

FREEDOM, THEODICY AND THE PROBLEM OF MODERNITY IN HANS

BLUMENBERG AND JOHN MILTON

by

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(Under the Direction of Dr. Thomas Cerbu)

ABSTRACT

In the *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Hans Blumenberg argues that Augustine formulates the doctrines of Predestination and Original Sin as an attempt to absolve God of the responsibility for the evils of the world in a way that overcomes the Gnostic challenge to the Christian Church. This thesis examines the failure of this attempt to overcome Gnosticism, a failure that was nevertheless constitutive for the conceptual, dogmatic and psychological environment of the Middle Ages, which required a second overcoming accomplished in the transition to the Modern Age. Milton's theodicy is based on freedom, and shows how the Gnostic problem is transformed in the Early Modern Age. This thesis examines the significance of this theodicy and the threat of Gnosticism and their anthropological consequences, arguing that they reflect the interest in and concern about human freedom emphasized in the epochal transition from the Medieval to the Modern world.

INDEX WORDS: John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, modernity, Gnosticism, Augustine, theodicy, Predestination, Original Sin, free will, knowledge, history of science, Christianity, reoccupation

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER	
1 FREEDOM OF THE WILL IN BLUMENBERG.....	1
2 “THROUGH A TELESCOPE A BLIND MAN SEES NOTHING:” THE STATUS AND FUNCTION OF SCIENCE IN PARADISE LOST.....	19
3 “THROUGH A TELESCOPE A BLIND MAN SEES NOTHING:” THE STATUS AND FUNCTION OF SCIENCE IN PARADISE LOST.....	42
4 CONCLUSION.....	57
5 WORKS CITED.....	60

## CHAPTER ONE

### FREEDOM OF THE WILL IN HANS BLUMENBERG'S *LEGITIMACY OF THE MODERN AGE*

One recurring concern of Hans Blumenberg's *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* is to expose the psychological / spiritual burden placed on humankind as a result of various attempts to "exonerate God" by placing the responsibility for "badness" in the world upon humans. This issue occurs most prominently as an integral step in the argument of Part II, where it appears in the form of Augustine's formulation of the doctrine of Original Sin as an attempt to "overcome" the problem of evil and Gnosticism, which is concerned with this problem at a fundamental level, at the same time. In this second section of *The Legitimacy*, Blumenberg's aim is to show how the "theological absolutism" of the late Middle Ages produced conditions that required the effort of "self-assertion" by which the Modern Age constitutes itself, and that this self-assertion is at the same time a second, and this time successful attempt to overcome Gnosticism:

A presupposition of this thesis is that the first overcoming of Gnosticism, at the beginning of the Middle Ages, was unsuccessful. A further implication is that the medieval period, as a meaningful structure spanning centuries, had its beginning in the late-antique and early Christian Gnosticism and that the unity of its systematic intention can be understood as deriving from the task of subduing its Gnostic opponent.

(LMA 126)

Augustine is in many ways a central figure in Blumenberg's work, and the discussion of this doctrine in particular appears as the first and unsuccessful attempt to overcome Gnosticism.

Blumenberg argues in addition, however, that this doctrine is a primary factor in the constitution of the theological conditions against which the Early Modern period also reacts: Augustine fails to overcome Gnosticism in that the doctrine by means of which he attempts this overcoming preserves within itself an element of Gnosticism. This paper will focus first on the internal dynamics of this first attempt, and then show how it functions within Blumenberg's larger argument.

It will be helpful from the outset to clarify what exactly Blumenberg means by Gnosticism. Because Part II begins with the question of the "origin of what is bad in the world," Blumenberg presents a brief outline first of the Platonic cosmology, in which the "myth of the demiurge guarantees that in the world the potential of everything that could be and of every way in which it could be is exhausted by the reproduction of the ideas" (*LMA* 127). In this myth, the world is not made by an omnipotent creator, but the demiurge brings the "blind necessity" of the given, matter as "a formless substrate of unknown origin," under the control of reason by means of persuasion" (*LMA* 127). While the world does not reproduce the ideas perfectly, it is brought in this way as close as possible. The world thus neither needs nor is capable of justification (*LMA* 127). This Platonic cosmos does, however, posit the radical dualism of reason and necessity, of form and matter, although it does not draw from this the conclusion that the distance of the image, the world, from the original amounts to evil. In Neoplatonism, the "accent" shifts in the focus of cosmology, and conceives of the world as "the great failure to equal its ideal model" (*LMA* 128). From this shift in focus follows a corresponding intensification of the metaphysical discrepancy between form and matter, "the *theologizing* of the Idea" and the corresponding "*demonizing* of matter" (*LMA* 128). What is important in this genealogy is first of all its dualism. While it lacks the intensity of Gnosticism metaphysical evaluation, it clearly establishes the

philosophical conditions that are necessary for Gnosticism's development. It also shows that in the change from classical to Hellenistic philosophy there is already movement toward the more radical metaphysics of Gnosticism.

Rather than focus on any particular system or making allowances for the "speculative variants" of the various Gnostic systems, Blumenberg provides a brief outline of what is "Really 'Gnostic,'" the cosmological elements that pose such a challenge both to ancient metaphysics and the trust in the cosmos and to early Christianity.

Where it employs the Neoplatonist system, it is nevertheless not a consistent extension of that system but rather a reoccupation of its positions. The demiurge has become the principle of badness, the opponent of the transcendent God of salvation who has nothing to do with bringing the world into existence. The world is the labyrinth of the *pneuma* [spirit] gone astray; as cosmos, it is the order opposed to salvation, the system of a fall. Gnosticism has no need of a theodicy since the good God has never had anything to do with the world. Even the bringer of salvation, sent by the good God to deliver the lost *pneuma* through knowledge, can only appear to assume a human body in order to deceive the demiurge's watchmen. The downfall of the world becomes the critical process of final salvation, the dissolution of the demiurge's illegitimate creation.

(LMA 128-9)

Gnosticism thus takes the metaphysical dualism of the Platonic tradition and intensifies it.

Whereas in the Platonic hierarchy there was already an evaluative element, whereby the intelligible Ideas receive ontological preference, and matter is at some later point "demonized" by comparison, it does not quite become a principle of evil. Gnosticism goes two steps beyond this, claiming not only that matter is evil, but also that the demiurge who imposes form upon this

matter is an evil god, a principle who opposes the good God, who is good precisely because he has never had anything to do with the world. The world itself is a labyrinth, a prison in which spirit is trapped, and any order it may possess is just for the sake of maintaining this entrapment. This anti-cosmos constitutes the primary challenge to ancient metaphysics, whereas the separation of the good God from the God of creation, the implication that the God of the Old Testament is evil, as is His creation, constitutes the primary challenge to Christianity.

