Plato's* Statesman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 132. See also 132-35, in which Lane considers each of Race's "normative" examples.

[203] Onians, 347.

[204] Ibid., 344. *Kairion* appears in the *Iliad* 8.83-84.

[205] See "*tempus*" in *Latin Dictionary and Grammar Aid*, http://archives.nd.edu/latgramm.htm.

a mark. Weaving binds a cloth.[206] The success of both moments depends upon skill and attention. The former is easily enough understood: skill is the obvious part and intended outcome of technique. But the latter—attention—what we might think of as a rapt and steady waiting for the moment, is the uncanny aspect of technique, in terms of *kairos*. It is entirely implicit: the right attentiveness issues solely from one's internal disposition, one's internal readiness to *recognize*. This kind of called-for attention squared with Milton's emphasis on individual conscience, in terms of obedience.

From their conceptual beginnings in the language of archery and weaving, the lexical senses of *kairos* began to take on analogical possibilities. The analogy derived from archery was martial; the analogy derived from weaving, artistic, the weave of storytelling. Both concern community; the former, its defense (the army of archers defends the community), and the latter its sense (the story the teller tells—the weaver weaves—makes sense of the community to itself, and thus, gives the community its sense). Archery is performed in the public sphere: in games, in war. Weaving is done in the private sphere: in enclosed inner rooms. Importantly, for the Greeks at least, the former activity is male, designating work men do, and the latter is female, designating work women do.[207] What correlates the two activities across the threshold of public and private, external and internal, is the similarity of skill required, and the synonymity of attention required. This correlation speaks to the origin of *kairos.*

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[206] Although I do not have the space here to draw out its implications fully in terms of my argument, an observation Onians makes is nonetheless worth including: "In antiquity owing to the lack of mechanical devices, the insertion of woof-threads was a tedious business, so that cheaper cloths tended to have very few of the former in proportion to the threads of the warp. The better the cloth, the greater the relative number of woof-threads in a short length" (339). By analogy, the more a thing is made by *kairos*—by moments of opening rightness—the more durable it is.

[207] Cf. *Iliad* 1.409-13.

In both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* archery serves not only a military function, but a ritualistic function at critical moments of heroic and heroically broken emotion.[208] Further, archery characterizes both heroes at these critical moments. In the *Iliad*, Achilles rests his exhausted army and orders funeral games to honor Patroclus. These games are competitions, performed by soldiers. More to the point, they are successive displays of martial skill intended to counter death's annihilating critique of human vulnerability, especially that aspect of humanity which loves, as Achilles loved Patroclus. Archery is the seventh and penultimate event. In Robert Fagles' translation, the moment reads:

> Archery next—
> And again Achilles set out iron, dark gray trophies,
> Ten double-headed axes, ten with single heads.
> He stepped the mast of a dark-prowed man-of-war
> Far down the beach and tethered a fluttering dove
> Atop the pole, its foot looped with a light cord,
> Then challenged men to shoot and hit that mark.[209]

In the *Odyssey* archery's role is decisive twice, and as in the *Iliad*, the moments of archery's significance come near the end of the epic.[210] In Book 21, Penelope, defined as weaver, sets Odysseus' bow unstrung before the suitors, and delivers her ultimatum:

> So, to arms, my gallants!
> Here is the prize at issue, right before you, look—
> I set before you the great bow of King Odysseus now!
> The hand that can string this bow with greatest ease,
> That shoots an arrow clean through all twelve axes—
> he is the man I follow, yes, forsaking this house

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[208] For a good discussion of archery in the Homeric epics, see Caroline Sunderland, "Archery in the Homeric Epics," *Classics Ireland* 8 (2001), 111-20.

[209] Homer, *Iliad*, translated by Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Classics, 1998), 23.941-47. All subsequent citations are from this edition unless otherwise noted.

[210] The funeral games for Patroclus appear in the penultimate book of the *Iliad*. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus strings the bow in Book 21, and with it slaughters the suitors in Book 22.

Where I was once bride.[211]

Of course, it is the hand of Odysseus—the apparent hand of a grubby beggar to the suitors, one of whom mocks him as the "connoisseur of bows"—that strings the bow, with "virtuoso ease" (only Odysseus can string Odysseus' bow!). At the very moment that Odysseus strings the bow, "Zeus cracked the sky with a bolt, his blazing sign."[212] The moment, divinely sanctioned—a moment of opening rightness, *but* externally apprehended—was now. Odysseus hears it, and acts:

> He snatched a winged arrow lying bare on the board—
> the rest still bristled deep inside the quiver,
> soon to be tasted by all the feasters there.
> Setting shaft on the handgrip, drawing the notch
> and bowstring back, back…right from his stool,
> just as he sat but aiming straight and true, he let fly—
> and never missing an ax from the first ax-handle
> clean on through to the last and out
> the shaft with its weighted brazen head shot free![213]

In the following book, Odysseus empties his quiver (as l.465 foreshadows, "soon to be tasted by all the feasters there"), slaughtering the suitors in the hall. The arrows hit their many marks.

Just as archery plays a significant role for men in both epics, weaving plays a significant role for women in both epics: "In the Homeric poems all women, including queens and goddesses, are either specifically described or said to be involved in the spinning of wool or the creation of cloth on their looms."[214] The women in both epics are

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[211] Homer, *Odyssey*, translated by Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Classics, 1999), 21.83-89. All subsequent citations are from this edition unless otherwise noted.

[212] *Odyssey* 21.460.

[213] Ibid. 21.463-71.

characterized by their weaving. So they are characterized by, and embody a principal theme of, Homeric epic. The first time we meet Helen of Troy she appears as a figure of deep privacy, working the loom:

> And Iris came on Helen in her rooms…
> Weaving a growing web, a dark red folding robe,
> Working into the weft the endless bloody struggles.[215]

In the *Odyssey*, Penelope—in her way as cunning as her husband—deploys weaving as both delay tactic and red herring to keep the suitors at bay.[216] Famously, by day she weaves, by night unravels. Speaking for all the deceived and held-back suitors, Antinous declaims:

> This was her greatest masterpiece of guile:
> she set up a great loom in the royal halls
> and she began to weave, and the weaving finespun,
> the yards endless, and she would lead us on: 'Young men,
> my suitors, now that King Odysseus is no more,
> go slowly, keen as your are to marry me, until
> I can finish off the web…
> so my weaving won't all fray and come to nothing.
> This is a shroud for old Laertes.[217]

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[214] Maria C. Pantelia, "Spinning and Weaving: Ideas of Domestic Order in Homer," *American Journal of Philology* 114.4 (Winter, 1993), 493. Pantelia summarizes the shared literary purpose of weaving in both epics: "Helen weaves while a war is being fought for her sake and is interrupted at the moment when her future apparently about to be determined by the duel between her two husbands. Andromache weaves while Hector is fighting, and her work is interrupted by the news of his death. Penelope weaves Laertes' shroud and unravels it at night in order to maintain her domestic stability" (398). In other words weaving, thematically, concerns domestic stability, or its lack brought on either by war (*Iliad)* or by exile *(Odyssey).*

[215] *Iliad* 3.150-52. Iris is the goddess of the rainbow, and messenger of the Olympian Gods. Hector's wife, Andromache, also weaves. But her weaving does not extend to analogy, perhaps to allegory as Helen's does. Or perhaps one might also say, her weaving as analogous activity does not concern the world of war but the world of what is decidedly not war: At the moment of Hector's death, Andromache is weaving flowers: "…but the wife of Hector / had not heard a thing. No messenger brought the truth/ of how her husband made his stand outside the gates. / She was weaving at her loom, deep in the high halls / working flowered braiding into a dark red folding robe" (22.514-18).

[216] Antinous describes Penelope as "the matchless queen of cunning" (*Odyssey* 2.95).

[217] *Odyssey* 2.101-09.

But the shroud is for no one (it is not even properly a shroud, but an activity to stop time, or perhaps the eventfulness of time). Antinous continues:

> So by day she'd weave at her great and growing web—
> by night, by the light of torches set beside her,
> she would unravel all she'd done. Three whole years
> she deceived us blind, seduced us with this scheme…
> Then, when the wheeling seasons brought the fourth year on,
> one of her women, in on the queen's secret, told the truth
> and we caught her in the act—unweaving her gorgeous web.[218]

As long as Penelope weaves a shroud for unweaving, she controls her destiny. It is an incredible balancing act, performed in a space of maximum dialectical compression. That is, making and unmaking, doing and undoing compress to a unified event. Penelope makes what she is unmaking, and vice-versa.

So weaving and archery inform both Homeric epics, to a degree organize their narrative arcs, and exemplify their thematic concerns. However, they are not yet in Homer's epics consubstantial with or used to indicate *kairos*. That is, they are not yet thematically denotative of *kairos*.[219] Thus, in Homer we cannot (yet) read archery and weaving through the lens of *kairos*. Instead, we may think of archery and weaving as the conceptual forces out of which *kairos* develops as a literary concept, moreover as an attribute of what will become the Christian idea of *logos*, the expressive will of God in history embodied by Christ.[220]

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[218] Ibid., 2.115-21.

[219] See Onians, 343.

[220] In ancient everyday Greek, *logos* meant something like the speech of reason. Heraclitus (534-475 BCE) introduced *logos* to philosophy, as a philosophical term denoting the *principle* of order. In other words, Heraclitus expanded the term to take in the cosmos. See *Heraclitus: Fragments,* translated by T. M. Robinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), especially Fr. 1, 2 and 50. Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE-40 CE), a Hellenized Jew, brought the term to Judaism and used it to indicate the animating principle of the divine. By means of allegory (which he learned from the stoics) Philo synthesized the Hellenic abstraction with the Hebrew God. For a good overview of Philo's life and thought, see Marian Hiller,

Primarily, it is Pindar and the Greek tragedians who extract *kairos* from the technical language of archery and weaving, and make of it a literary motif; Plato, borrowing both from the Sophists and from Pindar, who employs it as a political term; and Paul who turns it into a central concept of Christian theology.[221] Pindar, self-claimed poet of the Muses, believed that poets (himself, for instance) were born to it, just as athletes were born to it.[222] That is, the gift of poetry as of athletics was inherent, a gift from the gods without which poetic or athletic greatness could not be achieved.[223] In the third *Nemean Ode*, Pindar writes:

> A man has much weight if glory belongs to his breed.
> But whoso needs lessons
> His spirit blows here and there in the dark,

"Philo of Alexandria (c.20 BCE-40 CE)," in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://www.utm.edu. In early Christianity Christ became identified as the *logos*, most especially in the Gospel of John. See John 1.1: "In the beginning was the Word and the word as with God, and the Word was God"; and John 1.14: "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

[221] See Onians, 343-51. For Paul's Christianization of *kairos* (a project with distinct echoes of Philo), see especially Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, translated by Patricia Daley (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

[222] Quintilian considered Pindar the greatest "of the nine lyric poets" of Hellenic Greece (the others are Alcman, Alcaeus, Anacreon, Bacchylides, Ibycus, Sappho, Simonides, and Stesichorus), "far the greatest, for inspiration, magnificence, *sententiae*, Figures, a rich stock of words and ideas, and a real flood of Eloquence": see *The Orator's Education*, translated by Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001), 10.1.6. It is worth noting, as C.M. Bowra does, that "Pindar does not mean that it is not necessary for a poet to study and master his art, but he does mean that it is useless for him to try to do so unless he has an inborn genius for it": Bowra, *Pindar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 8.

[223] There is a vast amount of Pindaric scholarship. I am indebted especially to William H. Race's Introduction to his edition of Pindar's *Odes*: see *Pindar's Odes*, translated by William H. Race (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 1-42. For a good general study of Pindar, see Bowra, *Pindar*. For more recent studies, see for example R.A. Swanson's introduction to his edition of *Pindar's Odes* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), xxv – xlx; Thomas K. Hubbard, *The Pindaric Mind*: *A Study of Logical Structure in Early Greek Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 1985); Hugh-Lloyd Jones, "Pindar," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 68 (1982), 139-63. In particular, Jones points to the difficulty of assessing the intentions of the speaker (public, subjective?) in the *Odes*. Mary Lefkowitz addresses this problem in "Autobiographical Fiction in Pindar," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 84 (1980): 29-49. Lefkowitz argues that the Pindaric "I" is neither *merely* bardic nor personal, neither public nor subjective. Instead, Lefkowitz writes, "the combative tone and 'personal' references express the poet's understanding of the meaning of victory; that in these statements he describes himself as taking a combatant's risks, sharing his determination, experiencing his sense of isolation" (30). Milton describes his efforts in similar, that is, Pindaric terms.

Nor ever enters he the lists with sure foot,
Tho' countless the glories his futile fancy savours.
(*Nemean Odes* 3.40-42)

In the ninth *Olympian Ode*, he writes:

What nature gives is always the strongest, but many
Have tried to win renown among men
By taking lessons in prowess;
If God is not there, each thing
Is no worse for being kept silent.[224]
(*Olympian Odes* 9.100-04, emphasis added)

Milton describes his efforts in similar, that is, Pindaric terms. The opening invocation to the Muse in *Paradise Lost* is implicitly Pindaric. It performs what Harold Bloom has called the "high sense of Pindaric invocation summoning the poetic powers, the sense of glory,"[225] as for example when Milton claims his sacred purpose: "that with no middle flight intends to soar / Above th'Aonian mount, while it pursues / Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme. / … / That to the highth of this great argument / I may assert eternal providence, / And justify the ways of God to men" (*PL* 1.14-16, 24-26). In *Il Penseroso* Milton describes the Pindaric poet's heroic isolation:

Or let my lamp at midnight hour,
Be seen in some high lonely tow'r
Where I may oft outwatch the Bear,
With thrice-great Hermes, or unsphere
The spirit of Plato to unfold
What worlds, or what vast regions hold
The immortal mind that hath forsook
Her mansion in this fleshly nook.
(*Il Penseroso* ll.85-92)

And in *Reason of Church Government,* Milton writes of his determination, of his coming struggle, and of his victory:

[224] These illustrative examples are taken from Bowra, *Pindar*, 7.

[225] Harold Bloom, interviewed in Robert Moynihan, ed., *A Recent Imagining: Interviews with Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller and Paul de Man* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1986), 4.

> I began thus farre to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home, and not lesse to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intent study (which I take to be my portion in this life) joyn'd with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die. (Yale 1:810)

In *Reason of Church Government* also, Milton reiterates the Pindaric claim: "These abilities, wheresoever they be found, are the inspired guift of God" (Yale 1:816).[226]

For Pindar that which distinguishes the true poet (just as it distinguishes the true athlete) is *kairos*. Additionally, the source of the poet's genuine authority derives from *kairos*. Of his own odes, Pindar writes: "I have lighted upon many themes, hitting the *kairos* with no false word."[227] The claim is not so much a boast by Pindar (although that is indubitably how it sounds to our ears) but a justification of himself as a poet, thus an argument for the validity of his poetic authority. In brief, what Pindar claims is what Pindar takes to be the signal distinction of poetry: *kairos*. This distinction poetry shares with victory, generally, and is that which binds all human victoriousness together.[228] Further, because *kairos* is about recognizing the moment of opening rightness, it is a skill as much about waiting, in a state of readiness, for the moment. For Pindar then, *kairos* is fundamentally "the moment of *ripeness which requires long anticipation*."[229] This conception of *kairos* is especially resonant with Milton's sense of it, particularly with his motif of waiting. One recalls the closing line of Sonnet 19 ("They also serve who only stand and wait"), the closing line of "Nativity Ode" ("Bright-harnessed angels sit in order

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[226] In the paragraph leading up to the declaration quoted, Milton invokes Pindar.

[227] Pindar, *Nemean Odes* 1.18. The translation given here is by Onians (343).

[228] See Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 8.25-34; and Lefkowitz, 48.

[229] Hubbard, *The Pindaric Mind*, 24.

serviceable"), and Milton's profession of his poetic destiny in *Reason of Church Government*:

> Neither doe I think it shame to covnant with any knowing reader, that for some few yeers yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be rays'd from the heart of youth or the vapours of wine, like that which flows at wast from the pen of some vulgar Amorist or the trencher fury of a riming parasite, nor to be obtain'd by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternall Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallow'd fire of his Altar to touch and pacify the lips of whom he pleases.
>
> (Yale 1:820-21)

So Pindar utilizes *kairos* to designate the true poet and true poetry, a move that influenced Milton deeply. Just as influential is the similar move Plato makes on behalf of political philosophy—really of leadership itself—in the *Statesman*, in which Plato remakes the term for philosophy by conflating both the Sophists' sense of the term (as that opportune moment for winning an argument) and Pindar's sense of the term.[230]

The central concern of the *Statesman* is the nature of political expertise and the authority which justifiably denotes that expertise.[231] If in the *Republic* the question of political expertise resolves to those who have a comprehensive understanding of the Good (these would be Plato's philosopher-kings), a category of dubious practical-political applicability, in the *Statesman* the question of political expertise is redistributed, as it were, to include not just knowledge (of the Good), but usage, in time, of that

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[230] For a discussion of Milton's reading of *Statesman*, see Herbert Agar, *Milton and Plato* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1928).

[231] It is worth noting that although Socrates appears at the very beginning of the *Statesman,* in the typically Platonic set-up to the philosophical dialogue proper, he disappears once the dialogue begins. Thereafter, the Socratic character and function is taken over by the Eleatic Stranger (appearing similarly in the *Sophist*), in dialogue with Young Socrates (no relation). For a perceptive and helpful reading of *Statesman*, particularly the place of *kairos* in Plato's concepts of political skill and authority, see M.S. Lane, *Method and Politics in Plato's* Statesman, esp. 1-11, 99-136, 139-45, and 163-81. My understanding of the dialogue, and to *kairos* in it, is indebted to Lane.

knowledge. So that the idea of political expertise depends not just on what one knows, but upon how one times the deployment of what one knows, in a near endless host of specific instances. As Melissa Lane writes,

> Given how many forms of expertise there are in the city—cobblers, generals, navigators and so on—two questions must be asked about the postulate of a purely political expertise. First, what does it know? Second, how does it rule? The *Statesman* answers these questions. . .by distinguishing between knowing what to do and knowing when to do it . . .The dialogue emphasizes time as the dimension of political action. Political expertise is neither meta-knowledge nor another species of knowledge, but rather knowledge between other forms of knowledge and the temporal demands of the moment of action, or the *kairos*.[232]

In other words, Plato recognizes *kairos* as *the* determinant for political authority, "exalted against the static and inflexible authority of the written and unwritten laws."[233]

The efficacy of Plato's claim for politics as such requires that *kairos* be not only a reality, but verifiable *as* a reality in the decision-making (in the opportune decision-making) of the political expert. Although the idea of such an elusive concept as *kairos* being *asserted* as reality may be difficult to entertain from our current perspective, this is precisely what the *Statesman* entails, and what it purports to show (or perhaps more accurately, what the Eleatic Stranger purports and Young Socrates seconds).