This adumbration of a few significant components of Gnostic thought is relevant to this paper for two reasons: first, in that it clarifies the challenge to which Augustine responded in the formulation of the doctrine of Original Sin, which he incidentally and accidentally reproduced and which was only overcome with the advent of the Modern Age; and second in that it shows the intensity of the concern with badness in the world that Augustine, who spent nine years as a Manichaean, carries into this question. Augustine's response is then influenced by Gnosticism in two ways: on the one hand he shares with Gnosticism the intense concern with the condition of the world and the eagerness to have a God who is not responsible for that condition, and on the other hand, having rejected Gnosticism in his conversion to Catholicism, his response must retain the unity of the Creator and the Savior. The separation of these two by Gnosticism, however, allows for a formidable logical consistency<sup>1</sup> unavailable to Augustine, which Blumenberg presents as the motivation for Marcion's formulation of the Gnostic system:

Marcion wanted a god who did not need to contradict himself by creating man in such a way that he would have to deliver him from his lost state; by laying down a Law, the impossibility of complying with which would make it necessary for him to absolve those who became guilty under it; by setting up a natural order, only to infringe on it with his

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<sup>1</sup> Blumenberg claims that Gnosticism had on its side "a more consistent systematization of the biblical premises" (*LMA* 126).

own miracles—in a word, by producing a world that, in spite of his omnipotence, in the end allows the announced design of salvation to accrue to only a few men.

(LMA 130)

Here Blumenberg indicates the inconsistencies to which a more orthodox Christian theodicy is liable by focusing on the Pauline attitude toward the Mosaic Law, found in Romans. In addition to revealing the pathos with which he himself feels these inconsistencies, Blumenberg points us in the direction Augustine would also look to find his answer to the problem of evil.

Blumenberg presents Augustine's response to Gnosticism as having two distinct but related branches. The first is a departure from ancient metaphysics and an opposition to the cosmic dualism of the Gnostics, and is found in his commentary on Genesis:

The elaboration of *creatio ex nihilo* [creation from nothing] as *concreatio* [cocreation (of matter and form)] was Augustine's lasting achievement in his commentaries on Genesis. Exegesis no longer could, and no longer wanted to, overlook the fact that God, in the biblical account of creation, had expressly given each of his works the confirmation that it was good. Then where did the bad in the world come from?

(LMA 132)

By thus asserting that matter itself is a part of the creation narrated in Genesis, Augustine must recognize that matter too is good, for it is declared good by an omnipotent God responsible for its existence. He is thus able to remove the problematic "pregivenness" of the material world but as a consequence the question of the origin of the bad in the world becomes more intense and the options for answering it are narrowed.

The answer that Augustine gave to this question was to have the most important consequences of all the decisions that he made for the Middle Ages. With a gesture just

as stirring as it is fateful, he took for man and upon man the responsibility for the burden oppressing the world. Now, in the aftermath of Gnosticism, the problem of the justification of God has become overwhelming, and that justification is accomplished at the expense of man, to whom a new concept of freedom is ascribed expressly in order to let the whole of an enormous responsibility and guilt be imputed to it.

(*LMA* 133)

Blumenberg's presentation of Augustine's solution to this problem has two primary steps, the first of which is the establishment of "a new concept of freedom," a "freedom of the will" not considered "as an anthropological and moral quality but rather as the condition under which it was possible for the just God to punish man, on account of his failings, with the bad things in the world" (*LMA* 133). As stated above, Augustine takes as given that the world created by God is good, and was pronounced good by God. He takes too, however, both from experience and as a problem inherited from the philosophical and Gnostic traditions the premise that the present condition of the world is not good. In addition, the philosophical tradition did not distinguish lexically between evils perpetrated by humans and evils experienced by them, which thus implied that bad things in the world are its "reflex" to man's "wickedness" (*LMA* 133). Because the world is the creation of a God held to be just, this reflex must be His punishment of humans for their sins. Augustine makes no attempt to demonstrate that God is just, but because he assumes that knowledge is dependent on "premises accepted in faith," he rather thinks that to attain any knowledge he must begin from what biblical revelation says of God (*LMA* 133). Thus taking as premise that God is just, Augustine asserts the absolute freedom of the human will because "the bad things in the cosmos can only be punishments if man can really be made responsible for his actions" (*LMA* 133).

This concept of freedom, according to which man now bears the weight of responsibility for not only his own wrong actions but all of the badness in the cosmos, however, invites the question of whether such freedom itself can be called good. For if this freedom is not good, the attempt to “absolve God” would be a failure, in that God made humans free, that is to say His creation would not be good. But can this freedom of the will be considered bad? Augustine argues that it cannot. Blumenberg presents this argument thus:

Must not those who lead bad lives assent to freedom, without which they could not ever be good? Even he who is wicked wants at least to be able to be good; thus, even for him, freedom is something that he does not wish did not exist. Freedom confirms the goodness of God and His work in every case because it wills itself; indeed it wills itself independently of its moral quality. But falling back on the reflexive structure of the will, which wills not only this or that but primarily itself as the condition of its concrete acts of choice, only moves the problem a step further back: the will that wills itself is only free if it can also not will itself. Here rationality breaks down; reasons cannot be given for self-annihilation; “Sciri enim non potest quod nihil est” [For what is nothing cannot be known].

(*LMA* 134)

This works primarily as an argument for the freedom of the will and not the goodness of freedom. It is based on the reflexive character of the will. Because even a wicked human cannot will the non-existence of his own will, the will in every case wills itself. Because this self-willing of the will is independent of the moral quality of the individual will, Augustine concludes that the reflexivity of the will implies its freedom and thus “confirms the goodness of God and his works in every case” (*LMA* 134). If this demonstrates that the will is free, it demonstrates that it

is good only under the assumption that what the will wills is good, that is to say, only if one accepts that the evidence of the will can be taken to justify the will. But this attempt to show that the will is free by claiming that it in every case wills itself invites the question of whether the will can also not will itself, whether it is capable of willing its own non-existence. Only if this were possible would the will be absolutely free. But no argument can be given for this, since according to Augustine knowledge applies only to what exists, and thus no reason can be given for the will willing its own non-existence. Here again the emphasis is on the will's freedom, but now reason lack the capacity for a full demonstration. This is not to say that such a demonstration is necessary for Augustine's claim, but that the ability of the will to will its own nonexistence, as irrational, can be removed as a criterion of the will's freedom. The implied argument for the goodness of this freedom, however, has not been advanced. This opens already the possibility for Gnosticism to be retained in Augustine's attempt to overcome it, although it finds its submerged place in his system as a result of the second stage of his response.

The freedom of the human will thus explains how evil came into the world by locating the responsibility for this evil on humankind, but it leaves open the question of how one can conceive of the world as it is found, the world as Augustine perceived it, to be a just and deserved punishment. Augustine's motivation for attributing the responsibility to man was primarily the desire to show that God is not to blame, that he is indeed good. While it is clear that such a theodicy has as its effect the redemption of the world as well, Blumenberg claims that its human, psychological effect, the effect of having to bear total responsibility, is a "side effect" (*LMA* 134). Even still, this doctrine leaves open the question of how one might find a human act that deserves as its punishment the world and its evils. No single sin seems to suffice.

In order to deserve as punishment the world as it had been perceived and evaluated by the Manichaeans, the sins of man, which had taken the position of the wickedness of the Gnostic demiurge, had to be great, all too great. Even in the remorseful examination of his past life in the *Confessions*, Augustine found no sin that could have been measured on this scale. The balance between the condition of the world and the guilt of mankind, which he had drawn up in his early philosophy of freedom, caused him to become the theologian of the uniquely great original guilt of mankind and of its mythical inheritance.

(LMA 134)

Despite the fact that Augustine's doctrine was formulated to exonerate God, and that to do this required him to conceive of the world in such a way that it was not in essence evil, it is important to recognize, as Blumenberg points out, that Augustine, who followed Manichaeism for nine years, would have considered the evils of the world to be great enough to have once, and for a considerable time, believed the world, or more precisely the matter of which it was created, to be evil. Augustine does not reconcile such a world with the goodness of God by saying that this world is the punishment of the sum of human sin, which is in fact a consequence of the deserving, and is as much a part of the punishment as its cause. To the contrary, Augustine formulates as the first cause a single great sin of mankind, and the inheritance of guilt for the "first disobedience" of Adam (*PL* 1.1).

But the question of proportion, how any action of a human "could be measured on this scale" such that it would allow or invite the responsibility for the great evil in the world, poses the greatest problem here. For if one were to weigh in a balance the eating of the forbidden fruit of knowledge against the evils of the world and of man, the sin would appear out of all proportion with the punishment: Blumenberg elsewhere describes it as "a relatively modest crime involving fruit" (*WOM* 19). It is for this reason that Augustine's doctrine of absolute

freedom of the human will is so important. Blumenberg suggests that there is no way to attain congruity by increments, that no sin on its own or even all sins together equal in weight the magnitude of the punishment. By making the first sin a sin of the will, and by conceiving of the will as absolutely free, Augustine can argue in this way that the sin too is in this way absolute. Augustine's doctrine of original sin is based in the idea, found in Paul's letter to the Romans, that "through the disobedience of one man many have been constituted sinners," and that in the same way, "by the obedience of one man shall many be constituted as just" (Rom 5:19), which is echoed and explained in his letter to the Corinthians: "just as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive" (I Cor 15:22).<sup>2</sup> Augustine's thought on this matter in fact emphasizes the incongruity disguised in the former formulation: the "many" referred to in the protasis who are constituted sinners in Adam's sin are all of humanity, whereas the same word in the apodosis refers, particularly in Augustine's interpretation, to God's elect. In his commentary on *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* Augustine diagnoses the condition of humanity with a "metaphor taken from the bakery," wherein "the whole batch or lump of the human race contracted" its condition "from the sin of our first parents, who were just the two of them, all by themselves" (Aug. *GAL* VI.16, n.11). This metaphor, perhaps an extension of that found in the first Letter to the Corinthians, which refers to "the leaven of malice and wickedness" (Aug. *GAL* VI.16, n.11), alludes to Augustine's teaching that "Adam's guilt is transmitted to his descendants by concupiscence, thus making of humanity a *massa damnata*" (*ODCC* 1203). Concupiscence is for Augustine caused by Adam's fall, and describes the loss of original righteousness, and is "transmitted to us" as "a nature in which the desires of the flesh are no longer subordinated to

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<sup>2</sup> The references to and translations of verses from the New Testament are those found in Edmund Hill's translation of Augustine's *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*.

reason” (ODCC 396). In his meditation upon and confession of his wavering at the threshold of conversion, Augustine identifies this wavering as a problem within his own will:

When I was deliberating about serving the Lord my God, as I had long meant to do, it was I who willed to do it, I who was unwilling. It was I. I did not wholly will, I was not wholly unwilling. Therefore I strove with myself and was distracted by myself. This distraction happened to me though I did not want it, and it showed me not the presence of some second mind, but the punishment of my own mind. Thus it was not I who caused it but *the sin that dwells in me*, the punishment of a sin freely committed by Adam, whose son I am.

(Conf. VIII.10)

Augustine himself here appears to be of two minds. While he is attempting to refute, or at least to distance himself from, the Manichaean claim that “there are two minds in us of different natures, one good, one evil,” and thus asserts the division of one will, a will that does not will one thing exclusively but is all the while one, he also concludes that he did not cause this division, but rather “the sin that dwells in” him caused it (Conf VIII.10). He likewise seems to emphasize his own responsibility when the alternative is an evil mind given to him by God, and all the while to attribute the turning away of his will from God not to himself, but to a sinful condition, an internal sin that he has inherited but that he does not identify with himself. He thus denies the metaphysical dualism of the Manichaeans, according to which he, and all humans would have two natures, and both the good and the evil natures would be attributed to God. Augustine claims rather that the sin that dwells in him is a punishment visited upon him for Adam’s sin, and it is this sin that determines the division in his will.

Thus the doctrine of Original Sin allows for the “enfeebled” character of the human will on this side of the fall, but preserves it for Adam and Eve as a premise, and thus argues that God is just in visiting this punishment upon the totality of mankind, a punishment that carries with it total responsibility for the world’s evils, in that a sin committed by a will that is absolutely free can be conceived as an absolute sin. Blumenberg argues, however, that it is precisely by these means that Augustine reintroduces Gnosticism into his system:

In the very text that had convinced Marcion of the wickedness of the Old Testament lawgiver, in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, Augustine found the theological means by which to formulate the dogma of man’s universal guilt and to conceive of man’s ‘justification’ [in the theological sense of the term] as an absolution that is granted by way of an act of grace and that does not remove from the world the consequences of that guilt. There he also found the doctrine of absolute predestination, which restricted this grace to the small number of the chosen and thus left the continuing guilt of the all too many to explain the lasting corruption of the world.

(LMA 134-135)

As shown above, in Paul’s letters, the source of Augustine’s doctrine of Original Sin, there corresponds to the universal damnation brought about by Adam’s sin an offering of grace, also universal, to all. Augustine however recognized that Paul’s letters do not systematically uphold that the saving grace of God is offered to all, that in fact God in His omniscience and omnipotence is held to offer such grace only to those “that are called according to His purpose” (*Rom* 8:28-30). While in Augustine the doctrine of predestination is not held to impinge upon the freedom of the human will, it is nevertheless upheld that only the grace offered by God to the elect is sufficient for salvation, and that the fact of any individual human choosing God is a

consequence of that human's already having been elected. Augustine thus maintains the freedom of the human will, but his emphasis is placed rather on this inherited guilt.

The Gnostic dualism had been eliminated as far as the metaphysical world principle was concerned, but it lived on in the bosom of mankind and its history as the absolute separation of the elect from the rejected. This crudity, devised for the justification of God, had its unspoken irony in the fact that the absolute principle's responsibility for cosmic corruption—the elimination of which had been the point of the whole exercise—was after all reintroduced indirectly through the idea of predestination. For *this* sin, with its universal consequences, in the end only the original ground of everything could be held responsible—all that the *massa damnata* [condemned mass] had to do was to suffer the consequences.

(LMA 135)

Blumenberg claims that “cosmic corruption,” the evil in and of the world, enters into Augustine's thought by means of predestination, and that this constitutes the reintroduction of Gnosticism into his attempt to overcome it. This is to say, first of all, that the opposed Gnostic principles of Good and Evil have a systematic and functional equivalent<sup>3</sup> in the opposition between the elect and the damned. Because these groups must exist as such from eternity, i.e. in God's divine foreknowledge, and because the freedom of the human will is not sufficient to alter the position of the human in this scheme, their differentiation from one another is absolute.