The dialogue shows this first by way of an analogy between statesmanship and weaving (279b-287e). According to the Eleatic Stranger (and to Young Socrates) both

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[232] Lane, 3-4.

[233] Ibid., 4. Lane is basing her interpretation here on *Statesman* 294b: "Law can never issue an injunction binding on all which really embodies what is best for each; it cannot prescribe with perfect accuracy what is good and right for each member of the community at any one time"; and 294c, "It is impossible, then, for something invariable and unqualified to deal satisfactorily with what is never uniform and constant." Unless otherwise noted, all citations to *Statesman* are from J.B. Skemp's translation, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

activities depend principally upon *due measure* for their success (283e, 284e, 285a), and concern the *binding together* of seemingly disparate elements (285b, 295b). The question that immediately arises is how due measure can possibly and consistently be imagined, if not achieved in such an overwhelmingly diverse field of occupations and moments. The Eleatic Stranger asks: "How could any lawgiver [whether king, constitution or democracy][234] be capable of prescribing every act of a particular individual and sit at his side, so to speak, all through his life and tell him just what to do?" (295b). Here the Eleatic Stranger's deconstruction of the law is accomplished by pointing out its *a priori* inability to respond accurately to the exigencies of any given instance. For the Eleatic Stranger this fundamental inability of the law remains the case precisely because it is put forth *against* the very idea of "one true and scientific ruler" (301c). Thus, it makes no difference if the form of governance is an oligarchy, an aristocracy, or a democracy (all three of which are for the Eleatic Stranger degraded forms). However, the very deficiency of the law in terms of its application for good governance in all specific instances necessitates at the least an ideal presence of some other governing force superior to the mere blunt application of law, if not to govern at least to use as a reference point for governance. This ideal presence would of course be the ideal ruler, whose domain would be the world, every inch and person of which the ideal ruler would be prepared to know *in time* and *specifically*. To Young Socrates the Eleatic Stranger imagines the reign of ideal presence: "It remains true that if the ideal ruler we have described were to appear on earth he would be acclaimed, and he would spend his days guiding in strictest justice and perfect felicity that one and only true commonwealth

[234] See 291b.

worthy of the name" (301d). In other words, like Pindar's ideal poet, Plato's ideal statesman would be such by *kairos*.

By strictest justice the Eleatic Stranger means that every decision rendered by the ruler to every individual would accomplish justice, and thus would render an always ethically accurate judgment for the case at hand. In this speculation lies the Eleatic Stranger's definition of what he calls the kingly art. The strictest justice, so described, becomes the weave of perfectly recognized moments of time. All of these moments, rightly recognized, bind the community together. The emphasis on the singularity of every moment of time also provides the possible implication of the singularity of every individual's experience of time within the community. Further, the community as a corporate force also has its experience of time. "The perfect felicity" of the ideal ruler is his rendering of justice at all times, to individuals and to the community.[235] The question of how a corporate entity could survive intact—with any degree of rigor and structural dignity—the accurate distribution of justice to every individual in his specific moments becomes the critical question. The Eleatic Stranger does not answer this question in any practicable terms (perhaps it cannot be answered in such a way). Instead, he returns to his analogy of weaving in the hope of illuminating the character of ideal rule. "It [the ideal rule]," he says, "weaves all into its unified fabric, with perfect skill" (305e).

What is implied by the analogy is the issue of necessary priority in terms of the efficacy of the ideal rule. To follow the analogy, the structural integrity of the weaving does not depend solely or perhaps even primarily on the fabrics being woven, but on the weaving, on the strength and accuracy and binding power of the stitch. To illuminate this

[235] Cf. 305d: "The kingly art controls them according to its power to perceive the right occasions for undertaking and setting in motion the great enterprises of the state."

point, the Eleatic Stranger investigates the relationship between epithets (as he names them) and praiseworthy (or excellent) behavior.[236] Taking swiftness—of body and mind—as his first example of excellent behavior, the Stranger asks Young Socrates first if he has praised or heard praised such behavior (yes), and then if he remembers "the way in which the approval is expressed in all instances" (306d). For the moment Young Socrates confesses that he is unable to remember. In posing the question, the Stranger has left out a step in his chain of logic, and so Young Socrates is at first confronted by an abstraction beyond his comprehension. The Stranger begins again, this time including the step, and providing the answer at once: "We admire speed and intensity and vivacity in many forms of action and under all kinds of circumstances. But whether the swiftness of mind or body or the vibrant power of the voice is being praised, we always find ourselves using one word to praise it—the word 'vigorous.'"[237]

The Stranger then notes that "gentleness and quietness" (307a), epithets quite different from "vigorous," are also often used to praise instances of human behavior. To Young Socrates, the Stranger says,

> We constantly admire quietness and moderation, in processes of restrained thinking, in gentle deeds, in a smooth deep voice, in steady balance in movement, or in suitable restraint in artistic representation. Whenever we express such approval do we not use the expression 'controlled' to describe all these excellences rather than the word 'vigorous'?

The point the Stranger is making is that what constitutes praiseworthy behavior depends upon the activity and the situation. Thus what is praiseworthy as "vigorous" in one

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[236] By epithets, the Stranger means commendations, or superlative evaluations—descriptions of strong approval.

[237] The proposition bears a gentle conceit, for "vigorous" is used to suggest the *kind* of word issued for praise. That is, "vigorous" is used as a sign denoting itself and words like it, as this specific sense of epithet.

instance would be an abomination in another instance, an instance for example in which quietness would be the right epithet. As the Stranger puts it, "when we find either of these kinds of behavior appearing out of its *due time*, we have different names for each of them" (307b, emphasis added).

So to know what epithet to use for a given exemplary behavior requires recognition of the *instant* (activity and situation) of that behavior. From this proposition, the Stranger elaborates a like proposition in the realm of statesmanship. That is, the Stranger's discussion of epithet and behavior functions as a preparing (if not prophetic) analogy for his concluding discussion of statesmanship that immediately follows it, which the Stranger terms the description "of the kingly weaving process" (305e). The discussion progresses from epithet and behavior to a consideration of temperament, of conflicting temperaments (307d). As the Stranger points out, in trifling situations such a conflict of temperaments is of little importance. However, "when the conflict arises over matters of high public importance [e.g., war and peace] it becomes the most inimical of all the plagues which can threaten the life of a community" (307d). Accordingly, in such a situation those whose temperament disposes them to peace will argue for peace, *regardless* of the situation: "They conduct all their dealings with their fellow citizens on this principle [peace] and are prone to take the same line in foreign policy and preserve peace *at any price with foreign states*" (307e, emphasis added). Similarly, those whose temperament disposes them to war will argue for war, and be "forever dragging their cities into war and bringing them up against powerful foes on all sides just because they love a military existence too fiercely" (308a). As such, the two temperaments are in serious conflict with one another, even though each is necessary; or, as the Stranger puts

it, "We find that important parts of goodness are at variance with one another and that they set at variance the men in whom they predominate" (308b). For the Eleatic Stranger, this is the fundamental conundrum facing any given community or state. And the productive resolution of this tension can only recur to the ideal ruler, figured as the Statesman. This Statesman has both the responsibility and the ability to unify variance. He does so by the "royal weaving process" (309b), to the Eleatic Stranger an art predicated on the recognition and application of variant temperaments to their apt moments. In other words, statesmanship is an art of *kairos*.

In Christianity that art comes to designate Messianic time, the timing of the divine will in history. Messianic time suggests and is intended to be an overwhelmingly alternative interpretative frame: a sheer otherness, brought near, God as the Son of God. The interpretive frame is alternative, the divine other, because it is entirely predicated on perfect timing, a condition perhaps felt by faith, but otherwise illegible to human reason. Christ's life, death, and resurrection are the embodiment of this perfect timing, of what can with precision be known as divine *kairos*, an experience of temporality consonant with diapason—harmony—rather than with disobedience. When the Son says, "My time I told thee, (and that time for thee / Were better farthest off) is not yet come" (*PR* 3.396-97) he is simultaneously asserting the truth of his timing. It is this divine *kairos* that Satan does not understand.

Once the development of *kairos* into a literary, philosophical, and then a theological concept has occurred, archery and weaving, formerly merely suggestive of *kairos*, become analogies for *kairos*. In other words, archery and weaving, once the grounds out of which *kairos* developed, become the analogies by which *kairos* is

expressed. However, it must be said that from a conceptual standpoint *kairos* does not now just refer to both analogies, it refers to both at the same time. This simultaneity of reference culminates in Paul's usage, and in my view, again in Milton's usage (as with many theological concerns, Milton is Pauline).

To understand *kairos* conceptually then requires an attempt at simultaneous—perhaps it would be better to say, double-fold—attention, an attending to two analogies at once. From a purely mechanical perspective, the two activities are very similar, and this similarity makes them sympathetic as analogies. The archer's arrow is to the weaver's needle; the path of the arrow is to the thread attached to the needle; the mark is to the warp. One can easily enough see the arrow's path as the needle's thread, and the warp as the archer's mark in the distance just appearing. Once the two activities are imagined in their spatial likeness, we can then re-approach them in their analogical character. But considering the two activities as two sympathetic *analogies* at once is a more difficult critical and imaginative task.[238] It is so because in the very moment an activity becomes (is considered) an analogy that analogy's potential themes are conceived. That is, to analogize any given human activity is to extend (or maybe merely to hope for) its epistemological reach. Once any given human activity is extended beyond the bounds of its prescribed space of transaction (the specified space in which the activity is performed), it becomes thematic in character and designation. It becomes a theme pointing to itself as an activity and beyond itself as an activity.

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[238] It is a task requiring perhaps an approach more consonant with the spirit of *paideia* then with our contemporary methods of specialized scholarship. For *paideia*, see Werner Jaeger's *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, 2nd edition, 3 vols., translated by Gilbert Highet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). The work remains the best of its kind. As Jaeger points out, *paideia* cannot simply be rendered as civilization, culture, tradition, literature or education, but is all of these together, organically unified by the truth of a single ideal, to which all human endeavors refer, and by which all human endeavors are organized, and made sensible (vol. 1, xvii).

If we take the main theme of archery to be war, and the main theme of weaving to be storytelling/poetry, we are faced with the task of bringing these two themes together if we want to understand *kairos*—not just of reconciling them in some measure, but of understanding them as essentially related, dependent, akin to each other.[239] So that from a poetic-philosophical perspective we could let archery stand in thematically for weaving, or vice-versa, in our consideration of timing in *Paradise Regained.* To be able to do so requires a thematic correspondence in the details, as it were, in the subsidiary themes of each analogy. Subsidiary themes of archery might include: ritual, *agôn* (sport, competition), and therefore *areté* (nobility of thought and action) and *aidôs* (honor); and subsidiary themes of *agôn*, *areté*, and *aidôs*, might include *techne* (skill), thus accuracy.[240] With regard to weaving, subsidiary themes might include ritual (storytelling as ritual), *harmonia* (a joining together, specifically a joining together of wooden planks), *akrivia* (precision), *economia* (flexibility); and the subsidiary theme of *harmonia*, *akrivia*, and *economia* might be said to be *techne*.[241]

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[239] Although Milton's knowledge of Old English is debated, it is perhaps worth noting the use in Old English poetry of the epithet "peace-weaver" (frithwebba) to describe women married to an enemy tribe in hopes of binding the warring groups in amity.

[240] The translations given here for *agôn*, *areté*, and *aidôs* are the conventionally accepted approximations into English. My understanding of the concepts derives primarily from Jaeger.

[241] All of these themes are suggestive propositions drawn firstly from the primary sources, especially the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and Pindar's *Odes* (I cite examples below). For a good general overview of the culture in which both archery and weaving were representative activities (representative of Hellenic culture and its ideals), see, Jaeger, *Paideia*; Edith Hamilton, *The Greek Way* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1942); and C.M. Bowra, *Homer* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972). For archery, see especially Roy Arthur Swanson, ed., *Pindar's Odes*, xxxvii-xxxviii; Bowra, *Pindar*, 8-9; Daniel A. Dombrowski, *Contemporary Athletics and Ancient Greek Ideals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 16-17. For weaving, see Lauren Hackworth Petersen, "Crafts and Artisans," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*, edited by Michael Gagarin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); see also related entries in John Roberts, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Before proceeding, it may be useful to recall the Greek gods and goddesses, and the way the Greeks related to them. Most especially, the Greek gods were not representations, or symbols, of that which they were gods and goddesses of. To give one example: Zeus was not a symbol of thunder, but the embodiment of it. So too with the goddess who most concerns us here, Athena. Carl A. Anderson writes,

> The goddess Athena is a paradox. On the one hand, myth says that she emerged fully armed from the head of her father Zeus, who swallowed either her or, in some versions of the story, her pregnant mother Metis to prevent the birth of a rival. This story explains Athena's unique connection to her father and the world of men. Born armed from a male, Athena is an invincible war goddess—and she is a virgin war goddess, Athena Parthenos, the Maiden, unwed, sexless, and untamable. On the other hand, Athena has significant connections to the female world as the patron of all arts, in particular spinning and weaving. Thus Athena embodies the *areté* (excellence) of both sexes: valor in war for men, and for women distinction in weaving and management of the household.[242]

Specifically, Athena was the goddess of: war, the city (hence Athens), agriculture, arts, literature, and crafts, including weaving, spinning, and textiles. These various activities, taken together—that is, understood in full concert and mutual relation with each other, as inseparable—circumscribe a high ideal. They are technical and mechanical activities expressive of necessary themes, and are also reflective of abstract virtues. Thus, Athena was the goddess of all the activities mentioned. *And so,* she was the goddess of wisdom. And, just as Zeus did not represent but embodied thunder, so Athena did not represent but embodied wisdom.[243]

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[242] Carl A. Anderson, "Athena," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*. For the story of Athena's birth, see Hesiod's *Theogony*.

[243] Hamilton, *The Greek Way*, 74. For a good précis of Athena, see Robin Hard, *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London: Routledge, 2004), 180-84.

Since Athena was the embodiment of wisdom for the Greeks, then all of the activities she was goddess of, including archery and weaving, and the themes those activities suggest, may be understood as essentially related under the rubric of wisdom. Their translation to wisdom depends upon utmost skill: the archer hits the mark, the weaver threads the warp. The quality which essentially determines each skill is *kairos*. *Paradise Regained* organizes around and is organized by *kairos*, a single moment. The Son is as the arrow shot from the bow of God, and the needle held in God's hand, the thread being pulled the divine will designing in history, in time at a specific place. The place is the pinnacle, the target and the warp upon which Satan puts the Son and the Son in perfect timing stands. Analogically, the Son standing—balancing—is the singular moment in which the martial and the artistic come together as one, war and weaving, male and female, violence and kinship, penetrating and binding. It is the single moment which binds the whole, in unsurpassable coherence.

The Pinnacle

Miltonic *kairos* redacts the concept as it is used and developed, most especially by Pindar, by Plato, and then by Paul. The intended valences of the concept are those of the poetic (Pindar), the political (Plato), and the Christian (Paul). For Milton at least, the last designation of the concept (Christian) necessarily includes the first two (poetic and political). Pindar's "in-born" poet corresponds thematically to the idea of a begotten divinity. Plato's *Statesman*—his ideal ruler—could serve as a description of Christ on earth. Both correspond prototypically to Milton's characterization of the Son, and by

extension, to his characterization of Christianity in its early and formative experience of the temptation. Finally, the poetic, political, and therefore Christian valences of *kairos* point to the three forces which shaped Milton, and which he in turn shaped.

To recall, the motifs by which Milton represents *kairos* in his work are waiting, hearing, and stepping. The first two—waiting, hearing—correspond to the sense of due measure. They are the alert and elegant poise out of which *kairos* comes. However, neither is *legible*, at least to reason and, by extension generally, to humankind. Neither waiting nor hearing can be externally adjudicated as *real*, as authentic, destinational components of *kairos*. For example, the seemingly apt waiting Milton proclaims in Sonnet 19 either is or is not authentic in terms of *kairos*.[244] If God knows (for Milton God knows), with all the evaluative force of omniscience, humankind does not know. Since waiting is an internal disposition, it cannot in isolation be publicly verified in any rational and discursive terms. Any description of it would be just that, a description mystical or poetical, and perhaps depending for its authenticity as much upon the disposition of the reader as the force of the mystical or poetical vision. Similarly, the seemingly apt hearing Milton describes, either is or is not authentic in terms of *kairos*.

With stepping—the third of Milton's motifs of timing—*kairos* becomes potentially legible. It must be understood as *potential* because in the very moment of stepping the divine (in *Paradise Regained*, the Son) and the human (Adam and Eve, thereafter, Samson) experience of *kairos* differentiate precisely along the threshold that separates them. For the Son, his stepping is eternally and verifiably guaranteed by the Father, even though he makes the step as human. More importantly perhaps, his stepping produces the demonstrable effect of Satan's falling—he *sees* it happen. This

[244] "They also serve who only stand and wait" (Sonnet 19 l.14).

demonstrable effect is the very real verification of the rightness of the Son's timing, of *kairos*, and is therefore the verification of the perfection of his obedience.