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<sup>3</sup> The logic underlying this statement is dependent upon Blumenberg's model of historical process, what he calls “reoccupation,” which he elaborates in Chapter 6 of Part I of *LMA*, 64ff.: “What mainly occurred in the process that is interpreted as secularization, at least (so far) in all but a few recognizable instances, should be described not as the *transposition* of authentically theological contents into secularized alienation from their origin but rather as the *reoccupation* of answer positions that had become vacant and whose corresponding questions could not be eliminated” (65).

Furthermore, because the temporal basis of this separation, the presence of unredeemed sin (or the absence of grace), is not only the inheritance of Adam's sin but is the original condition of all later humans and identical with the cause of the world's evils, humanity as such, but particularly in its unredeemed state, becomes, as the origin of evil, equivalent to the Gnostic demiurge.

Blumenberg's concern throughout his presentation of the development of the doctrines of the freedom of the human will, original sin, and predestination is rather more evaluative than the discussion of these developments in this paper, which begins with an interest in the internal dynamics of these doctrines, as well as an interest in the theological pressures to which and against which they respond. I by no means desire to imply, however, that this paper intends to ignore the question which is central to Blumenberg's discussion of Gnosticism and Augustine's failed attempt to overcome it: "Can man bear the burden of being responsible for the cosmos, that is, for seeing to it that God's design for His work does not miscarry" (*LMA* 134)? Guided by this question, the doctrine of the freedom of the will receives the bulk of his attention, because it is this freedom that allows total responsibility to fall on human shoulders. The latter doctrines, then, may for the purposes of this paper be seen to fill out Augustine's conception of the human condition, which in turn defines the parameters within which humans must relate to the world in which they find themselves. The reintroduction of Gnosticism thus has the dual effect of locating the origin of evil within humanity and diminishing the effectiveness of the human will and of human action such that humans can do nothing on their own to alleviate the situation.

*The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* is not, for that matter, focused upon this doctrine for its own sake, but rather it pays this attention to Augustine because he "was to become the most important source and authority for the theological speculation of the later Middle Ages" (*LMA* 135). This doctrine in particular becomes the basis for further development specifically in the

Nominalist response to High Scholasticism. Whereas the focus in Augustine, in that his concern was to conceive of the creator God as good, and to maintain His identity with the God of salvation in the face of the challenge posed to this identity by Gnosticism, was oriented such that the consequences for the human condition were clear, the psychological burden of living both as a human and in the world as conceived by Augustine already was grave. Blumenberg's concern is to locate in these doctrines the theological foundation of the late Middle Ages against which the Modern Age formed and conceived its foundation, where the factors that cause this burden are emphasized, and any possible alleviation is cut off.

Gnosticism had not destroyed the ancient cosmos; its order survived but (nor is this the only case in which 'order' as an overriding value has done this) emerged as terror, from which the only way out was a flight into transcendence and the final destruction of the "cellula creatoris" ["cell of the creator": Marcion]. The cosmos had not only changed its prescriptive evaluation, it had also lost the quality that was most important for its reliability—its eternity. On account of the prescribed remedy of flight—the offer of deliverance *against* the world—schemes to alter reality in man's favor did not constitute a live alternative. Augustine's momentous turning from Gnosticism to human freedom preserves 'order' for the Middle Ages and prepares the way for the return of Aristotle at the height of Scholasticism. The price of this preservation of the cosmos was not only that man was supposed to assign himself for the condition in which he found the world but also the resignation that his responsibility for that condition imposed upon him: renunciation of any attempt to change for his benefit, through action, a reality for the adversity of which he had himself to blame. The senselessness of self-assertion was the heritage of the Gnosticism which was not overcome but only 'translated.'

In Gnosticism the world retained its order, but it was an order imposed upon matter by the wicked demiurge in order to trap spirit within the world. Unlike the order found in the Platonic and Aristotelian cosmos, an order that is by nature good, that is in fact the goodness of the world, the Gnostic order has an inverted “prescriptive evaluation,” and because it is imposed upon matter by a maker-God, it is not eternal. The cosmos thus can no longer serve any human interest. Although Augustine’s theodicy redeems the cosmos from the metaphysical weight of this charge, he makes no attempt to redeem it to any kind of human interest. The world is not by nature bad, but has fallen with humans and continues to bear witness to human sinfulness. The Gnostic response was to recommend individual salvation by means of the knowledge of the human predicament and final salvation by means of the destruction of this world by a foreign God. Augustine teaches a flight similar to the former, but includes that no effort or knowledge on the part of the individual human being can achieve any actual escape, since this is dependent upon the grace that is offered only to the elect, and is offered independently of individual effort. The relevance of the Gnostic situation to Augustine’s thought extends still further, although a long discussion of this is beyond the scope of this paper. Although he conceived of the world as not being by its nature evil, he continued to fear the world, in that any attention paid to the world for its own sake was a distraction from the proper object of human attention, which should be directed at God for the sake of one’s own salvation.<sup>4</sup> This prohibition placed upon curiosity makes the world into an object *non gratum*, at least in so far as it is considered for human use, activity, or attention, and betrays a residue of the Gnostic dualism.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Confessions* X.30, LMA Part III.

As a response to the God conceived by Scholasticism in the late Middle Ages, who, because of the influence of Aristotle and because of the ease with which a divine first principle could be demonstrated by means of Aristotle's philosophy, had come to appear all too rational and all too unmoved, Nominalism places a new emphasis on God's transcendence. Whereas the possibility for some trust in the cosmos, which retains much of the order according to which God had made it and which is apparent in the idea of "Providence,"<sup>5</sup> which found a home in Patristic as well as Scholastic thought, the Nominalists, whose "philosophical center" is "the denial of universals and the assertion of the priority of reality over concepts," deny not only that there is an order in the universe accessible to human minds, but they deny as well that there is a *ratio creandi*, any reason because of which the world is created (*LMA* 153, 152). God in his absolute freedom transcends any binding character of rational intelligibility, as would be implied by the accordance of the world with any ideal form or universally applicable law. Such ideality was in fact conceived to be a limitation on God's sovereignty. Such a God, who was thus removed from the too limiting association with the Aristotelian unmoved mover, is also removed beyond the access of those who would take some comfort in being counted among the elect. Because He cannot be bound by any external force, He offers no guarantee that the conditions of human life on earth will remain as they appear to be now, nor any epistemological guarantee that they are now as one understands them to be. Blumenberg argues that this system, too, in its "attempt to hold the God of creation and the God of salvation together in *one* system rests [...] on the ground plan of" Augustine's formulation of the freedom of human will and humanity's universal and inherited guilt (*LMA* 135). The intensification of God's transcendence deprives humanity of any amelioration of this situation by means of hope in salvation, and simultaneously increases the

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. *LMA* 132, 269ff.

pressure to do what may be done in the absence of any assurance. Augustine's judgment on curiosity, on the desire to know the world for its own sake, had been decisive for the Middle Ages, and Nominalists upheld this judgment as well: "The Gnosticism that had not been overcome but only transposed returns in the form of the 'hidden God' and His inconceivable absolute sovereignty. It was with this that the self-assertion of reason had to deal" (*LMA* 135).

Part II of *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* shows the process of the internal collapse of the Medieval world-system from within, as a result of its own premises, among which Blumenberg identifies specifically those theological premises by which Augustine had tried to overcome Gnosticism but which rather amounted to a 'translation' of Gnostic dualism into a Christian system. The intensified interest in God's sovereignty, his absolute transcendence of any binding principle, removed him beyond the realm to which the human intellect has any access, but since he remained the creator and ground of all existence, this removes the world itself beyond the access of human intellect. Such a God guarantees to humans knowledge neither of their own salvation nor of the world, and thus deprives humans of any recourse. It is these pressures that result in the internal collapse of the Medieval theological epoch and against which the Modern Age attempts to define itself.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “THROUGH A TELESCOPE A BLIND MAN SEES NOTHING:” THE STATUS AND FUNCTION OF SCIENCE IN *PARADISE LOST*

In the third part of *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Hans Blumenberg presents an extended discussion of “The ‘Trial’ of Theoretical Curiosity,” which in the early modern period, he suggests, was the force that motivated serious inquiry into the world in which we live, i.e. it propelled modern science<sup>6</sup> through the first era of its practice. Blumenberg’s concern with theoretical curiosity here is a function of his claim that at the beginning of the Modern Age, “a form of life first begins to depend on science for the conditions of its possibility,” and thus the founding of the Modern Age requires a radical shift in the prevalent attitude toward the world characteristic of the Middle Ages (*LMA* 271). Part III is thus in part a history of attitudes toward theoretical curiosity, in which the parameters within which the human individual is at liberty to investigate and theorize about the world within various systems of thought are sketched out. Because Blumenberg’s argument is oriented ultimately toward the conditions of possibility for the modern “form of life,” and because the late Medieval perspective is most relevant to the passages from *Paradise Lost* at issue here, the focus in the present discussion will be on the attitude toward theoretical curiosity, toward the investigation of nature in general that is characteristic of the Nominalist response to High Scholasticism. Although the Scholastic position on *curiositas* remains in line with Augustine’s judgment that it is sinful, this may not extend to desire for knowledge of nature, in that *curiositas* comes to be “defined as “investigation of

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<sup>6</sup> In this paper I have used the term “science” throughout and intend by this word what is meant in the German language by the term “wissenschaft:” a field of inquiry which includes both the natural and the social or human sciences (*Legitimacy*, Translators Introduction. xxx).

questions that have no importance in reality and for us” (*LMA* 330). The position of Thomas Aquinas, for instance, is not central to but a consequence of the reliance of his theology upon Aristotle, and is consistent with the idea that man is a part of the cosmos, that the desire for knowledge is a part of human nature, and that this is fulfilled naturally because the universe is rationally ordered. Aquinas thus holds that “the knowledge of God” is “the fulfillment [...] of theoretical curiosity,” rather than a “condition” of its “legitimacy,” as was the case with Augustine (*LMA* 331).

The Nominalist attitude is more in line with the spirit of Augustine’s prohibition, and is clearly discernable as a function of their adherence to and intensification of the doctrines of Augustine, discussed in Chapter I of this thesis, defining the relationships between God, man and world. The following passage is in fact a part of Blumenberg’s “Systematic Comparison of the Epochal Crisis of Antiquity to That of the Middle Ages,” but clarifies the integral relationship between the concerns in the first chapter of this thesis and those in the subsequent chapters.

Blumenberg describes late medieval Nominalism thus:

While this may not be a metaphysical dualism of the Gnostic type, it is its practical equivalent *ad hominem*: the only dependable and trustworthy God is the God of salvation, who has restricted Himself to His *potentia ordinata*, like a partially constitutional monarch, but Who, through predestination, still withholds from man’s knowledge the range over which He chooses to be dependable. It is precisely this restriction to those who are chosen that distinguishes the pragmatic dualism of the late Middle Ages from the Gnostic dualism of late antiquity because liberation from the cosmos now is no longer a divine offering open to all men and authenticated by the possession of knowledge. This time there is no consciousness of conditions under which the world could lose its

significance for man. The groundlessness of the Creation is indeed dogmatized as requiring an act of unconditional submission, but submission as such is still not a condition of salvation. Escape from the world into transcendence is no longer an alternative for man himself and precisely for that reason has lost its human relevance and historical effectiveness.

(LMA 154)

Blumenberg's diagnosis of the condition within Nominalism emphasizes that the individual has recourse neither to the world nor to any hope in salvation conceived as flight from the world. Interest in the world is nevertheless fruitless, in that God in His absolute sovereignty cannot be conceived as operating within the rational framework suggested by the Scholastics, which allows for the laws of nature to be accessible to human rationality, nor is there any guarantee that the conditions of the world will continue as they are perceived to be now. As in Augustine, the proper field of human interest and activity is thus reduced to that which is related to one's own salvation. The Nominalist interest in the absolute transcendence of God removes this too, however, from human access. The individual can have no assurance of his or her salvation, and thus falls back upon the world, but now not as a field of activity and investigation, rather an environment of possible temptation and care to which he or she is limited by the absolute transcendence of both God and His order. There is therefore no room whatsoever for theoretical curiosity. Blumenberg argues that this tension within the Medieval system of thought causes its collapse, and it is against these conditions that a new form of life comes into being by means of "self-assertion."

With this foundation, the questions I want to consider in this paper are: 1) What can humans know about the world? 2) What things are humans forbidden to know or are for some reason

unavailable to us? 3) For what reason and in what way are these things forbidden or unavailable? And finally, 4) What ought humans to know, or be able to know, in their attempts to orient themselves in the world? In order to see how these questions are asked of a given world-orientation, this paper looks to an instance in which these questions are being addressed which falls outside the scope of Blumenberg's investigation, in that it was written after the latest of his historical case studies in the early modern era and before the earliest of the cases that relate directly to the intellectual environment of Blumenberg's time. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* has concerns similar to those expressed above at its center, but science had not gained the ascendancy in seventeenth-century England that it had by Blumenberg's time. Milton's attitude toward science, toward human knowledge of the world and the motivation of scientific inquiry, therefore, bear marks of both modern and medieval thinking about the status of science. The questions then will be asked not only by the text but of it. The book's subject matter, for its part, brings with it an additional burden, the risk that the desire for knowledge is sinful.

The question of knowledge is also linked, in Milton, to the question of the freedom of the human will discussed in Chapter I. For this chapter and the next show that it is primarily by means of the question of the availability of certain kinds of knowledge that Milton shows the limitations placed on human freedom. This is especially interesting because Milton too, or at least his God, claims that humans are completely free, are equally capable of choosing to obey and stand or to fall:

So will fall

Hee and his faithless progeny: whose fault?

Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of mee

All he could have; I made him just and right,

Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.

(*PL* III. 95-99)

Milton's God here performs his own theodicy, blaming not only Adam, whose role in his downfall to come has not been questioned, but also "his faithless progeny," who have not been born, and thus alluding to Original Sin. God Himself however recognizes the implications of His foreknowledge, given that He is portrayed here as the omnipotent, omniscient creator of the world whose will for His creation, despite Satan's efforts, will not be contravened. This may appear despite His protestations to the contrary to be incompatible with human freedom.

They therefore as to right belong'd,  
So were created, nor can justly accuse  
Thir maker, or thir making, or thir Fate;  
As if Predestination over-rul'd  
Thir will, dispos'd by absolute Decree  
Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed  
Thir own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,  
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,  
Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown.