This kind of verification is not available to humankind. Ideally, obedience to the will of God may produce stepping that is of right timing. But the verification of it, the rightness of the stepping, is not and will not be legible in discursive terms. When the Son steps, obedience is perfected by this perfect moment of timing. In the Christian dispensation, in Milton's view, such a moment will never and need never happen again. To borrow from the vernacular, it—the Son's stepping—is the essential one-and-done. When humankind steps, obedience to the will of divine may be fulfilled, or it may be transgressed. At the end of *Paradise Regained* the reader may speak with absolute assurance of the Son's stepping; and from the Son's stepping, may retroactively read the Son's waiting and hearing as authentic in terms of *kairos*. In *Samson Agonistes*, waiting and hearing cannot be retroactively made legible and verified from the position of a perfect step. This is the case because Samson's "stepping"—introduced in the opening line as "a little onward lend thy guiding hand," and completed by Samson's destruction of the temple—may or may not be authentic in terms of *kairos*. If it is, then Samson is being obedient to the will of God. If it is not, he is at the very least being delusional, and is possibly being disobedient to the will of God. For Milton, Samson's condition is the condition for all humankind, in terms of obedience and act. The sheer existential pressure Milton puts on "stepping" illustrates what he takes to be the critical importance of timing, and the magnitude of the situation of humankind in either obedient or disobedient relation to the divine. In Milton's view (as for any Christian) what makes the

pressure bearable, if not the yoke mild, is the example of the Son, most especially the example of the Son against Satan.

Not coincidentally, stepping is the last of Milton's motifs of timing to develop. Further it does not appear in his writing to any noteworthy effect until Milton considers the fall; that is, until he comes to write *Paradise Lost*. I say not coincidentally, because stepping represents that part of Miltonic timing that most illuminates postlapsarian humankind. *Paradise Lost* ends with Adam and Eve, leaving Eden, "hand in hand, with wand'ring steps and slow" (12.648-49). Their steps begin as wandering, for wandering is a condition of their exile. They cannot wait for the spirit to lead them, but must proceed. This condition of wandering sums up the very pain of their exile. They are alienated *and* ignorant. To borrow from Samuel Beckett, they cannot go on (having no idea how to proceed), they must go on. In *Samson Agonistes*, the first half of the formulation (cannot go on) has been dropped. Samson goes on: "A little onward lend thy guiding hand / To these dark steps, a little further on" (*SA* 1-2). Apparently he is being led. By whom? One can't precisely say. If he is talking to himself, he is either being led by himself, or perhaps by the spirit of God. If he is not talking to himself, it may be the Chorus leading him. The point: Samson *may* be in a condition of right proceeding. But of course, this condition is a condition of *unknowing*, his blindness its emblem.[245]

Between Adam and Eve, and Samson, stands the Son, in perfect stillness, on the pinnacle. There is no plot twist or revelation to give away. The reader knows from the outset that the epiphany and resolution of *Paradise Regained* will be the Son standing on the pinnacle. This moment is the very center not just of *Paradise Regained,* but of

[245] Samson's blindness and the condition of unknowing, as the necessary condition for timing, itself the necessary mechanic of obedience, is the subject of the following chapter.

Milton's three late poems taken as a whole, of Milton's corpus, and also of the very center of Christianity.[246]

When we first encounter the Son in *Paradise Regained*, we find him "Musing and much revolving in his breast, / How best the mighty work he might begin" (1.185-86). The mighty work in question is the salvation of humankind. The Son's musing on how to begin this project is a waiting, in terms of *kairos*. He will wait until he hears the prompting of the Father. He must begin in perfect accord with the will of the Father. To put it simply, he must get the timing of this beginning right (he must not rush it, or otherwise be distracted from hearing it when it comes). He must get the first step right because the first step is the designating precedent for all the steps in his experience of the temptation to come. If the first step is *kairos* his destiny aligns with resistance, rather than with temptation. Thus, bright, he waits. Then "One day forth [he] walked alone, the Spirit leading" (1.189). "Spirit leading" verifies that his step is *kairos*.

Thereafter the Son's thinking is step-like, and his steps are contemplative. The synchronization of step and thought indicates the incarnate nature of Christ: "Thought following thought, and step by step led on, / He entered now the bordering desert wild" (1.192-93). Further, the synchronization of step and thought indicates that for the Son, waiting, hearing and stepping are also now completely synchronized, revolving harmoniously. The hearing and the stepping happen at once. As he is hearing the will of the divine, he is stepping in accord with the will of the divine. And this stepping is also simultaneously a waiting for the will of the divine, in the greater terms of refuting Satan.

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[246] As Teskey writes in *DM*, 169: "The event cannot quite be reduced to the facts of a literal reading because its meaning is the meaning of Milton's work as a whole, the place where it comes into its center. Everything is at stake on the pinnacle."

Once the Son has made his initial step into the wilderness his temptation begins. And in this temptation he will, again and again, be tempted not to wait, hear, step, but to rush, proprietarily. That is, to take the world.[247] Satan tempts the Son. In response, the Son waits (to Satan it appears as a doing nothing). What is he waiting for? He is waiting to hear, within himself and without, the will of the Father.[248] In response to the Son's waiting, to his seeming inaction, Satan must progressively intensify his temptations, from a banquet feast to worldly ambition. The amplification of his temptations reveals Satan's misunderstanding, his misapprehension. To the Son, all the temptations are one temptation: the temptation to transgress the will of God, to be disobedient, in terms of *kairos*, to either rush or drag, either way to be out of step with the timing of the will of God. Thus, the Son waits, saying, "All things are best fulfilled in their due time, / And time there is for all things, truth hath said" (3.182-83). "Due time" Satan does not understand. Thus, he does not understand fulfillment as the expression of "due time," and therefore as a sign of truth, that which is and accords with the will of God, of *logos* ("truth hath said").[249]

In response, Satan takes "the Son of God up to a mountain high" (3.252). The only strategy Satan has at his disposal is apparently greater and greater temptation. He just needs to tempt with more, is his thinking. Again, however, his thinking is without the critical understanding: that the Son's obedience to God, his very being, depends on and is defined by timing. In other words, the temptations as distinct offering are not the

[247] As Zwicky notes, "Satan's constant effort is to get Christ to act before his time or kairos, and thus pervert God's plan": Zwicky, "Kairos in *Paradise Regained*: The Divine Plan," 276.

[248] See *PR* 1.198-99.

[249] Cf. Ecclesiastes 3.

point with regard to the Son's ability to resist them. His timing is the point, and is that which Satan misses. They are on the mountaintop looking down. To the Son, Satan says,

> All this fair sight; thy kingdom though foretold
> By prophet or by angel, unless thou
> Endeavor, as thy father David did,
> Thou never shalt obtain; prediction still
> In all things, and all men, supposes means;
> Without means used, what it predicts revokes.
> (3.351-56)

From one perspective, Satan's rhetoric is strong here, particularly in its allusion to David, and sophisticated in its suggestion that if the Son does not *take* the throne by striving, he will forfeit his destiny as the Son. In other words, if he doesn't get to it, he'll find himself with nothing. But from the perspective of the Son's obedience to the will of the divine—functionally, his commitment to *kairos*—Satan's rhetoric here, as everywhere in the poem, distills to babble. It is noise, all of it, breaking against the will of God manifesting in the Son. The Son replies to Satan "My time I told thee (And that time for thee / Were better farthest off) is not yet come" (3.396-97). Satan amplifies his temptation again, this time offering up the Roman Empire. Again, the Son refuses. Satan bellows:

> Since neither wealth, nor honor, arms nor arts,
> Kingdom nor empire pleases thee, nor aught
> By me proposed in life contemplative,
> Or active, tended on by glory, or fame,
> What dost thou in this world? The wilderness
> For thee is fittest place, I found thee there,
> And thither will return thee.
> (4.368-74)

The critical moment of this passage is at line 372: "What dost thou in the world?" What the Son does is the will of God. How he does it is by waiting to hear, neither of which are legible to Satan, neither of which can even appear as activities of any demonstrable

worth in and to the "world" (in quotation marks here because Milton intends it to be understood as Satan's term). The Son is ruled by God. The means of Satan's misrule is the world. For Milton, the distance between them is the distance between good and evil, the pinnacle and the pit of hell.

The Son's refusal of Empire exasperates Satan. "What dost thou in the world?" signals that exasperation. Then, what he cannot achieve by guile, Satan will approximate by force. Once he has the Son back in the wilderness, and the Son is alone, hungry, tired, and then asleep, a figure of human vulnerability, Satan resorts to all the terror at his disposal:

> for at his head
> The tempter watched, and soon with ugly dreams
> Disturbed his sleep; and either tropic now
> 'Gan thunder, and both ends of heav'n, the clouds
> From many a horrid rift abortive poured
> Fierce rain with lightning mixed, water with fire
> In ruin reconciled: nor slept the winds
> Within their stony caves, but rush'd abroad
> From the four hinges of the world, and fell.
> (*PR* 4.407-15)

But the Son sleeps on. His sleeping is the purest elegance of waiting. It refutes Satan's terror. Morning merely comes.

Out of devices, out of temptations, Satan brings the Son to the Holy City, to the pinnacle, and "added thus in scorn: / 'There stand, if thou wilt stand'" (4.550-51). The Son does, in the precise and absolute fullness of time. For Milton as for any Christian, the pinnacle is the maximum moment and place of dialectical compression. The Son stands on the pinnacle simultaneously. He makes (is made) as Christ; he unmakes (is unmade) as merely human. He becomes fully both, the "True image of the Father

whether throned / In the bosom of bliss, and light of light / Conceiving, or remote from Heav'n, enshrined / in fleshly tabernacle, and human form" (*PR* 4.596-99).

This moment of timing—of *kairos*—is the perfection of the Son's obedience. From the broader perspective of Milton's corpus, it may also be seen as the moment in which Milton reconciles his dual heritage (something like Paul before him), Classical and Christian, by illuminating *kairos* (Classical) as the essential and necessary mechanism of obedience (Christian). In other words, Milton's concept of obedience is made efficacious by *kairos* and its aura of the heroic—of the classical age of heroes, gods and philosophers, of both the pitiable vulnerability of human beings, and also, of their greatness. So while it is true that the Son rejects Classical learning, he rejects Classical learning presented as a *temptation*, and further, it is by dint of a Classical idea—*kairos*—that the Son resists the temptation, and stands.[250]

[250] See *PR* 4.227-364.

CHAPTER 4

SAMSON'S VIOLENT PRAYER

Framed as a question, the abiding concern of this dissertation is and has been the following: What does Milton mean by obedience? The question is simple. But the responses it provokes are of greater complexity and nuance than the term (obedience) might to our early twenty-first century ears initially suggest. For Miltonic obedience is not just a concept developed within given interpretive frameworks, Classical, Christian, and a specific historic context, England in the seventeenth century. It is a nearly ineffable and yet strangely practical structure of being, a harmonic disposition intended to recover something of the disposition of Adam and Even before the fall. Thus, to address the complexity and nuance of what Milton means by obedience has required addressing not only the ostensive definition of Miltonic obedience (chapters 1 and 2), but the mechanics of obedience (chapter 3), and now finally, the necessary condition for obedience. This last—the necessary condition for obedience—is the main subject of this chapter. It is also in my view the determining condition of *Samson Agonistes*, and the source of its dramatic power.

To recall: For Milton the structure of obedience organizes the mind *for* God. *A priori* the mind is otherwise always on its way to chaos without the intervening, one might say, interpreting grace of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit informs individual conscience, and this informing in part structures individual conscience in terms of obedience. (Here is Milton at his Puritan truest.) So informed, conscience reads the word of God, the *logos*, scripture and nature, and interprets it. The interpretation is a *will*

to interpretation dictated by the fall (after the fall, perfect obedience is no longer available to humankind), and is a required part of existence after the fall. Choices must be made. In Milton's view, choices must always be made, choices intended to synchronize human will with divine will. The quality of human being-ness that does the choosing is the will. The will's choice-making is its chief mode of interpretation.

The Miltonic will to interpretation—which may also be known as the postlapsarian requirement for the will—must make its choices in time. The situation of the will to interpretation in time introduces what I termed in the previous chapter the indispensable *mechanism* of obedience: right timing. To recall: Miltonic timing is in effect Milton's gloss on *kairos*, developed in the interpretive framework of Judeo-Christianity. (The Son may pan the Classical tradition in *Paradise Regained*, but his author's education is classical.) Miltonic *kairos* means that every act of choosing—every will to interpretation brought to fruition—is made on the threshold of obedience and disobedience to God.

The paradigmatic instance of disobedience is the fall. The paradigmatic instance of obedience is the Son on the pinnacle. When the Son steps on the pinnacle, his stepping is eternally and verifiably guaranteed by the Father, even though he makes the step as human. The moment is the visionary exemplum of obedience, the brightest guarantee of atonement. However, as Milton makes clear in *Samson Agonistes,* the kind of verification the Son's step receives is not thereafter available to humankind. Samson's "stepping"—introduced in the opening line as "a little onward lend thy guiding hand," illuminated by his *inwardly felt* "rousing motions" (l.1382), and completed by Samson's destruction of the temple—may or may not be authentic in terms of *kairos*, and may or

may not be a choosing made in obedience to the will of the divine. No one else in the drama but Samson can know, if indeed even Samson can.

As Milton tells us in the Argument, Samson "is persuaded inwardly that this [the appearance of the public officer and his message from the philistine lords] was from God." Milton might have but did not choose to write something along the lines of, "the message came from God." Further, Milton gives to God no agential presence in this line or any other line in the drama. Instead, the will of the divine—which in this drama cannot be identified positively as a characterized presence, and thus is more accurately denoted as the *idea of the will of the divine*—recurs to the characters who invoke it, either inwardly or publicly, Samson chief among them. (This situation is denotative of Milton's radical antinomianism). Samson is the agent here, and persuade is the key word. Does Samson persuade himself? The question is almost synonymous with the question suggested by the first line of the drama ("A little onward lend thy guiding hand"): does Samson guide himself? Both questions provoke the follow-up question that underlies much of the critical debate this poem has generated: does God have anything to do with Samson's choice?

As Stanley Fish and others have pointed out, the answer is a decidedly un-clarion, "maybe." And this "maybe" depends to a great degree on how one thinks of participation and engagement (of having to do with something).[251] All the evidence the drama affords for this and related questions will be circumstantial, if not obscure, if not perhaps irrelevant. The reader cannot with certainty evaluate Samson's final act in terms of

[251] Cf. Susanne Woods, "Choice and Election in *Samson Agonistes*," in *Milton and the Grounds of Contention*, ed. Mark R. Kelley, Michael Lieb, and John T. Shawcross (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 175-187, esp. 176.

divine will. And the reader most definitely cannot with certainty evaluate divine will or its absence in *Samson Agonistes*.

This "uncertain world of *Samson Agonistes*," as John Shawcross called it, raises the question then: What did Milton *intend* with *Samson Agonistes*, and why?[252] To address this two-part question, it is useful to think of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes* as forming a single work with a demonstrable theological progression.[253] The most serious distillation of this progression would be: Speech, Act, Silence.[254] A précis of this progression would be: in *Paradise Lost*, God the Father speaks his divine will; in *Paradise Regained*, God the Son performs the divine will; in *Samson Agonistes*, Samson, a human being, seeks or appears to seek to do the will of God, *and* the will of God may be present, *but* it is not legibly presented. In other words, if the divine is present in the world of *Samson Agonistes* (which is, as Joan Bennett points out, our world) it is speaking in silence in individual conscience, and acting in the realm of *kairos*.[255] Seen in this light, Samson is not so much a hero or delusional, but the heroic

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[252] John T. Shawcross, *The Uncertain World of* Samson Agonistes (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001). I emphasize "intend" to signal that I mean to include as fully possible the meanings of the word: "to stretch out, extend, expand, increase, intensify" (*OED)*.

[253] I make this point regardless of the actual dates of composition of *Samson Agonistes*, although a later dating seems likeliest, if not at this point certain. My own view is that Milton at the very least had finished both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* before he finished *Samson Agonistes*. For if we consider *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes* as forming a single work of theological poetics—the development of which can be traced from Milton's earliest poems all the way through the prose tracts—then the suggestion is that Milton had parts of all three works in his mind from the start. In other words, Milton thought of obedience comprehensively, in terms of what obedience meant for God the Father, for the Son, and for humankind after the Son. Cf. Michael Bryson, "A Poem to the Unknown God: *Samson Agonistes* and Negative Theology," *Milton Quarterly* 42.1 (2008), 22.

[254] In the Torah, the progression of God in the world is Act (creation), Speech (law), and Silence (the prophets). The fundamental difference between Judaism and Christianity is of course Jesus, but as obvious as the point is, it is in this context worth remembering. Christianity brings the speaking and acting of the divine back into the world, after silence, and then returns it to silence (after Pentecost). So the progression of God in the world for Christianity is Act, Speech, Silence, Speech/Act, Silence.

and the delusional potential in everyone. And Samson's predicament—of contingency and ineffability—is ours.

In this chapter I begin by situating *Samson Agonistes* in its interpretive frameworks, Hebraism and Hellenism, both in terms of their dynamic presence in Milton's England, and throughout his work. The very title of the drama necessitates establishing such a vantage point. After this, I approach *Samson Agonistes* not only for the interpretive dilemma it poses, but for the interpretive dilemma it is. The two main interpretations of the drama are addressed in turn. Both interpretations are in my view right, or at the least valid, *except* when they are *antagonistic* or *exclusionary* toward the other interpretation. I suggest this because taken together the two competing interpretations productively illustrate the "uncertain world" of the drama. This uncertainty is to be understood in terms of *apophasis*.[256] I give an account of *apophasis*, by way of rehearsing its development from Parmenides of Elea (c. 5th century BCE) to Nicholas of Cusa (1403-1464 CE). I then move to my main argument. It is that Samson's predicament points to Milton's dramatic and theological solution to the problem of uncertainty, and may be characterized by a single word—*unknowing*. Without its foundational reliance on unknowing *Samson Agonistes* would have little dramatic force, and Milton's theology little cogency.[257] If Samson's choosing—to

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[255] See Joan S. Bennett, "A Reading of *Samson Agonistes*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 227: "In *Samson Agonistes* we are not shown heaven or hell or paradise or even the wilderness, but rather a world that we can recognize. It is the world of family (parent, lover, wife); of friendship (colleagues, countrymen); of conventional beliefs and values (religious, societal, political); and of glimpses of our intersection with the divine."

[256] For *Samson Agonistes* and *apophasis*, see Michael Bryson, "A Poem to the Unknown," 22-43.

[257] I want to make it clear that to say *Samson Agonistes* has no dramatic force is not to say that it has no drama. The drama is there, the death of innocent people. To say that Milton's theology has no cogency without "unknowing" is to say that unknowing as the necessary condition is what makes Milton's concept

destroy the temple, to kill Philistines—eludes resolute evaluation, the manner of his choosing, and the condition in which his choosing is made, does not.

The Interpretive Dilemma

In its title and its meanings *Samson Agonistes* brings together the dual heritage of Hebraic and Hellenic, Israel and Greece, by extension Judeo-Christianity and the Classical age: Samson from the Book of Judges, Agonistes from the Greek *agon*.[258] This heritage—in certain points sympathetic, in others indicative of a felt and nearly impossible tension—is the heritage of the age of Reformation and Renaissance, and before that of the Medieval age stretching back to late Antiquity, illuminated in the great synthesizing labors of the first Neoplatonists— chiefly Plotinus, Porphyry, and Proclus—and of their Christian counterpart, and hugely influential early Father of the church, Augustine.[259] Properly speaking, the dual heritage is conceived in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, as told in the Gospels, if not articulated by and in that life and telling. From a theological-

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of obedience theologically compelling. If those moments of opening rightness could in fact be apprehended as knowledge, knowledge would supplant obedience.

[258] See Mary Ann Gossman, "The Synthesis of Hebraism and Hellenism in Milton's 'Samson Agonistes.'" PhD diss., Rice University, 1957 (http://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/18282?show=full); Carole S. Kessner, "Milton's Hebraic Herculean Hero," *Milton Studies* 6 (1975), 243-58; and especially, Jeffrey S. Shoulson, *Milton and the Rabbis: Hebraism, Hellenism, and Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 1-9, 240-62. Shoulson's book pays close attention to Milton's texts *and* to the philosophical and theological interpretive frameworks in, by and with which the author Milton wrote the texts. Also of interest is Jeffrey Einboden's study of Joseph Massel's 1890 translation of *Samson Agonistes* into biblical Hebrew, "Toward a Judaic Milton: Translating *Samson Agonistes* into Hebrew," *Literature and Theology* 22.2 (2008), 135-50. A good place to start for any discussion of the relationship between Hebraism and Hellenism, particularly in the Western tradition, is Matthew Arnold's essay "Hebraism and Hellenism," collected in *Culture and Anarchy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 84-96.

[259] As Susanne Woods writes, "In *Samson Agonistes* Renaissance humanism and Reformation Protestantism mingle in a discourse as rich and uneasy as an experience of radical times. The drama not only tells a powerful tale, it invites the reader to live within each moment's ambiguities as that tale unfolds": "Choice and Election in *Samson Agonistes*," 179.

philosophical standpoint, Christianity may with intellectual fidelity be described as the Hellenic spirit reading the Hebraic law. The teachings of Paul are certainly so. To recall the example given in the previous chapter, Mosaic obedience is read by way of Hellenic *kairos*.

If one thinks of this dual heritage as a tension, then the relationship between the heritages may be understood as dialectic and the productive outcomes of it as, potentially, synthesis. If one thinks of this heritage as a conflict, then each heritage considered in isolation from the other is didactic in nature, and autocratic in intended outcome.[260] In this case, the heritages are as it were in competition with each other, vying for absolute supremacy in terms of truth, and concomitantly seeking to vanquish the other heritage from *any* proprietary relation to truth. These two possibilities—of dialectic, of didactic—may be considered the problem of the dual heritage, or perhaps more accurately as the dual heritage *within* the dual heritage, as the generative dynamic of the ongoing encounter between the Hebraic and the Hellenic, between Athens and Jerusalem (to retrospectively agitate Tertullian).[261]

The writers, priests, and philosophers of England in the Renaissance—more generally the thinkers—received this dual heritage as in a full and complicated embrace, and their intellectual productions (Renaissance humanism in total) arose to a marked degree out of this dual heritage. The point just made is perhaps as obvious as strong

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[260] Cf. Northrop Frye, "*Agon* and *Logos,"* in *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 201: "Milton intended *Paradise Lost* to be a Christian conquest of the Classical epic genre, and similarly *Samson Agonistes* is a Christian conquest of the Classical genre of dramatic tragedy.

[261] For Tertullian classical philosophy was incompatible with the truths of scripture. In *De praescriptione haereticorum* (The Prescription Against Heretics), Tertullian famously and rhetorically asked, "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" (*De praescriptione haereticorum* VII, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, edited by Philip Schaff and Alexander Roberts. Rpt. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994).

convention, but like many strong conventions it is worth reiterating and remembering. This is so not least because in embracing the dual heritage, Renaissance England became an intensive recipient of the problem at the heart of the dual heritage, just articulated: that is, the Hebraic-Hellenic dialectic, and/or the Hebraic didactic vs. Hellenic didactic. In other words, in Renaissance England the diffusion of classical learning transpired in a Reformation and then post-Reformation context, just as the reforming spirit of Christianity—from Tyndale's translation to the Restoration—developed and variously articulated itself during a *renaissance* of classical learning. So that to say Renaissance England *embraced* the dual heritage is to say that in terms of intellectual production, it embraced first and foremost a productive tension, and/or a debilitating conflict. Further, when one employs instead of the backward-looking term Renaissance, the forward-looking term, Early Modern (which appears to be the now preferential term), one simply transposes the tension/conflict from inheritance (theirs) to bequest (ours), which from our standpoint can then be variously revised *in the past tense* according to one's relationship to that bequest—as curse, to give an extreme example, as blessing, or to the point, as inheritance.

When one turns from the Renaissance in England generally to seventeenth-century England in particular (and by extension to the New World), one enters upon an era notable for high tensions—ecclesiological, political, religious, poetic and domestic—tensions in greater and lesser degree informed by the tension of the dual heritage. In some cases, as for example with the very *humanist* (in other words classically inspired) endeavor of the Authorized Version of the Bible (1611), the outcome denotes the quality

of the engagement as one of productive tension.[262] To the point, in four years of collaborative endeavor, the Hebrew and Greek of the Old and the New Testaments respectively resolved into the majesty of King James' English, a coherent language of astonishing poetic, rhetorical, political and of course theological force. In other cases, however—that is, in virtually all of the political and ecclesiological disputes of 1625-1642—the outcome denotes the quality of engagement as ultimately one of conflict. To this point, in seventeen years of what might also be termed, albeit less comfortably, collaborative endeavor, the factions of church and state dissolved into war.

From a further perspective, however, what appears as debilitating conflict may recur as productive tension, depending on one's point of view with regard to given outcomes. That is to say that only the most immediate, localized perspective affords the designation of either tension or conflict. And even here, this designation depends on the interpreter; and the interpreter's perspective—based upon proximity to the outcome in question, and to intellectual and perhaps spiritual inclination—in part determines his interpretation. The potential for obscurity in such a hermeneutical situation is troublingly manifest.[263]

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[262] For a detailed and formidable history of the making of the Authorized Version, see David Norton, *A Textual History of the King James Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For a more accessible account, see Alistair McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story Of The King James Bible And How It Changed A Nation, A Language, And A Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2001); and Adam Nicolson, *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003). Most recently, and to coincide with the 400th anniversary of the publication of the AV, Gordon Campbell has produced *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611-2011* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[263] In both Biblical and philosophical work, hermeneutic refers both to the interpretation itself and to theories of interpretation. By the intentionally vague "hermeneutical situation" I mean to invoke generally the tradition of hermeneutics, from the rabbinic commentators and Plato to Gadamer (1900-2002). For a good overview of this tradition, see Bjorn Ramberg and Kristin Gjesdal, "Hermeneutics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/hermeneutics/>. In particular, I refer to the idea of the "hermeneutic circle." The idea is first developed, although not named as such, by Spinoza in chapter 7 of the *Tractatus-theologico-politicus* (1670). See Spinoza, *Theological-political Treastise*, trans. by Samuel

This hermeneutical situation—of interpretation as ongoing crisis of understanding played out between tension and conflict, potentially to resolute, potentially to dissolute ends—is precisely the situation of *Samson Agonistes*. It is the fullest statement of Milton's own interpretive practices of scripture, of classical tragedy, drama and poetry, of theology generally, and of his own poems and prose.[264] And it not only poses but is

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Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackettt, 2001), Chapter 7, "Of the Interpretation of Scripture." The title denotes that Spinoza's frame for his discussion of interpretation is hermeneutics as biblical exegesis, that of Talmud, and of Christian commentary (e.g. Calvinist commentaries). Responding to the abject state of biblical interpretation in his time, in terms of motive, approach, method and outcome, Spinoza sets out to "discuss the true method of scriptural interpretation and examine it at depth" (87). He responds to the problem with his now-famous analogy of scripture and nature: "For the method of interpreting scripture is no different from the method of interpreting nature" (87). Spinoza develops the analogy over the course of the chapter with an eye always to coming to a clear methodological understanding of hermeneutics. What he comes to is the importance of *context* to any hermeneutical endeavor. By context he includes the historical, textual, linguistic, philosophical, political and personal, and any other framework of thought which brings organizing influence to any interpretation. Out of his sustained analogy of scripture and nature, Spinoza makes his most important observation, in terms of hermeneutics and context: "Scripture does not provide us with definitions of the things of which it speaks, any more than Nature does. Therefore, just as definitions of the things of nature must be inferred from the various operations of Nature, in the same way definitions must be elicited from the various Biblical narratives as they touch on a particular subject" (88). In other words, understanding of scripture, as with nature, depends upon an understanding of parts (Biblical narratives, particular subjects) and whole (scripture), and the relation of parts to whole. The hermeneutic circle denotes the interpretive movement back and forth between parts and whole, in which both are always kept in mind. So that a movement to a part is not a movement away from the whole, or vice versa, but a movement *in* the whole, and with the whole toward one of its constituent parts; and the movement from part to whole is the same. In *Being and Time*, and then again in "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger expands (or perhaps abstracts) Spinoza's hermeneutics to the realm of ontology. Heidegger's point of departure in *Being in Time* is precisely that hermeneutics *is* ontology, but can only function as such once it is understood that "only as phenomenology, is ontology possible." Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 35. In other words, interpretation concerns being by and in its attending to specific phenomena, *asked-for* (Heidegger's formulation for a hermeneutical approach to specific phenomena, what he names *entities*). In his formulation Heidegger *turns* from (and expands the field of inquiry of) Spinoza, and makes decisively what is known as the "ontological turn" in hermeneutics. The effect produced on the hermeneutic circle is a shift in emphasis from the parts and whole of a text, and the relationship between text and reader, to an emphasis on the existential, that is, on the relationship between self and world, between one's understanding of oneself, one's understanding of the world, and one's understanding of their interplay (37, 182). In this context, Heidegger articulates three modes of being, cohered by an essential Heideggerian position: Understanding is a mode of being. The activity of this understanding is interpretation. As discussed in chapter two, Milton understood the circumstance of human being as being-as-interpretation as the result of the fall.

[264] Stanley Fish, "Spectacle and Evidence in *Samson Agonistes*," *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1989), 556-86, thereafter developed into "The Temptation of Intelligibility," Chapter 13, *How Milton Works*. Strikingly, Michael Lieb has described the critical dilemma produced by *Samson Agonistes* as a kind of "interpretive anarchy," which is the direct result of the total occlusion of the poem's final meaning(s). See Lieb, "Terror and Annihilation in Milton," in *Milton in the Age of Fish: Essays on Authorship, Text, and Terrorism* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007), 232. For a comprehensive study of Milton's interpretive

intentionally an interpretive dilemma. The intensity and disputatiousness of critical debate about the right interpretation of the tragedy brings the point home.[265] As Susanne Woods puts it, "*Samson* is preeminently about choice."[266] The nature of that choice, for all involved, is preeminently interpretive.

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practices, see Dayton Haskin, *Milton's Burden of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994). Haskin's book is the best of its kind. One of Haskins' main arguments is the degree to which Milton's interpretive practices resulted not so much in the kind of providential certainty that Puritan reading practices intended, but in a problematic (or perhaps, merely complex) hermeneutic of devotion and ambiguity, the solution to which could only be continued interpretive engagement. This point is especially important when one considers Milton's late masterpieces. As Haskins writes, "While 'liberating' applications [of scripture] must have seemed to Milton highly desirable, 'clarity' and 'certitude' cannot be said to be prominent goals of the interpretive activity that informs his mature poems" (xii). For Haskins' reading of the interpretive difficulties presented by *Samson Agonistes*, see 162-238.

[265] For a concise review of the interpretative battles the poem has generated, see Alan Rudrum, "Milton Scholarship and the 'Agon' over 'Samson Agonistes,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65.3/4 (2002), 465-88. The most recent critical dispute was set off by Stanley Fish's *How Milton* Works, and from John Carey's response to Fish's reading in light of the events of September 11th, 2001. Because of September 11th, Carey argued in the *TLS* that *Samson Agonistes* could no longer be read in the same way. See Carey, "A Work in Praise of Terrorism? September 11 and *Samson Agonistes*," *TLS* 6 (September, 2002), 15-16. It needs to be noted that Carey's "anti-heroic" reading of Samson was not *caused* by 9/11, but amplified by 9/11: see John Carey and Alastair Fowler, eds., *The Poems of John Milton* (London: Longmans, 1968), 335-41. Feisel G. Mohamed addressed the dispute in his influential "Confronting Religious Violence: Milton's Samson Agonistes" *PMLA* 120.2 (March, 2005), 327-40. Mohamed effectively dismantles Carey's post 9/11 reading, and interestingly, challenges Fish for not pushing the implications of his interpretation far enough. For a good and, more importantly, judicious survey of *Samson* criticism, see John T. Shawcross, *The Uncertain World of* Samson Agonistes, esp. 48-144. Rudrum's review, cited above, is less judicious than Shawcross, but I agree with it, particularly with regard to the interpretations put forth by Carey, Irene Samuel, and Joseph Wittreich. Wittreich surveys the state of *SA* criticism, first in *Interpreting* Samson Agonistes (1986), and then again in *Shifting Contexts: Reinterpreting* Samson Agonistes (2002). In both cases his survey is pointedly polemical, directed especially at F. Michael Krouse's *Milton's Samson and the Christian Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), and what Wittreich sees as the prevailing interpretations following Krouse, those especially of Hanford, Lewalski, and Radzinowicz. In *Interpreting* Samson Agonistes, Wittreich is writing against all typological interpretations of *SA*, a position of critical rigidity equal to the critical rigidity he convicts typological interpretations of having. Instead of typological interpretation (by which he includes the traditional reading of *SA* as a drama of regeneration), Wittreich argues for a contextual interpretation. However, for Wittreich, the relevant contexts are self-evidently seventeenth-century literary and theological thinking about Samson in Judges, as opposed to the work of say Augustine and Luther. This assumption belies a misunderstanding of the very term it seeks to justify: relevant contexts. The relevant contexts with which to interpret *SA* are those contexts which were relevant to Milton, the poet, writing *SA*, as Radzinowicz suggests in her method of author-contextual criticism (*Toward* Samson Agonistes, xix).

[266] "Choice and Election in *Samson Agonistes*," 175.

Samson Agonistes is an interpretive dilemma not only for *all* the characters of the tragedy, especially Samson, but for all the readers of the tragedy.[267] Throughout *Samson Agonistes*, all the other characters—the chorus, Manoa, Dalila, Harapha, the officer, the messenger—are trying to interpret Samson. And throughout the tragedy, Samson is trying to interpret the will of God, for himself, or is perhaps trying to appear to be so doing. In turn, as Milton intends it, the reader of *Samson Agonistes* is faced with a triple-task of interpretation, one that brings with it the dreadful possibility of interpretive collapse, of distinct hermeneutics coalescing not into a bright and harnessed latticework of interpretation but into a pile of dumbness.[268]

First, the reader is confronted with the task of interpreting Samson's interpreters (the chorus and Manoa being the most troublingly inconsistent in *their* interpretations). Second, the reader is confronted with the task of interpreting Samson's interpretation, not with the end in view (Samson's destruction of the temple), but radically, in the moments of interpreting, without or despite it.[269] Third, the reader is confronted with the task of

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[267] Any reading of Milton's late poems that stipulates their reader as an agent in them most likely derives in one way or another from Fish's *Surprised by Sin: the Reader in* Paradise Lost. What Fish proposes as the "interpretative choice" required of any reader of *Paradise Lost* (207-39), is even more the case with *Samson Agonistes*.

[268] Perhaps the paradigmatic instance of interpretive collapse is Plato's *Parmenides*, in which Parmenides' deconstruction of Plato's "theory of forms," and Young Socrates' delineation of eight deductions intended to restore the philosophical validity of the forms, leads to an enormously obscure discussion of the nature of the "One," and of what can and cannot be said of the "One." The dialogue ends, enigmatically, with an interpretive debilitation that stands for the whole. The moment is one of profound and subtle pathos. The great thinker, Parmenides, realizes that—despite all his experience and acumen, and despite all his arduous intellectual work during the discussion just concluded—his philosophical investigation has not and *will not* with any elegance or clarity resolve the questions he has posed. He must admit as much to his young interlocutor. "It seems," he says, "that, whether there is or is not a one, both that one and the others alike are and are not, and appear and do not appear to be, all manner of things in all manner of ways, with respect to themselves and to one another." To which, with devastating irony and the loss that drives it, Young Socrates replies, "Most true" (166b).

[269] As Stanley Fish writes, "I think we are intended to understand that we cannot make the choice—cannot say what kind of act the rebellion is—by simply pointing to what seem to be its empirical consequences … That is to say, in a world where outcomes (but not intentions) are contingent, we should not, says Milton,

interpreting what is in the drama not *legible*, or present in *any* discursive way: the will of the divine with specific regard to Samson and Samson's act. The second and third tasks of interpretation, taken together, create an ethically fraught situation for the reader, because of the death and destruction that Samson's final act causes. Milton means to put—pin would be more to the point—the reader where he does. For the fraught situation *is* the hermeneutic situation seriously amplified, engaged in the very groundwork of justice—life and death—and by this engagement made inescapably, gravely ethical.[270] And the task of interpreting the will of God—the non-legible presence, the "rousing motion," the absence?—in reference to Samson, and of *not* first interpreting the will of God in terms of Samson's final act, is the interpretive task that Milton sets before us.