(*PL* III. 111-119)

The intention of this is not to imply that God is wrong, but to show that there is a way in which Milton's theodicy is based upon the idea that the human will is entirely free. The succeeding discussion shows, furthermore, that the limitation placed upon knowledge in Eden, both the moral knowledge offered by the forbidden fruit and the desire for knowledge that arises from living in a world that implies some order but that does not necessarily reveal its secrets, inclines Adam and Eve

toward the fall and seems in fact to limit the possible effectiveness of their freedom. Satan, too, recognizes this:

and do they only stand  
By Ignorance, is this thir happy state,  
The proof of thir obedience and thir faith?  
O fair foundation laid wheron to build  
Thir ruin!

(PL IV. 518-22)

The following discussion shows how knowledge about the world, and specifically the desire for such knowledge, is not unlimited in Eden, and that the desire for physical knowledge is already closely associated with sin even before it leads to sin, before it inclines Eve to commit the first sin.

The appropriate measure of inquiry into the world, the limits of knowledge and of action, are questions that recur fairly frequently in *Paradise Lost*, but are raised explicitly when Adam, after hearing a long narrative about the history and prehistory of the world, asks Raphael to explain to him the nature of the “celestial motions” (PL VIII. “The Argument” 183). Raphael was sent to Eden by God to warn Adam and Eve of the imminent danger confronting them as Satan has escaped from Hell and found the newly created Earth. In response to Adam’s question, he tells also of who Satan is, how he became that way, his revolt against God, the war in Heaven, Satan’s defeat by the Son, his fall and ruin, his new abode; he then tells Adam how and why the earth was created and finally of Adam’s own beginning. It is important to notice that the question of the appropriate measure of knowledge or inquiry arises only after Adam has learned, at his own request, more than can even now be known scientifically. All of this information, however, only “largely hast allay’d / The thirst [Adam] had of knowledge” (VIII.7-8). That it is not fully allayed is not surprising, as new

information often serves rather to produce than to quench curiosity. What marks this passage as interesting is that Adam's desire

to know

Of things above his World, and of thir being

Who dwell in Heav'n, whose excellence he saw

Transcend his own far

(V.454-457)

is piqued only upon the arrival and conversation of Raphael. His question, however, about the reason for the existence of the heavenly bodies, has been asked before. Adam first hears this question when he suggests to Eve, in Book IV, that the time has come for them to retire for the night, and explains this as what is "Appointed" by God for man, who can thus better complete his work (IV.619). Eve offers no dispute, but claims that "conversing" with Adam she forgets "all time, / All seasons and thir change, all please alike" (IV.639-640). After listing what she finds pleasant in the times, seasons and changes that she experiences, she ends her speech with this question: "But wherefore all night long shine these, for whom / This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes?" (IV.657-658). Eve's question arises from her interaction with the world, each part of which she enjoys. Her thoughts about the world prompt her to ask about the things in the world that she is told not to enjoy.

Although it is submerged, one sees in her logic a question about the sense of an interdiction in Paradise. Her thoughts and her attitude, however, are far from this, and do not stray from her enjoyment of what is given to enjoy. The desire for knowledge is thus dependent on the existence of what is forbidden or unavailable. It is noteworthy that Eve's question exposes this relation, and also suggests how what is epistemologically unavailable might come to be seen as divinely forbidden, as it will be in Raphael's response to Adam's formulation of the question. Adam's response here lacks

this interdictive element, but it indicates no curiosity: although no human eyes see the stars, they “Shine not in vain” (IV.675).

Adam’s desire for knowledge, it appears, is responsive. Eve’s however seems to be more natural, but is nevertheless a product of human interaction with and contemplation of his world. When Adam asks about the movements of celestial bodies, then, the question arises not in spite of how much he has just learned but because of it. This attitude regarding curiosity, what Blumenberg calls “the motivation of theory” implies something discomfoting: Adam is still in paradise, and his curiosity is responding to something, namely the fact that his world holds itself in reserve (Legitimacy 230). The fact of living in the world produces in the observer the desire to know the world so that he might orient himself to it. The very thing that produces this desire, however, is the thing that prevents it from being fulfilled.

In response, then, to the teaching of the “Divine / Historian,” (VIII. 6-7) Adam begins to consider the workings of the world whose creation he has just learned:

When I behold this goodly Frame, This World  
Of Heav’n and Earth consisting, and compute  
Thir magnitudes, This Earth a spot, a grain  
An Atom, with the Firmament compar’d  
And all her number’d Stars, that seem to roll  
Spaces incomprehensible (for such  
Thir distance argues and thir swift return  
Diurnal) merely to officiate light  
Round this opacous Earth, this punctual spot,  
One day and one night; in all thir vast survey

Useless besides

(VIII. 15-25)

Adam begins from an understanding of a world that gives itself, at least in some measure, to the observer who would know it: his access to the world is visual and his mind comprehends the world as his eyes see it. His vision, too, is robust. He sees not only the earth and the stars but also the “goodly Frame,” the universe as a whole in its harmony (VII. 5). His vision gives him knowledge at least of the fact of a design, a structure, if not of that structure’s exact character. But his knowledge of the world is not limited to what he can see. His vision is good enough that he can and, I suppose, must, if he would know them, “compute” the “magnitudes” and distances of the celestial bodies (VIII. 17, 21). Already we see that Adam understands the world not only as an object which holds some information about itself in reserve, but which can, to some degree, be penetrated with the aid of the tools of human reasoning. The material provided by these instruments, however, informs Adam’s question rather than his answer. I find the manner in which Milton introduces the tools of modern scientific inquiry, in this case mathematics, into the question of the nature of the universe very interesting: there is as yet no indication that these tools can provide answers; they merely assist in asking the questions.

Adam’s approach to his question is somewhat indirect. He begins by comparing the size of the Earth to that of the other stars and planets, in which company the Earth is miniscule: “a spot, a grain, / An Atom” (VIII. 18). The question of the size of the Earth in relation to the universe, however, is interesting. He is not, or not yet, questioning the Earth’s significance, its spiritual or metaphysical centrality. This, in fact, will prove to be his problem: that something so small can be the center, the focus, of a frame so large. Again Milton suggests this in the language of science.

Adam now refines his point before finally formulating his question. Not only are these planets and spaces incomprehensibly large, but, in order to complete their daily circuits, they must travel unimaginably vast distances at such great speeds that it defies sense. His argument reveals that Adam believes his world to work according to the geocentric world model of Ptolemaic astronomy, but that he recognizes the explanatory difficulties of this model. Both the Ptolemaic and the Copernican world systems held that the Earth is insignificant in size compared to the universe, but it is clear that the motion Adam describes is necessary only if the Earth is stationary. Milton, however, is clearly drawing out the self-propagating character not only of the motivation to scientific inquiry but also of scientific work generally. Adam's thinking in this passage develops steadily in its complexity as well as in its use of (anachronistic) scientific terminology as he works toward his point.

What troubles Adam about the discrepancy in size now becomes clear: such large bodies travel great distance only to "officiate light / Round this opacous Earth" (VIII. 22-23). It is a matter not only of size but also of function. The Earth is not only smaller, but it receives rather than produces light. It receives its light, for that matter, from great and noble bodies that, in Adam's mind, serve no purpose other than to give Earth an often insignificant amount of light (in the case of the fixed stars). It is not, however, the Earth's position or function, or in this case its lack of function, that most troubles him, but what this implies: the lack of recognizable sense of a universe that is so large and so noble with no apparent purpose. Adam's question finally builds to its full weight:

Reasoning I oft admire

How Nature wise and frugal could commit

Such disproportions, with superfluous hand

So many nobler bodies to create,

Greater so manifold to this one use

(VIII. 25-29)

His conception of Nature as not only “wise” but “frugal” is surprising. One would not expect Adam to question the wisdom of creation, but to assume that wisdom and frugality ought to be equated does not seem to gain support from the description of plant growth in Eden, from Eve’s beauty, from Raphael’s telling of history, i.e. from any of the things in the world to which Adam has had access. The basis of his query is therefore dubious. It is based not on his experience, but on the natural science of the Earth’s future. In *The Veil of Isis*, Pierre Hadot locates an early version of this attitude particularly in Aristotle, who “thought that nature acts in a rational manner, or more precisely that everything happens *as if* nature acted in a rational, reflective way” (Hadot 191). Although this perspective refers primarily to living beings,<sup>7</sup> Hadot discusses as well a version of this “principle of economy” prominent in Milton’s time: “In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was even introduced into mechanical physics, becoming specified and modified in the principle of least action, according to which in nature, optimal action takes place with a minimum of expenditure” (Hadot 192). We thus see a seventeenth-century version of an Aristotelian premise about the functioning of the world underlying Adam’s question.

The nature of the question is significant also in that it entails an accusation. God has created an ostentatious world, a world that lacks wisdom in its design; there is no comprehensible proportion between the size and nobility of the stars and the function they perform. It suggests also that the world is created in such a way that Adam’s ability to reason is not up to the task of understanding it

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<sup>7</sup> “In the Aristotelian perspective, the fundamental principle that makes possible the explanation of the phenomena of nature, especially those of living nature, is that nature always acts with a view to an end, and therefore never accepts the incomplete, the infinite, or the indeterminate, either in the organisms it produces or in the series of beings it causes to appear. The characteristic of living beings is to be full and complete. Consequently, Nature does nothing in vain” (Hadot 191).

(insofar as we give him credit for not meaning what he has not said, i.e. that the world is poorly designed: it is only in this way that he can mean his question as a question). It is for this reason that Milton's employment of scientific terminology in this passage is curious. He clearly does not disdain science, for the attitude reflected in Adam's question implies the rational functioning of the cosmos, and a rational order to which humans have access and of which they are a part.

The problem of proportion<sup>8</sup> is significant on several levels. His question is about celestial motion, and it implies that something great should not serve something less great. It is then a problem of what kind of work is appropriate to an individual given a hierarchical ordering. The bright and noble heavenly bodies are "Greater so manifold to this one use"; their nobility is being somehow wasted or abused (VIII. 29). This is an important question for Milton, in that his task, in writing this book, is about as presumptuous as one can imagine: to "justify the ways of God to men" (I. 26). This is not, however, Milton's problem here, at least not directly. Adam's discomfort with the thought that greater bodies may serve the less great is structural. If he lives in a world in which such things happen, then the ordered hierarchies according to which the world can be divided and thereby known are disrupted. If the order of nature can be thus inverted, then the world itself cannot be relied upon, at least not for the sake of knowledge. This, however, would imply a constellation of serious problems: Adam lives in paradise and, it seems, even paradise is a world about which its inhabitants must live in doubt. Adam, to be sure, is well provided for, as far as his physical needs are concerned. His only task is to keep in check the growth (from which he receives his sustenance); his labor is easy and his sleep untroubled. His problem stems from the fact that he has been given reason by the same God who frustrates its application. He has recognized an incongruence between (the

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<sup>8</sup> "Ultimately, the Aristotelian formulas can all be reduced to the principle of economy, which expresses the ideal of perfectly rational action that sets means and ends in precise proportion" (Hadot 192).

fruits of) his reason and the world he has been given to understand. It is interesting that providence could have become a problem in such a way, but it does not seem that the fact of providence is what concerns Milton, but how we understand the world.

The second issue raised by Adam's question has to do, by implication, with the Messiah, about whom he does not, and cannot, yet know, as there is not yet sin in the world. It makes Adam uncomfortable that he lives in a world in which the greater serves the lesser. He does not experience this problem in his relationship with Eve, whom he is happy to serve and whom both he and Eve consider to be his intellectual inferior. He is nonetheless troubled. In his blameless state, however dependent, he cannot yet comprehend the need for such a thing. I do not mean to suggest that Milton is attempting to rationalize the Messiah's coming, but, by using the stars as a type of a future event, he emphasizes the breach in the "natural order" effected by the incarnation.

Thus far, it seems that Milton is using science to suggest that the quality of the experience of the world in which a human lives can change according to how he understands the world. This emphasizes the importance of understanding the world correctly, and thereby encourages reliance upon the understanding. Furthermore, the manner in which the world invites or arouses theoretical curiosity is precisely that which eventuates its frustration. The desire for knowledge becomes for Adam, in this way, a temptation, insofar as it can undermine, at least for a time, his trust in God.

Adam's question is much easier to deal with and accept than Raphael's response. Raphael begins with the only good news: "To ask or search I blame thee not, for Heav'n / Is as the Book of God before thee set, / Wherein to read his wondrous works" (VIII. 66-68). The question itself is not sinful. The fact that sin has not yet entered the world only just ensures his innocence, for we know that in *Paradise Lost*, in fact in the Old Testament narrative itself, the desire for knowledge and sin often walk hand in hand. It is the case, however, that Raphael's assurance that he does not blame

Adam for his question would make no sense unless his blame were under dispute, which is to say that, Adam's innocence aside, his question would be blameworthy (cf. *Legitimacy* 61). Raphael does not blame him, however, because he believes, rightly, to be sure, that Adam did not intend the criticism of God's wisdom implied by Adam's question and, in addition, knows that Adam knows no better. Raphael's response, then, is a more-or-less gentle way of telling Adam that he should know better. It is, however, no answer, since knowledge is precisely what is at stake in Adam's question. Knowledge, furthermore, is the only thing with which Adam and Eve can be tempted.

Raphael's response, however, becomes increasingly troubling. His next statement sounds as if he is claiming that the heavens are available for knowledge, that the casual observer can know what is to be known of the world simply by looking. This may be so, but, what, then, is to be known? "The Book of God" suggests that it may be God about which we read, but the next line suggests that it is rather his works. In either case, what Adam reads in this book raise questions it does not answer. Although Raphael's answer appears at first to be a comfort, his tone quickly changes: "this to attain, whether Heav'n move or Earth / Imports not, if thou reck'n right" (VIII. 70-71). His refusal to answer is now explicit, and suggests now directly that Adam could have known not to ask this question, that it is only a matter of his reckoning rightly: in this case to reckon rightly is reckon that one ought not reckon about the world. According to Raphael, here, Adam's (human) reason is given not so that he can understand and know the world, but so that he can know that the world, or much of it at least, transcends the scope of his reason. His reckoning can teach him his own limitations but not the nature of his world. Raphael's tone in this passage, however, may either soften the blow or reinforce it. His statements are full enough of puns that they cannot be taken only at face value. Furthermore, in this subject he has little to teach, for the answer to Adam's question has been concealed from "Man and Angel" alike (VIII. 73). Raphael himself speculates that God hid

this information not only wisely, but “perhaps to move / His laughter” (VIII. 77-78). Cruel though this sounds, Raphael mocks Adam as he says God is mocking: what moves is neither the Earth nor heavenly spheres, but God’s laughter at the “quaint Opinions” of scientific speculation, whose orbits swing “wide” of the mark (VIII.78). Through the rest of his response, Raphael plays on the two models of the universe, the Ptolemaic and the Copernican, in order to confound Adam’s question, to demonstrate that human reason can account well enough for visible phenomena, but that it cannot discover what has been hidden: the design behind the appearances.