In the traditional interpretation *Samson Agonistes* is a drama of regeneration.[271] Samson begins in despair, moves through penitence to a kind of self-surrender, hears not

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justify our actions retroactively by waiting to see how they turned out and then reasoning backward to their virtue or vice, as Samson does when he decides that, given what has happened to him, the marriage to Dalila was a bad idea ('I thought it lawful from my former act.'). Rather, it is a necessary and sufficient justification if the act issues from a desire to do God's will and to follow the path of obedience rather than the path of carnal impulse. (On this view of the matter, the road to hell could *not* be paved with good intentions)": "Milton, Liberalism, and Terrorism," in *Milton in the Age of Fish: Essays on Authorship, Text, and Terrorism*, 250-51.

[270] Cf. Joan S. Bennett, "A Reading of *Samson Agonistes*," 225: "In submitting ourselves to this tragedy, we will enter an experience graver, more moral, and to our greater spiritual good than even that of *Paradise Lost* or *Paradise Regained*; for the tragedy will work directly on our individual innermost selves, addressing the roots of sin and suffering in us."

[271] The representative critics of this tradition include Krouse, Hanford, Frye, Radzinowicz, Lewalksi and to a degree, Shawcross. See for example, Krouse, *Milton's Samson and the Christian Tradition*, *passim*; Hanford, *John Milton: Poet and Humanist* (Cleveland: The Press of Western Reserve University, 1966), 264-86; Frye, *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 205-21; especially Radzinowicz, *Toward Samson Agonistes: The Growth of Milton's Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), xx, 113, 227-65; Lewalski, "*Samson Agonistes* and the 'Tragedy' of the Apocalypse," *PMLA* 85.5 (October, 1970), 1050-62; and Shawcross, *The Uncertain World of Samson Agonistes*, ix, 48-64, 108, 112-44. See also Joan S. Bennett, *Reviving Liberty: Radical Christian Humanism in Milton's Great Poems* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Georgia Christopher, *Milton and the Science of the Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Wendy Furman, "*Samson Agonistes* as Christian Tragedy," *Philological Quarterly* 60 (1981), 169-81; Anthony Low, *The Blaze of Noon: A Reading of* Samson Agonistes (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974);

himself but the will of the divine, and is regenerated as a hero.[272] For Mary Ann Radzinowicz, Samson's regeneration illustrates the drama's theology of gradual revelation.[273] At the beginning of the drama, Samson is a figure of crushing doubt, "eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves" (*SA* l.41). Why? He wants to know,

> Why was my breeding ordered and prescribed
> As of a person separate to God,
> Designed for great exploits if I must die
> Betrayed, captive, and both my eyes put out,
> Made of my enemies the scorn and gaze,
> To grind in brazen fetters under task
> With this Heav'n gifted strength?
> (*SA* ll.30-36)

Samson asks this question in the pit of his own despair, rock-bottom as it were. From here he has only his own guilt to call on. He does so in the form of pointed rhetorical interrogation: "Whom have I to complain of but myself? / Who this high gift of strength committed to me / In what part lodged, how easily bereft me, / Under the seal of silence could not keep / But weakly to a woman must reveal it" (*SA* ll.46-50). And: "How could I once look up, or heave the head, / Who like a foolish pilot have shipwrecked / My vessel trusted to me from above, / Gloriously rigged; and for a word, a tear, / *Fool*, have divulged the secret gift of God / to a deceitful woman" (*SA* ll.197-202, emphasis added). The admission of guilt is the beginning of his penitence. His penitence signals the beginning of his recovery of agency. Central to this recovery is Samson's *recollection* of

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and John M. Steadman, "Milton's 'Summa Epitasis': The End of the Middle of 'Samson Agonistes,'" *The Modern Language Review* 69.4 (October, 1974), 730-44, esp. 731.

[272] As John Shawcross has pointed out, proponents of the regenerationist interpretation justifiably cite two passages in particular from *Christian Doctrine* to support their claims: "It is by man's renovation that he is brought to a state of grace after being cursed and subject to God's anger" (Yale 6:460); and "Regeneration means that the old man is destroyed and that the inner man is regenerated by God through the word and the spirit so that his whole mind is restored to the image of God, as if he were a new creature. Moreover the whole man, both soul and body, is sanctified to God's service and to good works" (461).

[273] See Radzinowicz, *Toward Samson Agonistes: The Growth of Milton's Mind*, 88-91, 167-245.

his intimate accord with the will of God. This recollection—a kind of secondary source of his regeneration, the primary source of which must be the will of the divine—is in part brought on by *challenging* interactions, with the Chorus, Manoa, and especially with Delilah, and then with Harapha. To the traditional reading, I would add that Samson's penitence is a waiting *to hear*. By dint of his interaction with bona fide opposition—Delilah, Harapha (they are in their opposition part of his regeneration)—his waiting to hear becomes a *waiting to hear the will of the divine*. Harapha ridicules what he takes to be the fraudulent source and story of Samson's strength:

> Thou would not disparage glorious arms
> Which greatest Heroes have in battle worn,
> Their ornament and safety, had not spells
> And black enchantments, some Magician's art
> Armed thee or charmed thee strong, which thou from Heaven
> Feigned at thy birth was given thee in thy hair,
> Where strength can least abide, though all thy hairs
> Were bristles ranged like those that ridge the back
> Of chased wild boars, or ruffled porcupines.
> (*SA* ll.1130-38)

Strongly, clearly, unhesitantly, Samson replies: "I know no spells; use no forbidden arts: / My trust is in the living God who gave me / At my Nativity this strength" (*SA* ll.1139-41). What becomes clear in Samson's exchanges with Harapha is that the giant's loud-mouthed taunts especially serve as the unexpected and necessary prelude and instigation to Samson's regeneration, to the "rousing motions" (*SA* l.1382) Samson feels, and the disposition those rousing motions produce in Samson (*SA* l.1382).

The particular quality of Samson's heroic status depends on which source tradition is *emphasized* as determinant, Christian or Classical. In the case of the latter, the classical emphasis, Samson is simply a Greek hero regenerated, a version of Hercules, and the question of scriptural precedent is more or less elided, or—and this is a more

sophisticated interpretive maneuver—relegated to the background.[274] In the case of the former—in the typological reading—Samson is a prefiguration of Christ. This typological interpretation depends in large part for its persuasive power on the mention of Samson in Hebrews 11.32-33 as a hero of faith, which seems to clarify the meaning, in terms of Samson's action and divine will, in Judges 16.28-30.[275] The problem with this interpretative strategy is that Hebrews 11.32-33 is itself a typological interpretation of the Samson story, and of others. To the point: Hebrews 11.32-33 interprets Judges 16.28-30 to establish Jesus Christ as the Messiah by identifying his precursors in the Old Testament. This redactive interpretive effort is exactly the work and intention of Christian typology: once the connection between Samson and Christ is established, Samson can be read retroactively from a Christian perspective. So that Hebrews 11.32-33 clarifies the will of the divine with regard to Samson precisely by reading him typologically, as a Christ figure. And if Samson is a Christ figure, he is for Christians a figure of divine will on earth. Therefore, his actions manifest that will, as Christ's action manifest that will. They adhere in terms of divine conscription. In terms of *Samson Agonistes*, this interpretive logic proves circular, whether or not the typological reading effectively legitimizes Jesus as the Messiah prophesized in the Hebrew Scriptures/Old

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[274] See William Riley Parker, "The Greek Spirit in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*," *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association* 20 (1934), 21-44; and *Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in* Samson Agonistes (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1937), 237. Parker writes, "The theme of *Samson Agonistes*, then, is the hero's recovery and its result." See also Kessner, "Milton's Hebraic Herculean Hero."

[275] Hebrews 11.32-33: "And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and *of* the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions." Judges 16.28-30: "And Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with *all his* might; and the house fell upon the Lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than *they* which he slew in his life."

Testament.[276] In other words, because Hebrews 11.32 is a typological interpretation of Judges 16.28-30, it is not necessarily reliable as a tool with which to interpret the will of the divine in Judges 16.28-30, or in *Samson Agonistes*.

In the counter-traditional interpretation, Samson is not so self-evidently a Messiah figure, if he is a Messiah figure at all.[277] In this reading Samson's final act—the atrocity offstage as it were—necessarily dictates the interpretation of the work, and dictates the interpretation not as regenerationist but as tragedy. Implicit in this interpretation is a grappling with the ethical responsibilities of the interpreter, confronted with a text of apparently dubious motivations. As Irene Samuel—perhaps the most influential (particularly on Joseph Wittreich's long engagement with the work), and certainly one of the first Miltonists to argue against the regenerationist reading—explains:

> Even the best of those who argue for Samson's regeneration rather noticeably close their eyes to the nature of his last act. They focus exclusively on Samson as though no one else were involved and dismiss the victims of his wholesale murderousness as 'God's enemies' presumably placed there by divine providence in order that the Chorus may rejoice over 'thy slaughter'd foes in number more / Than all thy life had slain before.' Some of us cannot without profound discomfort identify Milton's with the gross morality that exonerates every injury of

[276] In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Messiah is anticipated by the Davidic line, and most especially figured by Solomon, son of David. See 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. The Messiah is named as such in Daniel 9.25-26: "Know therefore and understand, *that* from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince *shall be* seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof *shall be* with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined." For the figure of the messiah in Judaism, see Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971).

[277] The representative critics of this interpretative tradition include Irene Samuel, Joseph Wittreich, Derek Wood, John Carey, and also Jane Melbourne. See Irene Samuel, "*Samson Agonistes* as Tragedy," in *Calm of Mind: Tercentenary Essays on* Paradise Regained *and* Samson Agonistes (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1971), 235-57; Joseph Wittreich, *Interpreting* Samson Agonistes and *Shifting Contexts: Reinterpreting* Samson Agonistes; Derek N.C. Wood, "'Exil'd from Light': The Darkened Moral Consciousness of Milton's Hero of Faith," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 58 (1988-89), 244-62; Carey, ed., *Poems of John Milton*, 335-51; Carey, "A Work in Praise of Terrorism?"; and Jane Melbourne, "Biblical Intertextuality in *Samson Agonistes*," *Studies in English Literature* 36 (1996), 111-27.

> others if only it be committed in the name of God's will. Milton himself had lived through a long civil war during which God's will was all-too-seriously called upon as sanction.
>
> No, either we accuse the poet of *Samson Agonistes* of a serious moral blindness, of sheer bigotry, or we recognize that he called the work a tragedy for good reason…All that he [Samson] says and does is appropriate to the protagonist of a tragedy; and as a tragic agent Samson does not violate the ethic that Milton held.[278]

Samuel's registration of the "profound discomfort" *Samson Agonistes* causes its interpreters is critically important. The question then is, what are we to do—what does Milton intend us to do—with this grave discomfort? As Samuel suggests, the project of identifying Milton's *morality* in and by *Samson Agonistes* is dubious, if not doomed from the start since the only morality to be resolutely and specifically discerned in the drama is not Samson's nor any other characters, but the reader's. Finally, we as interpreters have no critical access (which means Milton gives us no access) to Samson's "rousing motions," and therefore we cannot finally interpret their quality, whether divine, delusional, or anything else. And we have no access to the nature of Samson's transformation from despair to act. We have only what he says, and what others say to and about him, both before and after he pulls the temple down. And what each character says is, as soon as he or she says it, identifiable as rhetoric (as language being used to persuade), and perhaps even as description of concern or intention, but what each says is not in the least identifiable as the truth of the matter, as reported fact, or as the express disclosure of Milton' morality. Milton's morality is not *in* the play; if anything, it *is* the play, every word, every line, every transition, every character, every interaction between characters, and every setting, actual and implied. So that the only appropriate definition of Milton's morality in *Samson Agonistes* would be to point to the play, and say "that."

[278] Irene Samuel, quoted in Wittreich, *Interpreting* Samson Agonistes, 296. Carey's "A Work in Praise of Terrorism," is basically a restatement of Samuel's interpretation.

If Milton intended otherwise—to have his morality clear and readily identifiable in the drama—he would have delivered otherwise, in the manner of his prose. For example, "But God himself is truth!" (*2Def*, Yale 4:585) Or:

> Good and evil we know in the field of this World grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involv'd and interwoven with the knowledge of evill, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discern'd, that those confused seeds which were impos'd on *Psyche* as incessant labor to cull out and sort asunder, were not more intermixt.[279] (*Areop*, Yale 2: 514)

What Samuel is saying here—the interpretive dilemma she is pointing to—is that with *Samson Agonistes* we must either ascribe to Milton a coarse form of 'popular morality,' jacked-up on a lust for retribution—which would be a frankly inaccurate ascription—or we are compelled to find a different reading. The counter-traditional reading that Samuel and others have generated is just such a different reading, in which Milton's intentions are not as immediately assumed, as they are in the regenerationist reading.

The counter-traditional reading seeks to read both the obscurity and the nuance of the drama not despite its violent dénouement, but as a way of understanding the meaning of the dénouement. For this line of argument, it is important to remember that Milton's concept of obedience posits the potential if not the occasional synchronicity of human will with divine will, and demonstrates the perfect moment of such synchronization in *Paradise Regained*.[280] For Milton, moments of such synchronization—of what we might think of as moments of accurate obedience—are of course entirely different from moments not of synchronization but alienation, moments of inaccurate obedience (most

[279] For Psyche, see Yale 2:514, n.100.

[280] To extend the point: if this potential for synchronization were excluded from Milton's work (an exclusion which would in my view render his work senseless), then Milton could justifiably be described as an intellectual terrorist.

particularly, perhaps, those moments of inaccurate obedience which nonetheless justify injury caused as fulfilling divine will.) It follows that any comprehensive designation of (human) acts "committed in the name of God's will," must *at the very least* afford designations of those acts as accurate and inaccurate commissions, and further still, of the whole set of partially accurate and inaccurate commissions between the two extremes of accurate and inaccurate commission, moments of obedience and disobedience.

For Milton, whose life was one sustained attempt to discern the will of God both for himself and for England, and whose poetry is the artful outcome of that attempt, the idea that in *all* cases of injury to others the same designation can be applied is insufficient. Considered in the light of Milton's paramount valuation of obedience, only those cases of "injury to others" which followed from *inaccurate commissions* of human will in terms of its obedience to divine will would need to be exonerated, or to put it more bluntly, explained so terribly away. However, in those cases in which "injury to others" followed from *accurate commissions* of human will in terms of its obedience to divine will, those injuries would not need to be exonerated. This is so precisely because Milton's paramount valuation of obedience indicates Milton's entire epistemology, the ground of his knowledge both theoretical and applied, in terms of truth and in terms of the framework in which meaning for that truth is generated and organized. Milton values obedience above all, because for Milton only obedience to divine will affords the possibility of coming to the truth, which is for Milton God's will.

By emphasizing the very incertitude of *Samson Agonistes*, the counter-traditional reading suggests what may be a useful adjustment with regard to the kind of interpretation the drama demands. For it may be that what Milton asks of us in our

attempt to interpret human acts "committed in the name of God" is the reorientation of our imaginations in which our critical judgments develop and from which those critical judgments are advanced. We might describe this reorientation of imagination from one of *personalized* imagination, in which human experience is the point of orientation and concern, and human sentiment the inevitable result, to one of what might be called *sacrificial* imagination, in which divine experience is the intended point of orientation, and the revelation of divine will in the world the intended result. When acts "committed in the name of God's will" are evaluated by the critical faculty of the sacrificial rather than the personalized imagination, the resultant interpretations will *always* be qualitatively different, even in those instances when the final judgments are the same. And in those potential cases in which such acts are *accurate commissions* of divine will, then the evaluation of those acts, and all their effects, e.g., "injury to others," would proceed not in terms of exoneration but in terms of glorification and remembrance. For a Christian, the injuries sustained would be injuries of martyrdom, wounds attributable to the workings of the divine will in the world.

It is important to note that nowhere in the attempt to interpret acts committed in the name of God's will does the potential for sheer atrocity make itself felt than in just this kind of formulation (although it must also be noted that sheer atrocity does not require a God-oriented imagination for its efficacy). However, the positing of a providential God entails just such a disquieting possibility. Milton's God is not only the God of the "inner light" but the God of the flood and of Jericho as well. And this God's providence is *only* reducible to justice, in divine terms, and to nothing else. As Feisel Mohamed has pointed out, "that Samson's actions carry a horrific human cost does not

preclude consideration of them as consistent with Providence."[281] From this perspective, the "gross morality" might more accurately be called sublime.

However the sublime possibility is *only* a possibility. When we consider the *genre* of *Samson Agonistes* other interpretations become possible. For example, Samson's final act may be an atrocity *and* even so, he is a tragic hero of neo-Greek tragedy (one thinks of what Achilles does to Hector's corpse). This interpretive possibility reiterates the importance of reading *Samson Agonistes* in terms of Milton's own generic designation of it as tragedy. As Samuel writes, "Milton called *Samson Agonistes* a tragedy, not a martyr play; its subject cannot be Samson restored to divine favor. The title signifies Samson in his *agon*, his contest, and thus prepares us for a grim struggle proper to tragedy."[282] It is possible that the grim struggle finds its conclusion in the tragically self-referential nether-reaches of Samson's will, roused or otherwise.[283] As for Samson's will, it may be a site of perceptive distortion wreaked by a disastrous alliance of virtues and harm. So when he looks out on his circumstance, or into his circumstance, he perceives virtue harmed, or himself having harmed virtue, chiefly his own, God-given. As Samuel writes, "along with virtues [Samson] has a *hamartia* so deep in his ethos that he snares himself in folds of necessity."[284]

Hamartia corresponds negatively to *kairos*, and was used in Ancient Greece to denote its opposite—not hitting the mark, but missing the mark. The senses of the word

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[281] "Confronting Religious Violence: Milton's *Samson Agonistes*," 336.

[282] Samuel, "*Samson Agonistes* as Tragedy," 239. However, if one emphasizes Samson, rather than Agonistes, one may rightly propose that a "martyr play" is exactly what Milton wrote, and gave the name "tragedy to it."

[283] See Melbourne, "Biblical Intertextuality in *Samson Agonistes*," 121.

[284] Samuel, "*Samson Agonistes* as Tragedy," 256.

also included wrongdoing, error, and in the Judeo-Christian framework, sin. In simple terms, Samson is so screwed up—because of the sin he committed, the mark he missed—that he can't see clearly. As Jane Melbourne puts it, Samson "suffers psychologically as well as physically because he believes he was born to deliver Israel, and he has accomplished nothing toward that end. From either a Deuteronomic or tragic perspective, all that has happened to him is his own fault."[285] So when the drama opens, we meet a Samson blinded twice—by the Philistines, and then again by his crushing sense of failure.

In terms of genre and its intent, the movement from Samson's *hamartia* to the conclusion of the drama follows from the proposal made in the preface to *Samson Agonistes*. As Milton writes:

> Tragedy, as it was anciently composed, hath been ever held the gravest, moralist, and most profitable of all other poems: therefore said by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such-like passions, that is to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated.

The debt to Aristotle's *Poetics* is explicit, most especially in its concern with the effect of a literary work on its audience. The debt to Horace and the positing of neoclassical literary theory are implied. The effect is first off "to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to *purge* the mind." Here, Milton recalls Aristotle's theory of catharsis or purgation, set forth in chapters 9, 13-14, and 24-25 of the *Poetics*.[286] The purpose of the purgation is taken up after chapter 9. Aristotle replaces *catharsis* with *rhaumaston*,

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[285] Melbourne, "Biblical Intertextuality in *Samson Agonistes*," 112. Melbourne's article makes a strong case that Samson's suffering can only be understood when read in context with *Paradise Regained*.

[286] Aristotle, *Poetics*, translated by Ingram Bywater, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle,* edited by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941).

usually translated as wonder, and in Ingram Bywater's translation as "the marvelous." This move from catharsis to wonder is not a revision on Aristotle's part but a shift in emphasis. If purgation is one effect of tragedy, then there is the intended effect of that purgation, the feeling that catharsis gives. For Aristotle, this feeling should be pleasure, and the pleasure that follows from the cathartic, should be instructive.

In *Ars Poetica* (18 BCE), Horace unifies the Aristotelian notions of pleasure and instruction as that necessary quality for drama but he does so without reference to catharsis:

> Poets aim either to benefit or to amuse, or to utter words at once both pleasing and helpful to life. Whenever you instruct, be brief, so that what is quickly said the mind may readily grasp and faithfully hold: every word in excess flows away from the full mind. Fictions meant to please should be close to the real, so that your play must not ask for belief in anything it chooses, nor from the Ogress's belly, after dinner, draw forth a living child. The centuries of the elders chase from the stage what is profitless; the proud Ramnes disdain poems devoid of charms. *He has won every vote who has blended profit and pleasure, at once delighting and instructing* the reader.[287]

Reference to catharsis returns in neoclassicism, and English neoclassicism provisionally dated from the Restoration in 1660.[288] Neoclassical literary theorists were indebted both to Horace and to Aristotle.[289] As such pleasure (what Milton in the Preface calls "delight"), instruction, and catharsis all appear as central tenets of poetry. The catharsis

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[287] Horace, *Ars Poetica* 333-46, in *Satires. Epistles. Art of Poetry*, translated by H. R. Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1926). Emphasis added. In Latin the emphasized passage is: *omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci, lectorem delectando pariterque monendo*. It should be noted that the consensus among Classicists is that Horace was not familiar with Aristotle's *Poetics*.

[288] For the standard discussion of neoclassicist literary theory in England in the seventeenth century, see J.P. Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908-09). The first volume situates Milton with the early English neoclassicists, based on selections from Milton's prose tracts, and more importantly, the Preface to *Samson Agonistes*.

[289] For a good discussion of neoclassicist literary theory, see René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism 1750–1950*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955).

of the neoclassicists, however, is not that of Aristotle (to recall: Aristotelian catharsis becomes wonder). The English neoclassicists especially—influenced perhaps by the moral aesthetics of Puritanism, and having to justify poetry in a climate of Puritan moral aesthetics—understood catharsis as purgation. And as René Wellek has noted, "purging was interpreted to mean hardening, becoming inured to the passions of pity and fear, just as a physician becomes indifferent to the sight of terrible wounds and a veteran soldier to the most dangerous fighting."[290] As Wellek continues, "In this [neoclassical] theory of catharsis the emotional effect of art was central, even though it was interpreted to mean a release from emotion as the final attainment of contemplation."[291] Again then, in terms of genre, the last line of *Samson Agonistes*—"calm of mind, all passion spent"—verifies it as tragedy.[292]

However, there is a necessary caveat to reading *Samson Agonistes* only as tragedy: as much as the title signifies Samson in his *agon* as Samuel points out, and thus emphasizes its Greek heritage, the title signifies that *agon* as Samson's, a biblical figure—in the Old Testament a figure "blessed" by the Lord (Judges 13.24), in whom the spirit of the Lord moved (13.25), and for whom God provides miraculously (15.18-19), and in the New Testament a "hero of faith" (Hebrews 11.32)—thus emphasizing its Hebraic heritage.[293] So prioritizing either the *agon* of the title or the Samson of the title,

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[290] See Wellek, 22.

[291] Ibid.

[292] Ibid.

[293] Judges 13.24: "And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him"; Judges 13.25: "And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol"; Judges 15.18-19: "And he was sore athirst, and called on the Lord, and said, Thou hast given this great deliverance into the hand of thy servant: and now shall I die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised? But God clave an hollow place that *was* in the jaw, and there came

tells us something of the critical disposition and intention of the interpreter, but not necessarily anything about the prioritization of the Hellenic or Hebraic in the drama. In other words, if the regenerationist interpretation prioritizes the Judeo-Christian framework of *Samson Agonistes*, and the counter interpretation prioritizes the Greek framework of the *Samson Agonistes*, in both cases, the interpretations follow from the interpretive framework each prioritizes. And the characterizations of Samson the interpretations propose are legitimated by propositions of cause and effect that are themselves illegitimate, not least because each names Samson's final act an effect, and then reasons backward for a cause to justify that effect in keeping with the interpretation. If Samson is a prefiguration of Christ, Samson's final act must be sanctioned by divine will. Therefore that act must be an effect, the cause of which is Samson's regeneration under the auspices of divine will. If Samson is merely a broken hero, a delusional murderer, or both, then Samson's final act must be a tragedy. And therefore, that act must be an effect, the cause of which is Samson's fatal flaw, as it were, the *hamartia* deep in his ethos.

However, a point the counter-traditional view makes is that this kind of "prioritizing" can be read as ignoring the poem's status as a work of literature. That is, some regenerationist readings seem to assume that the poem is, in effect, a versified and unproblematic retelling of the Bible story, as opposed to a *literary* retelling *not necessarily tied* to its original in all facets. As a work of literature—of imaginative art—*Samson Agonistes* creates its own interpretive framework, *even as it* draws on both the

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water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived: wherefore he called the name thereof Enhakkore, which *is* in Lehi unto this day; Hebrews 11.32: "And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and *of* Barak, and *of* Samson, and *of* Jephthae; *of* David also, and Samuel, and *of* the prophets."

Hebraic and Hellenic frameworks at its disposal. The main point in the counter-traditional reading is not necessarily that *Samson Agonistes* must be read as a Greek tragedy, but that it should be read as an autonomous work of art. By prioritizing the poem's own framework, it may then be valid to interpret Samson as a prefiguration of Christ, *as long as* one makes such an interpretation in the light of the interpretation of Samson as tragic hero, and vice-versa, and always in direct reference to what the poem itself says. The interpretive effort proposed here is not one of reading dialectically but of reading the dialectic itself, or trying to, within the literary framework the poem itself produces.[294] To do so, one affirms one interpretation, prioritizes the Hebraic or Hellenic heritage; and this affirmation functions as a very temporary negation of the other interpretation, and its repression of that other heritage. Once the affirmation has been made, the negation rises to be affirmed, and subsequently what was affirmed is negated. *Samson Agonistes* requires just such an interpretive practice. The practice correlates to the Christian theology of *kataphasis/apophasis*, and is part of the necessary condition for obedience. It is to the *via negativa* I now turn.

Apophasis

[294] The *disposition* required to do so is something like the disposition required of Frye's concept of "double-vision" (and thus to Blake's poem, from which Frye borrowed his title), in which spiritual and physical world are simultaneously apprehended by the power of metaphor, to Frye not an element of language, but its essence. See Frye, *The Double Vision: Language and Meaning in Religion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991). Frye took his title from a poem Blake included in a letter to Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802: "…For double the vision my Eyes do see / And a double vision is always with me / With my inward Eye 'tis an old Man grey / With my outward a Thistle across my way." See *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, edited by David V. Erdman, revised edition (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 692.

The interpretive framework in which Milton's concept of unknowing develops, and from which it derives, is *apophasis*, or negative theology. In the simplest terms, *apophasis* posits the unknowability of God and from this first position, sets out to describe God by what God is not.[295] As Milton writes in *Christian Doctrine*, "God, as he is, is far beyond man's imagination, let alone his understanding."[296] Two hundred years before Milton, Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464) asked: "How do we seriously adore what we do not know?"[297] Cusa's question is a restatement of the question Augustine posed at the beginning of the *Confessions*: "Who then are you, My God, deeply hidden yet most intimately present?"[298] The question articulates the predicament *apophasis* or negative theology continually poses, and posed, to Milton.

Negative theology may be defined as an intellectual method, as a spiritual exercise, and as a critical practice. Understood as spiritual exercise, negative theology depends upon its practicable aspect, which entails the negation of all affirmations one can claim about God, followed by a negation of those negations. The specified reason for these negations is that *apophasis* saves its practitioners from idolatry. It does so by perpetual recourse to the fact of the individual's perceptual limited-ness. This limited-ness, and the uncertainty it denotes, at first provokes an existential anxiety. For negative theologians this anxiety is tantamount to a kind of critical virtue.

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[295] The companion of *apophasis* is *kataphasis*, or affirmative theology, in which the knowability of God is first posited, and then described along those lines of affirmation.

[296] *Christian Doctrine* (Yale 6:133).

[297] Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, translated by Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: A.J. Benning Press, 1981), 50.

[298] *Confessions* 1.4.

But it is so only if *apophasis* is practiced in relationship to *kataphasis*, or affirmative theology. One of negative theology's ongoing risks is its propensity for becoming an epistemologically self-defeating catechism of negations. Further, the relationship of *apophasis* to *kataphasis* is as a secondary to a primary. This is an obvious point, but important enough to bear explication. Affirmative theology is the foundation upon which negative theology depends, and without which it cannot function. As Hilary Armstrong, the foremost authority on Plotinus, has argued, "One may have to negate everything in the end: but one cannot negate it till one has understood it thoroughly. And negation does not mean abandonment."[299] In this regard the process or spiritual exercise of *kataphasis/apophasis* is a dialectic practiced on behalf of preserving a right relation to the divine; that is, of extending to knowledge and then returning to unknowing the individual in his philosophical relationship to the divine. To put it another way, the dialectic serves to promote continually more accurate apprehensions of the divine, while at the same time successfully resisting idolatry.

Formulations of unknowing rely upon *paradosis*, for the use of paradox as the predominant tool with which to express the experience of unknowing and to suggest its meanings, and also for the situational paradox of a text engaged in articulations of the unsayable, the unknown, the finally elusive. Parmenides of Elea (525 BCE) is conventionally understood as the founder of this mode of thinking. After Parmenides, the chief philosophical antecedent of negative theology is Plato. Socrates may be said to be the exemplar of what Nicholas Cusa almost two thousand years later came to call "learned ignorance." Socrates knows that he does not know. In the *Symposium,* this situation becomes the Platonic definition of the philosopher (see, for example,

[299] A.H. Armstrong, *Plotinian and Christian Studies* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1979), 78.

Symposium 175e). In *Parmenides*, the situation of unknowing is most fully investigated. Every term deployed in the dialogue comes under relentless scrutiny.[300] Of all Plato's dialogues, *Parmenides* is most a process dialogue, in other words, an enactment and recapitulation of the practice of doing philosophy. At the end of the dialogue no conclusions can be viably drawn, other perhaps than that all philosophical argument beyond the acknowledgement of being is doomed to degrees of inaccuracy and reductiveness.[301]

Fragments survive of Parmenides' unfinished epic poem, dating to 515 BC, and taken together establish the groundwork for practices of negation. The predominant interpretation understands the fragments as an archetypical if severe monist doctrine, making the argument that there is only and exactly one thing in the universe, unchanging and completely unified, and this one thing may be understood as the truth, or as the divine, and is in most cases radically different from what we perceive to be the case—in other words, from the everyday world of sense and contingency.[302] In Parmenides' poetic turn, "What is is/must be" and for all but the initiated the world is unknowable, and most probably misapprehended at all times.

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[300] It is perhaps worth noting that *Parmenides* is one of four of Plato's dialogues known to be in circulation in England during the Renaissance.

[301] See n.16 above.

[302] Parmenides, *The Fragments of Parmenides*, translated by A.H. Coxon (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1986). See especially Fragment 1.28-30: "You must be informed of everything, both of the unmoved heart of persuasive reality and the beliefs of mortals, which comprise no genuine conviction"; Fragment 3: "Come now, I will tell you (and do you preserve my story, when you have heard it) about those ways of enquiry which alone are conceivable. The one, that a thing is, and that it is not for not being, is the journey of persuasion, for persuasion attends on reality; the other, that a thing is not, and that it must needs not be, this I tell you is a path wholly without report, for you can neither know what is not (for it is impossible) nor tell of it…"; Fragment 8.1-5: "Only one story of the ways is still left: that a thing is. On this way there are very many signs: that Being is ungenerated and imperishable, entire, unique, unmoved and perfect; it never was nor will be, since it is now all together, one, indivisible."

With the birth of Christianity, *apophatic* philosophy begins to take real form as a negative theology. Following Pierre Hadot, Christianity should here be understood as a "revealed philosophy."[303] Its doctrines are paradoxical. A Christian believes in an unknowable God, and is committed to knowing that God; a Christian believes in the resurrection of the dead; and after the council at Nicaea in 325 CE, a Christian subscribes to the Trinity, the most mystical of Christian doctrines, which puts forth the God of three persons, the triune unity, the One of three.

Influential to the concept of the persons of the Holy Trinity is Plotinus' *Enneads*, the first great work of Neoplatonism. In this work, Plotinus sets forth his three metaphysical principles: the One, Intellect, Soul.[304] Most importantly with regard to the development of negative theology, Plotinus establishes that the One can only in any way be known by deducing what it is not. The name "One" is a conceit, and should not be thought of as a principle of oneness, but as the evocation of what Plotinus considers perfect simplicity.[305] This perfect simplicity or "Simplex" in Mackenna's translation is beyond the reach of the discursive, which cannot express the indivisible. (In this formulation of the One, Plotinus may have been influenced not just by Plato but by

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[303] Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy*?, translated by Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 237.

[304] Plotinus, *The Enneads*, translated by Stephen Mackenna (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), 5.4.1: "Standing before all things, there must exist a Simplex, differing from it, and yet able in some mode of its own to be present to those others: it must be authentically a unity, not merely something elaborated into unity and so in reality no more than unity's counterfeit; it will debar all telling and knowing except that it may be described as transcending Being—for if there were nothing outside all alliance and compromise, nothing authentically one, there would be no Source. Untouched by multiplicity, it will be wholly self-sufficing, an absolute First, whereas any not-first demands its earlier, and any non-simplex needs the simplicities within itself as the very foundations of its composite existence. There can be only one such being."

[305] Ibid.

Aristotle as well).[306] Plotinus' admission of his conceits, both conceptual and linguistic, serves as a defense against dogmatism.

With the *Enneads* the philosophical character of negative theology is in place. With the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, an anonymous 5th-century Greek monk, the mystical attributes of negative theology specifically, and of unknowing generally, are formulated. Like John Scotus Eriugena, Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa after him, Pseudo-Dionysius was a speculative theologian, situated as they were, as all speculative theologians more or less are, on the precarious edge of either religious heresy or philosophical nonsense. Even so, for Pseudo-Dionysius the negative way is the most advanced intellectual activity available to man.[307] He makes this point more than once in *The Divine Names*, *Celestial Hierarchies*, and *Mystical Theology*, his exemplary treatise of the practice of *apophasis*. However, he does not believe this is the case because it concerns the divine, but because it concerns the ways in which we may speak about the divine. This is a critical distinction and represents something of a genuine philosophical innovation, foreseeing as it does many of the concerns of early modern and modern philosophy, concerns as various as Kant's Transcendental Analytic and the language work of logical positivism. As Pseudo-Dionysius writes: "But my argument now rises from what is below up the transcendent, and the more it climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely."[308] Another important aspect of Pseudo-Dionysius's philosophy is his

[306] See for example Plato, *Sophist* 259e; and Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094.

[307] See *The Mystical Theology* 1 and *The Celestial Hierarchy* 2.141A, in *The Complete Works*, translated by Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 135.

[308] *Mystical Theology* 3.1033C.

kataphatic "doctrine of analogy," which posits that the divine is in all creation, and that each individual entity can be known by the degree of divinity which it has, and which it emanates. In other words, by the divine all creation is analogous to itself, and all figures of creation are analogous to each other.[309] It is a doctrine positing creational harmony as its thesis, in conjunction with an ethic of unknowing.

The Pseudo-Dionysian corpus influenced the entire discourse of medieval philosophy and theology, and was considered orthodox teaching in the medieval Church. John Scotus Eriguena wrote a commentary on *Celestial Hierarchies* in the ninth century, translated *Mystical Theology*, and in his *Periphyseon* argues that divinity, which is without limit, and beyond essence, can only be articulated by rigorously denying every single affirmation we can posit about God.[310] To do so, is the absolute responsibility of humankind. St. Thomas Aquinas, conventionally understood as the anti-mystic, was more influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius than by any other Christian thinker—with the noted exception of Augustine—perhaps because of the influence of his (Aquinas') teacher, Albertus Magnus, who himself wrote commentaries on Pseudo-Dionysius. Aquinas followed suit, writing *the* medieval commentary on *The Divine Names*. He also utilized Pseudo-Dionysius' doctrine of analogy in his *Summa Theologica* to develop his concept of what constitutes the "intelligible world" and by what means that world is perceivable by human beings.[311]

Aquinas' near-contemporary and fellow Dominican, Meister Eckhart, who was known in his time as "the man from whom God hid nothing," also relied on the Pseudo-

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[309] See *The Celestial Hierarchy* 4.177C-177D.

[310] See Deirdre Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 58-66.

[311] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia, q.4–q.13.

Dionysian doctrine of analogy in his discussion of the relationship between absolute being (the divine) and created being, a category which he names *nulleitas* or nothingness for its total dependence on absolute being and for its total unintelligibility otherwise. It is Eckhart who extends the mystical attributes of negative theology into a poetry of abstraction noteworthy for its provocative formulations—e.g., "cherish in yourself the birth of God" and "God becomes as phenomena express Him."[312] Both statements follow from Eckhart's particular practice of negative theology, which delineates between God and Godhead. God is that which is beyond all being, beyond discourse, in no language can be approached. Godhead is the eternal potentiality and ongoing presence of God in being, the creator, and is that to which we refer when we attempt to speak of the divine.[313] Taken together, Eckhart's sermons may be thought of as a prolonged and guided excursion into the darkness of God.

Nicholas of Cusa's *On Learned Ignorance* (1440) is generally considered both the culmination to the negative theology of the medieval period, and the foundational text of negative theology for the Renaissance. As Ernst Cassirer wrote more than forty years ago, "Any study that seeks to view the philosophy of the Renaissance as a *systematic* unit must take as its point of departure the doctrines of Nicholas Cusanus."[314] First and foremost, *On Learned Ignorance* is the work of a man who is both a speculative theologian *and* a speculative mathematician (as Bruno and Pascal after him), a German living in Italy, and a conforming Cardinal of the church who was throughout his career

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[312] Meister Eckhart, *Sermon* 2, in *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation* by Raymond Bernard Blakney (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941), 103; *Sermon* 27, 225.

[313] *Sermon* 15, 167.

[314] Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, translated by Mario Domandi (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), 7.

concerned with two inextricably related questions: 1) How can we seriously adore what we do not know? Thus 2) How can we (finite, limited) think about the infinite and transcendent God? In other words, Cusa is primarily concerned with addressing not knowledge of God, but the possibility of knowledge of God. In response to this concern, Cusa utilizes geometry, number, Neoplatonic philosophy, scripture, and moments of exceptionally well-placed mysticism to develop his doctrine of "learned ignorance." The doctrine is most heavily indebted to Pseudo-Dionysius, Eckhart, and to Plotinus' figuration of the One, which Cusanus refigures as the "Maximum."[315] By "Maximum" Cusa means not just the Plotinian "perfect simplicity" but also the antithesis to every comparison, categorically to comparison itself, to every measure of grade and quantity, an idea quite similar to that proposed in Plato's *Parmenides*. This "Maximum" is set in relatedness to the universe, which Cusa argues (thirty years before Copernicus and the beginning of the scientific revolution) is indeterminate, with no fixed center.[316] The absolute distance of the divine is a characteristic of its otherness; and the absolute indeterminateness of the universe causes what Cusa terms "a crisis of incommensurability," to which only the practices of negative theology can effectively respond. Cusa writes: "Sacred Ignorance has taught us that God is ineffable. And by virtue of this fact, we speak of God more truly through removal and negation, as teaches

[315] *On Learned Ignorance* I.2.5: "Now, I give the name 'Maximum' to that than which there cannot be anything greater. But fullness befits what is one. Thus, oneness—which is also being—coincides with Maximality. But if such a oneness is altogether free from all relation and contraction, obviously nothing is opposed to it, since it is Absolute Maximality. Thus, the Maximum is the Absolute One which is all things."

[316] Ibid., II.1.97.

Dionysius who did not believe that God is either Truth or understanding or Light or anything which can be spoken of."[317]

Christ is in Cusa's terms the "contracted maximal individual," that is, he is God *in* time, and the only instance of such (and is equal to the Father, who is the infinity of oneness, by the unifying activity of the Holy Spirit).[318] The formulation is proposed mathematically in *On Learned Ignorance* by way of geometric analogy. With this formulation Cusa makes his (and arguably negative theology's) culminating approach, in unknowing, to a suggestion of God—a rigorous approximation. He explains: "the intellect is to truth as the polygon is to the circle: just as the polygon, the more sides and angles it has, approximates but never becomes a circle, even if one lets the sides and angles multiply infinitely, so we know of the truth no more than that we cannot grasp it as it is with any true precision."[319]

Threshold Poetry: Prayer and Act

In *How Milton Works* Stanley Fish writes, "In the end, the only value we can put on Samson's action is the value he gives it in context. Within that situation, it is an expression, however provisional, of his reading of the divine will; and insofar as it represents his desire to conform to that will, it is a virtuous action. *No other standard for evaluating it exists*."[320] It may be useful here to note that the title of the chapter in which

[317] Ibid., I.26.87.

[318] Ibid., III.4.203.

[319] Ibid., I.3.10.

this passage appears is "The Temptation of Understanding." Fish's critical purpose in the chapter is obviously enough to demonstrate that the "temptation" that underlies *Samson Agonistes* is the temptation to understand. (To extend Fish's point I would suggest that the very ground for human knowledge is divinely established as—and is paradoxically—unknowing.) Fish concludes his argument thusly:

> Along with the uncertainties, the difficulty of distinguishing between inspiration and inclination, the softening of so many supposedly sharp focuses, there coexists a strongly felt sense of cosmic order and regularity. At every point, our inability to understand something is accompanied by a conviction that if we only knew enough—that is, if we only were gods—it could be understood. And while this may appear to be a contradiction, it is in fact Milton's triumph. For his purpose is not to deny the reality of a just and benevolent God, but to suggest that we cannot infer his benevolence or validate his justice from the known facts.[321]

The underlying guarantor in all Milton's work is exactly the reality and presence of a just God, no matter how incomprehensible to humankind. As such, in *Samson Agonistes* the point for Milton is not finally the death of the Philistines, but the accuracy of Samson's final act in terms of divine will.

If Samson is wrong in *his evaluation* of that will it does not follow that there either is or is not a "reality of a just and benevolent God." Further, even if Samson is dead wrong, thus a murderer on all accounts, it does not follow that 1) he was not trying to do the will of the divine, 2) that trying to do the will of the divine is itself categorically wrong as a human activity, flowing from a human disposition, 3) that there either is or is not any such thing as a just God. If the definition of *Samson Agonistes* as a tragedy depends on one's interpretation of the tragic genre, and then one's interpretation of

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[320] *HMW*, 426. This passage in particular provoked Carey's disapproval. See "A Work in Praise of Terrorism?"

[321] *HMW*, 430.

Samson' final act, the designation of *Samson Agonistes* as a *drama*, depends upon what one recognizes to be the source of its tragic power. In my view, the source lies not in the final event, nor in Samson's proposed *hamartia*, but in the related points that 1) a human being, deluded or otherwise, attempted to do the will of the divine, 2) that such an attempt is a legitimate activity *regardless* of outcome, 3) that there is (to Milton at least) a just and benevolent God, 4) that the rightness of Samson's act in terms of the will of the divine *can only ever be established* (by the other characters in the drama, especially by Manoa, and by the reader) by the persuasive rhetorical force of interpretation, and not by any explicit and disclosed word from God, 5) that all such interpretations, beginning with Samson's interpretation of divine will, must be performed in a circumstance of terrible and terrifying obscurity, and 6) that to do so—to interpret so to choose—is for Milton a requirement of his faith.

What I am suggesting here is a reading that asserts the validity of elements within both the traditional ("heroic") and the counter-traditional ("anti-heroic") interpretations of *Samson Agonistes*, and negotiates the apparent impasse between them by reorienting both interpretations in terms of unknowing. In effect this reading accords with the counter-traditional argument that the poem is about unknowability of divine will, but also returns to a kind of regenerationist reading by emphasizing that Samson's heroic status, if it is there, follows from *the necessity of choosing* nonetheless; that is, of still making the decisive choice in a situation of terrible uncertainty. As John Shawcross put it: "The text does not question the benevolence of 'highest wisdom,' it questions human understanding of that wisdom and of the demands put upon humankind to uphold its covenant with its

God."[322] In brief, Samson is blind and bound, and bound again to be obedient to the will of the divine, even if that will will not be disclosed.

Milton's response to such a predicament is itself an act of interpretation, one that utilizes negative theology to reorient the human condition (as dramatized by Samson) from uncertainty (the predicament) to a necessary—thus in the Christian point of view potentially obedient—condition of *unknowing*. Negative theology points continually to the interpretive dilemma inherent in any and all attempts to describe or recall divine will, and divine will in relation to human will. The term "unknowing" designates both conceptual affinity with *apophasis* and practical differentiation from *apophasis*. Miltonic unknowing does begin with the *apophatic* recognition of the ineffability of the divine, and as Noam Reisner has demonstrated, Milton recurs to the idea of the ineffability of the divine throughout his work.[323] However, Miltonic unknowing is more than a mere recognition of the ineffability of the divine. Unknowing is Milton's visionary re-figuration of the existential condition of uncertainty into the necessary condition for obedience.

To say that unknowing is for Milton the necessary condition for obedience is to say that for Milton obedience must be understood in the frame of unknowing, and is only efficacious in that frame. It is the necessary condition for obedience because outside of this condition there can be no obedience, but only subjugation or delusion. So, outside

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[322] *The Uncertain World of* Samson Agonistes, 108.

[323] See Noam Reisner, *Milton and the Ineffable*. For a gloss of Reisner's book see Chapter 1, fn. 60 of this dissertation. Reisner situates Milton—most particularly the Milton of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*—in the whole philosophical and theological tradition of the ineffable, of which *apophasis* is a part. The instructive result is a deepened and historically contextualized engagement with Milton's theodicy, and its chief problematic, the obscurity of god. As Michael Lieb puts it, "For Milton, the whole project of attempting to know God is already called into question by the fact of God's hiddenness." See Lieb, *Theological Milton*, 77.

the condition of obedience is akin to outside Eden. Both states of being produce exile. In this way, obedience serves as the postlapsarian equivalent to Eden, as an internalized abstraction recalling the lost space of Eden. In other words, what was literal as a place—Eden—becomes, after the fall, figurative as a condition. Efficacy of obedience indicates that the necessary condition is in place.

As the necessary condition for obedience, unknowing becomes dispositional, recollecting Eve and Adam's prelapsarian disposition of wonder.[324] So Miltonic unknowing is not only the necessary condition for obedience, but the necessary condition which instantiates a disposition, which in turn becomes a continual referent, *the* point of orientation. So Miltonic unknowing is a condition, thus a disposition, thus an orientation. As such unknowing directs every moment of choosing in terms of obedience, the human will in its will to interpretation of divine will.

As Christopher Hill and others have noted, Samson's condition recalls the close of *Paradise Lost*. It does so because for Milton the condition of unknowing is the condition for all humankind after the fall:[325]

> The world was all before them, where to choose
> Their place of rest, and providence their guide:
> They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow,
> Through Eden took their solitary way.

[324] The recollective power of unknowing as a disposition (recollecting that disposition of Eve and Adam before the fall) derives precisely by being analogous to monism: By positing substance as God, and modes—everything that is not God—as properties of that substance, Spinoza—heretic or not—established from a theological point of view a necessary and relational intimacy between substance and mode, God and creation. The substance may or may not need modes, for its being, but modes, since they are of substance, require substance for their being. By extension, if there are modes, there is substance, and the modes are related to it. Miltonic unknowing performs a similar theological-philosophical function. By positing unknowing as *the* necessary condition for obedience, and disposition as the modal character of that unknowing (as obedience in unknowing), Milton re-creates Spinoza's monism; but entirely from the limited point of view of humankind, and in the context of the fall. Where God is in Spinoza's equation, unknowing is in Milton's. Where modes are in Spinoza's equation, obedience (Milton's mode of modes) is in Milton's.

[325] See Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1977), 431-32.

(12.646-48)

Paradise Lost closes with the first steps out of Eden, and into the world after the fall, whatever it is and wherever it leads. In brief, Adam and Eve don't know where they're going or why, and have only the promise of "providence their guide" to direct them, and their mutual support. *Samson Agonistes* begins with Samson, eyeless in Gaza (l.41), stepping tentatively, "a little further on" (l.2). The anxiety informing Adam and Eve's first steps out of Eden has become in Samson's steps exhaustion, guilt, and on the threshold of sure defeat. Furthermore, Adam and Eve's solitary way out of Eden has, it turns out, led to *Samson Agonistes*' world of "popular noise" (l.16). Retiring from it, Samson finds himself at the mercy of his

> restless thoughts, that like a deadly swarm
> Of hornets armed, no sooner found alone,
> But rush upon me thronging, and present
> Time past, what once I was, and what am now.
> (ll.19-22)

For Samson, the promise of his birth has become the source of his guilt; and his one false choice (Dalila), a mirror to Raphael's "other surety none." And his guilt over what he takes to be his single act of disobedience has become a kind of despair in the interrogative mode: the questions are coming out of him, hurled henceforth at himself, and also to the heavens. And all his questions are reducible to a Job-like "why?"[326] Why has my life become what it is? And why am I who I am? And why am I who I am, given who "once I was" (l.22)? The first question Samson asks is a lament:

> Why was my breeding ordered and prescribed
> As of a person separate to God,
> Designed for great exploits if I must die
> Betrayed, captive, and both my eyes put out,

[326] See especially Job 3.11: "Why died I not from the womb? *why* did I *not* give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?"

Made of my enemies the scorn and gaze,
To grind in brazen fetters under task
With this heav'n gifted strength?
(ll.30-36)

So Samson's interrogation begins as an interrogation of *his circumstance*, and it would seem that given the freight of his guilt his interrogation will continue as such, that is, as a series of questions designed not to be responded to, but for the sole purpose of laceration. "Whom have I to complain of but myself" (l.46)? This is not Samson asking Samson or God or anyone else a question. This is Samson leveling an accusation, which it at first appears he will then build into an irrefutable conviction of guilt. All he needs for that conviction is the demonstration of his shameful weakness and its result, disobedience. Speaking of the "gift of strength committed" (l.47) to him, Samson says:

How easily bereft me,
Under the seal of silence could not keep,
But weakly to a woman must reveal it,
Overcome with impotence and tears.
O impotence of mind, body strong!
(ll.48.52)

It is here with "O impotence of mind, body strong" that the nature of Samson's interrogation begins to change, first in its interpretative framework, thus in its intention. For Samson is asking *into* the paradox of his life: Why was I given (by God) such strength and not the mind to go with it? He does not have the answer to this question, and there is nothing he did that he can point to as causing it. As a result, the efficacy of his interrogation of his circumstance has come up against its interpretive limits. In this exact moment, Samson's interpretive framework ceases to be the interrogation of his circumstance, and begins to become something else entirely, an acknowledgment of his *condition*:

> But peace, I must not quarrel with the will
> Of highest dispensation, which herein
> Haply had ends above my reach to know.
> (ll.60-63)

The condition he acknowledges in these lines is the condition of unknowing. There are many questions still to come, many questions Samson will still express, but from lines 60-63 on, these questions are not as previously the interrogation but are articulated in the interpretive framework of unknowing, and are thereby directed by the ultimate intention of that framework—obedience to the will of the divine. As such, Samson's blindness, initially self-conceived as an emblem of his imprisonment and ignorance—"Eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves"—becomes the emblem of his obedience, by being purely denotative of obedience's necessary condition, unknowing.

By the time Harapha comes to taunt, Samson is so oriented by this unknowing, that his expressions of obedience echo the words of the Son to Satan in *Paradise Regained*. Like Satan before him, Harapha boasts and threatens (ll.1092-103). Samson replies: "Boast not of what thou wouldst have done, but do / What then thou wouldst" (ll.1104-05). His reply recalls the Son's "Think not but that I know these things, or think / I know them not" (*PR* 4.286-87). The first lines of each are exactly the same metrically. Further, the meanings of both, as replies to taunts, do the same work. In the case of the former: do or don't do what you're boasting of, it makes no difference to me. In the case of the latter: think or don't think what you want of me, it makes no matter. So, in unknowing, Samson—potentially—becomes aligned with the obedience of the Son of God. And it is possible he knows it. He claims to Harapha, in an upsurge of agency: "My trust is in the living God who gave me / At my Nativity this strength" (ll.1140-41). Here, Samson announces his disposition as obedience. So he announces himself as

obedient. And soon after, conveniently or by dint of *kairos* Samson feels what the Son felt before him: "I begin to feel" he says, "Some *rousing motion* in me which *dispose* / To something extraordinary my thoughts" (ll.1381-83, emphasis added). As the Son in *Paradise Regained* said: "And now by some *strong motion* I am led / into this wilderness, to what intent / I learn not yet, perhaps I need not know" (*PR* 1.290-92, emphasis added). Samson now *feels* himself aligned, his will synchronized with the will of the divine. As Milton renders it, Samson is at this moment on the threshold of his singular moment, and is echoing the Son. And there is only one thing left for Samson to do, one choice left to make: in obedience to perform his violent prayer. From Samson's perspective he is in terms of his obedience to divine will as right as he can be. Thus, in terms of divine will, he is either right or wrong. If Samson is a hero it is because he chooses in a situation of unknowability, thus without knowledge of the rightness of his choice. Further, he chooses as a martyr chooses—not his life, but his God. Samson's last lines in the drama begin, "Happen what may...." He is already calm of mind. "Happen 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*" (*SA* ll.1423-26, emphasis added). If Milton's Samson is indeed a hero of faith it is because his long trial in unknowing has made him first a hero of doubt.

CONCLUSION

THE USES OF DARKNESS

On March 29, 1652, at 8:48 am, the sky above London went dark.[327] It went dark above England generally. There was day, in terms of daylight, a day like any other. Then the moon passed between the Earth and Sun and covered the Sun entirely. And then the Sun could only be known as a distant glow emanating from behind what would have appeared from any street in London as a black ball in a dark sky. It was a total solar eclipse, a seamless darkness in the morning, in the Commonwealth of England.[328]

Years later, Milton was perhaps thinking of or remembering the eclipse when he composed Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*, first in his description of hell, "a darkness visible" (*PL* 1.64), and then in his description of Satan. "He above the rest" Milton wrote

> In shape and gesture proudly eminent
> Stood like a tow'r; his form had not yet lost
> All her original brightness, nor appeared
> Less than Archangel ruined, and th' excess
> Of glory obscured: *as when the sun new ris'n*
> *Looks thorugh the horizontal misty air*
> *Shorn of his beams, or from behind the moon*
> *In dim eclipse disastrous twilight sheds*
> *On half the nations, and with fear of change*
> *Perplexes monarchs.*
> (*PL* 1.589-99, emphasis added)

Properly, the simile first extends at l.593 ("as when the sun new ris'n), and two lines later offers the first of its two allusions, this one to Samson ("shorn of his beams"), a name derived from the Hebrew *shemesh*, meaning sun. The second allusion follows the first

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[327] See *Behold! Newes from Heaven, or, Wonderfull signes, and fearfull predictions ... concerning that grand and terrible eclipse of the sun, happening the twenty ninth of March, 1652* (1652), Wing B1778B.

[328] See Lewalksi, *Life*, 278-79.

("in dim eclipse"). Further, in *Paradise Regained* poetic vestiges of the eclipse also appear, this time neither in reference to possibly heroic humankind (Samson), nor to Hell, but to the Son. In Book 2, Mary laments, "O what avails me now that high honor / To have conceived of God" (*PR* 2.92-93). So she wonders, remembering how her (the) Son disappeared from her when he was twelve:

> I lost him, but so found, as well I saw
> He could not lose himself; but went about
> His Father's business; what he meant I mused,
> Since understand; much more his absence now
> Thus long to some great purpose he obscures.
> (*PR* 2.97-101)

From her, the Son is obscured, as the Sun in a solar eclipse is obscured. He is obscured to all but the Father in *Paradise Regained*, and to Satan especially, whose fury to see the Son (the punning equivalent of staring into the Sun) drives him to amplify his temptations manically from a mere banquet to "The Kingdoms of the world" (*PR* 4.163). When Satan tempts the Son with David's throne, the Son responds in the vestigial language of eclipse: "Know therefore when my season comes to sit / On David's throne, it shall be like a tree / Spreading and overshadowing all the Earth" (*PR* 4.146-48). He might have said, as the eclipse that overshadowed all of London.

That eclipse, on Black Monday, March 29, lasted for nearly three hours. On the streets of London, on the banks of the Thames, in the fields beyond London and the hills beyond those fields, each Englishman and Englishwoman confronted a double task of reading. Did the eclipse *mean* anything for human beings? This was the first task of reading to be addressed, the first question to be responded to. If the eclipse did not mean anything, then what did it mean that such a disquieting magnitude of dark did not mean anything for human beings? If a portent, was it one of doom or of marvelous things to

come? Or perhaps, to put it in terms less decisive if no less mysterious than portent, was the eclipse a metaphor as yet unshaped by human minds? How people responded to the eclipse—that is, *interpreted* the event—meant saying something about the present and future state of the nation, and the present and future state of one's soul. To bring the point home: How would parents explain such seemingly aberrant morning darkness to their children? All such explanations would be in their ways a referendum on the meaning of being human, in England, in 1652.

There were prayers in the street. Sermons were preached. The day before the eclipse, Fulk Bellers, "Master of Arts, and Preacher of the Gospel in the City of London," delivered a sermon at Paul's Cross before the Lord Mayor and the city's aldermen entitled *Jesus Christ the mysticall or Gospel sun, sometimes seemingly eclipsed, yet never going down from his people: or Eclipses spiritualized* (1652).[329] Nicholas Culpeper, physician and astrologer, interpreted the eclipse along political lines in his *Catastrophe Magnatum: Or the Fall of Monarchie. A Caveat to Magistrates, deduced from the Eclipse of the Sunne* (1652).[330] And a doomful ballad appeared anonymously under the title, *England's New Bell-Man: Ringing into all Peoples Ears Gods Dreadful Judgments to this Land and Kingdom, Prognosticated by the great Eclipse of the Sun, March 29, 1652, the strange effects to continue 1654, 1655, 1656, to the amazement of the whole world*.[331]

A little over a month before the eclipse, Milton in his capacity of Secretary of Foreign Tongues, had written *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* (*A Defense of the English*

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[329] Wing B1827.

[330] Wing C7485.

[331] Wing E3001A-3302. Extant copies exist in editions dated from [1660?] through to the mid-eighteenth century; it is unclear when the first edition might have appeared.

People, customarily referred to as *First Defense*). Within weeks of its publication in 1651, complete blindness came down on him. On the morning of the eclipse then, Milton would have been looking through a veil of double-darkness. The sun was eclipsed. Milton's eyesight had been eclipsed. And just as the solar eclipse could be seen as a symbol for the troubles of the nation, the onset of Milton's blindness could have been seen as emblematic of the losses he sustained in the spring of 1652. (His enemies interpreted his blindness as a divine judgment on his anti-monarchical polemic.)[332] Milton's wife, Mary Powell, died in May three days after giving birth to Deborah. Six weeks later, Milton's infant son, John, died. And at the age of forty-three Milton found himself a blind widower with three young daughters, and a governmental post the duties of which were becoming—because of his blindness—increasingly difficult to execute. Further, Milton, a proud man, now had to be led to Whitehall by the "guiding" hand of his nephew.[333]

What did all that was happening to him mean? More precisely, what meaning did Milton make out of all that was happening to himself and to his nation? If Milton despaired because of his blindness and the loss of his wife and his son, he re-interpreted that feeling—with reason he chose his meaning—as the kind of humbling reserved for prophets and seers, for God's chosen instruments, and eventually turned that choice into the making of his late poems. Just as the solar eclipse required interpretation, and in the moment of interpretation became meaningful and that meaning extensive to the future, so Milton's situation required interpretation. In other words, there were critical

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[332] See Lewalksi, *Life*, 400-02.

[333] *Ibid.,* 279.

interpretations for Milton to make in the personal, the political, and in the spiritual realm. In all three realms, Milton made his interpretations, and of them, an over-arching interpretation. That over-arching interpretation was Milton's concept of obedience, developed through all the years of his prose tracts, and rendered to full effect in the theologically unified vision of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*.

As I have sought to demonstrate over the course of this dissertation, Milton's obedience begins as a choice of interpretation, made to an ideal. The ideal is to be obedient to the will of the divine. Once made, the choice requires the agency of individual will. One must will what one chooses. If Milton had stopped here in his consideration of obedience, his obedience would not be a *concept*, but merely a prescription. But it is precisely the point that what Milton does not offer is a prescription of obedience, but a visionary concept of it, so close to the Stoic insistence on self-sufficiency, so close to the Judaic insistence on Mosaic Law, so close to what we would now call humanism, and yet not any of them. For Milton's concept of obedience was the product of a radical, seventeenth-century Christian Englishman, his Christianity radical not only because of the force of his faith, but because of its idiosyncratic admixture of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and its lifelong poetic and philosophical reliance on the Classical tradition, any and all claims to the contrary notwithstanding.

The foundation of Milton's obedience was scripture. From his reading, interpretation, and use of scripture, Milton derived his definitional understanding of obedience. That definition comprised the dictates of Mosaic Law and the prioritization of Pauline conscience, itself a stoic inheritance. Milton then resolved the two in his reformulation of purity, in most way reducible to Titus 1:15: "Unto the pure all things are

pure." Miltonic purity, as an expression of obedience, depends for its efficacy on individual conscience. This is the case because for Milton, the Spirit of God makes itself known in individual conscience, and individual conscience is the seat of reason. And it is important here to recall that for Milton reason was indeed but choosing. By saying "reason is but choosing" Milton implicitly rejected predestination in favor of a radical, pressurizing estimation of free will. So that for Milton obedience to the will of God requires free will, the activity of which is choosing. Without free will, and its activity of choosing, obedience degrades to subjugation.

But how does one choose in a manner consistent with obedience? That is, how does obedience actually work? Milton first fully confronted this question in 1634, in *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle*. But the response he came up with then fell short, as a misreading of chastity. As Milton formulated it in *Masque*, his obedience was a static ideal, ill-suited if not downright irrelevant to living *in the world*, and all its clamor, dispute, and beauty. By the time Milton addressed the question again, after years of writing prose tracts in the service of a Revolution and then of a Commonwealth, he had replaced his static figuration with a concept comprised of moving parts, and dependent upon necessary conditions. In other words, he had come to articulate not only obedience as a definitional ideal, but how it worked, and under what conditions. He had developed not only an ideal understanding of it, but a mechanical and what we might call an eco-theological understanding of it, of the spiritual ecology necessary for obedience.

Milton derived his mechanism of obedience from the Greek concept *kairos*, and from its poetic and philosophical legacy, to suggest right timing, the ability to recognize moments of opening rightness and to act accordingly. He illustrated the perfect

exemplum of right timing as the mechanism of obedience in the Son's resistance to Satan's temptations, and then, in the Son's stepping to, and standing on, the pinnacle. For the necessary condition of obedience, Milton availed himself of the limited powers and perceptual limitedness of human beings. It was a decisive interpretive choice for his concept of obedience, and was made perhaps out of strict necessity. The course of the world was uncertain, and one's place in it was framed in and by that incertitude. In the vernacular, there were no guarantees. For Milton, however, God was present. The difficulty for Milton lay in the fact that God was both present *and* incomprehensible, immediate in his sole command, and then again in the figure of the Son immediate in his promise of redemption; but God did not and would not offer absolute verification of choices made in the service of that sole command. Such verification redounded to individual conscience, the agency of choosing, and the will to intend by one's choosing to be obedient to the will of the divine. God, being both before and beyond language, and also the very generating *logos* itself, could not be known discursively. As such, the grounds of all human choice—of the activity of free will—were in a strict way, unknowable, and the condition for obedience, one of unknowing. Milton dramatized unknowing to profound effect with *Samson Agonistes*.

With unknowing, Milton refigured the existential condition of uncertainty into the necessary condition for obedience. With right timing, he illuminated an uncanny mechanism by which to negotiate that condition, to make choices in that condition, intended to be obedient to God. Importantly, this mechanism was, like the will of the divine itself, not discursive. With right timing and unknowing Milton realized his *concept* of obedience. Most strongly, it was for Milton a structure of being, a harmonic

disposition intended to recollect, as much as can in this world be recollected, the disposition of Adam and Even before the fall.

But to what end was Milton's paramount valuation of obedience, and what was the motive of that valuation? To what end in the everyday life of a nation and its people did Milton intend his concept of obedience to serve? By the time he came to write his late poems, was he just a blind, old, albeit formidably brilliant, sentimentalist—not only for the Good Old Cause, but for Eden? Was he an exile twice, pushed by that exile to imagine, if not a world in which he would feel finally at home, a disposition which anticipated that world?

Here, we might imagine Milton as he was in the years immediately following the eclipse—a blind man in the morning, an epic poet becoming, waiting for his nephew, Edward Phillips, to lead him by the hand to Whitehall so he, Milton, could continue to serve in his capacity as Secretary of Foreign Tongues. Again and again blind Milton rose to enter the noisome fray of the councils. If he did so because he believed—because he had chosen—that to do so was to be obedient to the will of God, why did he think such work, and his commitment to such work, synchronous with the will of God? If he believed that obedience was the paramount value, and choosing the activity by which individuals and nations collectively intended to be obedient to the will of the divine, why did Milton choose what he chose?

Two years after the solar eclipse and the onset of total blindness, Milton composed *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio Secunda* (*A Second Defence of the English People*, customarily referred to as *Second Defence)* in response to *Regii sanguinis clamor ad coelum*…, published anonymously by Adrian Vlacq at The Hague, 1652. Having, in

First Defense (1651), defended himself and his country against the attacks of Salmasius, Milton now defended again, this time against the personal attacks and various libels of *Regii sanguinis*. The tract begins with a declaration on the necessity of thanksgiving to God. "In the whole life and estate of man," Milton writes, "the first duty is to be grateful to God and mindful of his blessings, and to offer particular and solemn thanks" (Yale 4:598). It is perhaps important to recall, immediately, that *Second Defense* was a polemic written in the service of the state, and not a primer on Christian gratitude, or an extended meditation on the ways and means of humankind's relationship to God. But by beginning the way he does, Milton implies that all work he undertakes in the civic sphere follows from an orientation prior to that given by the civic sphere. He is indicating that any service he renders to the state is a service rendered to God, and that this is particularly the case in the present work (*2Def*), performed, if under duress, still with "solemn thanks" to the divine. It is also important to note, that by beginning the way he does, Milton rhetorically situates God with his cause. The gesture is both a polemical strategy, and for Milton, always a prayer. In other words, Milton is implying, God is with us, and also praying, God be with us.[334] With his opening declaration, Milton also communicates that he considers the present task, a "blessing" of which he is indeed "mindful."

With such an opening strategy, one might find Milton dangerously close to behaving like a proponent of theocracy. But Milton was, of course, anything but, as all the prose tracts of the 1640's and 50's make clear, most especially his anti-prelatical tracts. But how then, how can Milton adopt an opening strategy such as the one he

[334] Cf. Mark 9.24: "Lord I believe; help my unbelief!"

utilizes for *Second Defense*, and at the same time not be a proponent of, but an opponent of, any and all theocratic rule? The answer lies in the subject proper of *Second Defense*, of the ideal Milton is writing in service of, both for himself and for England.

In the second paragraph of the tract, Milton poses a series of three successively related, rhetorical questions. "For who," he asks, "does not consider the glorious achievements of his country as his own? But what can tend more to the honor and glory of any country than the restoration of liberty both to civil life and to divine worship? What nation, what state has displayed superior fortune or stouter courage in securing for itself such liberty in either sphere?" (Yale 4:550). The subject of *Second Defense*, then, is *liberty*. More specifically, it is about 1) the binding force of liberty, the "glorious achievement" for a nation and its persons, each of whom may rightly consider the liberty of England his or her own; 2) the binding force of liberty in terms of two necessarily separated, yet intrinsically related spheres, the civic and the religious; and 3) England (thus, following #1, Milton, and any other Englishman or woman who chose to thus identify themselves) as the proven and durable exemplar of liberty. This last point, Milton expands upon. "Being better instructed," he writes, "and doubtless inspired by heaven, they [the English people]

> overcame all…obstacles with such confidence in their cause and such strength of mind and courage that although they were indeed a multitude in numbers, yet the lofty exaltation of their minds kept them from being a mob. Britain herself, which was once called a land teeming with tyrants, shall hereafter deserve the everlasting praise of all the ages as a country where liberators flourish. The English people were not driven to unbridled license by scorn for the laws or desecration of them. They were not inflamed with the empty name of liberty by a false notion of virtue and glory, or senseless emulation of the ancients. It was their purity of life and

> their blameless character which showed them the *one direct road of liberty*.[335]
>
> (Yale 4:552, emphasis added).

Milton announces his cause, in ideal terms. Having done so, he is now ready to respond directly to the attacks made by the anonymous author of *Regii sanguinis*. Of these attacks, the most personal were those leveled at Milton's appearance.[336] And the most personal of these, were those leveled at Milton's blindness—a deprivation of sight divinely willed, in the anonymous author's formulation.

Just as on March 29, 1652, English women and men had to decide what to make of the cosmic poetry of the solar eclipse, so too Milton had to decide what to make of his blindness. Ultimately, what Milton made of his blindness was his concept of obedience, and his late poems. But it was the publication of *Regii sanguinis*, and the attacks therein (like Harapha's taunts of Samson), that gave Milton his first occasion—a moment of opening rightness—as a thinker and poet, to respond to his blindness, to interpret it. "Would that it were equally possible," Milton writes, "to refute this brutish adversary on the subject of my blindness, but it is not possible. Let me bear it then" (Yale 4:584). Here, if we could hear thought gathering itself in the space between sentences, in the space between "let me bear it then" and the sentences that follow, we would hear all Milton's thought gathering itself into the single brightness of a choice: "Let me bear it then. Not blindness but the inability to endure blindness is a source of misery. Why should I not bear that which every man ought to prepare himself to bear with equanimity, if it befall him—that which I know may humanly befall any mortal?" (Yale 4:584). His

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[335] The final phrase, "one direct road of liberty" resonates with *PL* 4.433: "one easy prohibition"; and *PL* 5.472, "one first matter all."

[336] Milton quotes the slights made about his appearance in *Second Defense*. See Yale 4:582.

choice is a willed interpretation of his predicament—blindness. He then elaborates what that choice means in Christian terms:

> May I be entirely helpless, provided that in my weakness there may arise all the more powerfully this immortal and more perfect strength; provided that in my shadows the light of the divine countenance may shine forth all the more clearly. For then I shall be at once the weakest and the strongest, at the same time blind and most keen in vision. By this infirmity may I be perfected, by this completed. So in this darkness, may I be clothed in light.
>
> (Yale 4:590)

The choice once made, resolution follows. That resolution is, as Milton writes, "to risk the greatest dangers for the sake of liberty" (Yale 4:591).

To return then to the question: to what end did Milton intend his concept of obedience to serve? The answer is liberty. He valued obedience for the sake of liberty, for himself and for his country. For Milton, to be obedient to the will of God meant to be always attendant to the prospect of liberty. In everything he wrote, Milton sang beneath "the sole command" for the sake of liberty, as he understood it. And so, everything written in this dissertation—this prolonged attempt to understand Milton's concept of obedience—might be reconsidered, re-approached, and rewritten, in liberty's terms, if not for liberty's sake.

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