Raphael’s advice must itself be deciphered. He tells Adam to “solicit not” his thoughts “with matters hid, / Leave them to God above, him serve and fear;” in addition, because Heaven is “too high / To know what passes there,” Adam should “be lowly wise:” he should think only of what “concerns” him and his “being” (VIII. 167-168, 172-174). He does not say that knowledge of the heavens is unimportant, though it is implied; it can only be asserted, however, that this is the case. It requires an absolute trust in God, not only because he is the only one who knows how the universe works and why, but because, in this narrative, he has given Adam all that he needs, and if the powers of reasoning he has given Adam do not approach the heavens, it is because it would not benefit him. Although this answer is enough to satisfy Adam, it would be hard to suggest that Milton takes it quite as seriously. Because he is trying to “Justify” God’s ways, we can reason, as in the argument about Adam’s susceptibility to blame, that he is only doing so because he thinks that God’s justice is under dispute. This does not require that Milton is unconvinced by his arguments, but his own knowledge of astronomy could not have been acquired if he had followed the advice with which Raphael quells Adam’s curiosity. We will soon return to this issue.

In the process of debunking future astronomical speculation, finally, Raphael says:

God to remove his ways from human sense

Placed Heav'n from Earth so far, that Earthly sight,  
If it presume, might err in things too high  
And no advantage gain

(VIII. 119-120)

It is no news that things are hidden, but that they are removed from “sight” and, furthermore, that they are removed by distance in space is noteworthy. For Milton was well aware of the advances in optics made in the seventeenth century and had visited Galileo in Tuscany (*PL*, n. 288, p. 14). Milton appears, for that matter, to have been convinced by Galileo’s findings that the explanatory power of the Ptolemaic system was no match for that of the Copernican. This does not challenge Raphael’s argument directly, in that Raphael claims only that no scientific model can sufficiently explain the universe as God’s creation. Raphael asks, I suppose rhetorically, “What if the Sun / Be Centre of the World, and other Stars / By his attractive virtue and thir own / Incited, dance about him various rounds,” and again “In six thou seest, and what if seventh to these / The Planet Earth, so steadfast though she seem, / Insensibly three different Motions move?” (VIII. 122-125, 128-130). Raphael does not “affirm” that either is the case, but encourages Adam in this way not to spend his time scrutinizing the skies, rather that he should mind the things to which he has access (VIII. 117).

Raphael does not leave Adam with nothing. He gives him a perspective that is not presumptuous from which he can view the world. The Earth, though much smaller than other stars, and though it does not produce its own light, is not therefore less noble. This is because the sun, which is larger and brighter, because also it is “barren,” can work no virtue on itself (VIII. 94). The Earth, because populated, contains more good than any star: the world, therefore is neither geo- nor heliocentric. The purpose of the stars is not to give light to Earth, but to give light to humans, “Earth’s habitant[s]” (VIII. 99). This world in Raphael’s description does not remain, however, thus

anthropocentric. The reason why the universe is so large is so that man may know that he is not sufficient to fill all that he sees. Neither with his reason, since the stars are “Ordain’d for uses to his Lord best known,” nor physically, in order that “he may know he dwells not in his own” (VIII. 105, 103). This is a thoroughly theocentric universe: the physical character is withdrawn, beyond the reach of human knowledge, but Raphael asserts that this benefits not only God but man as well: the concealment is itself wise.

This cannot, however, be Milton’s attitude. In writing this passage he reveals more astronomical learning than he allows Raphael to recommend. Furthermore, as suggested above, Milton knew that, in his time, distance no longer separated man from the heavens by the same margin as it had in Adam’s case. What he anticipated for the future of optics I don’t know, but it is clear that he could not have shared the attitude towards science that he gives to Raphael. What status, then, does Milton accord to science? In order to find an answer, I will turn now to the passages in which Milton includes specific references to Galileo and his telescope.

Galileo is first mentioned in Book I: Milton is describing Satan’s passage from the “Lake of Fire” onto hard ground when he regains consciousness after having been cast out of Heaven (I. 280). He is still girt for war, and his shield, the poet tells us, hung on his back like the moon, “whose Orb / Through Optic Glass the *Tuscan* Artist views” (I. 287-288). Interestingly enough, it seems more significant that Milton’s scientific knowledge allows him to describe an event more vividly than that it is Satan he describes. It is significant, however, that what Milton describes is Satan’s shield, being seen by him for the first time. It seems that Milton is trading on the effectiveness of the technological advancement to extend the human capacity of vision and the at least descriptive power that accompanies this vision, the ability to see and describe otherwise unavailable phenomena. Galileo next appears immediately after Satan first enters the newly created universe. He has flown

down from Heaven's gate through the outer spheres (note, here, that this is a Ptolemaic universe) and "There lands [...] A spot like which perhaps / Astronomer in the sun's lucent Orb / Through his glazed Optic tube yet never saw" (III. 588-590). Again Galileo is a figure of discovery: This is a new world, one neither Satan nor the reader has yet seen. This passage, however, adds another level to Galileo's figure. The third book begins with an invocation of his muse, who is addressed as "Holy Light," and thus related to God, who "is" also "Light" (III.1, 3). Satan appears on the sun, the source of light, as a flaw in the light of God's creation. Milton does not criticize Galileo for exposing such a flaw, but he links Galileo's discovery to Adam's upcoming question of the wisdom of God's plan. Because science investigates the world, it is only science that has the ability to suggest the flaws in a religious account of earthly phenomena, in that it approaches the same issues in wholly disparate terms. It therefore has also the power to overturn this system which, as Raphael has suggested, forbids such investigation.

Galileo is mentioned again when Raphael, just having received his charge to warn Adam and Eve of their danger, speeds down to Earth. "As when by night the Glass / of Galileo, less assur'd, observes / Imagin'd Lands and Regions in the Moon" (V. 261-263). Raphael, not fooled by appearances, avoids all obstacles in his path, and travels safely down to earth. Milton here does not challenge, however, what Galileo sees, but rather how he interprets what he sees. This is no challenge to the effectiveness of scientific instruments, either, since the kind of interpretation Galileo's evidence demands is akin to that which anything seen demands. This passage suggests that not only distance in space separates man from the knowledge he desires. The last reference to Galileo is perhaps the most interesting. Raphael is narrating to Adam the creation of the world. On the fourth day God creates the sun and the moon. Raphael describes the sun's surface as "porous to receive / And drink the liquid Light," which indicates that the world created was not that described

by Ptolemy, according to which the celestial bodies are eternal and therefore perfect. Raphael then tells of the stellar light by which “the Morning Planet gilds her horns” (VII. 361-362, 366). Milton includes Galileo’s discovery of the phases of Venus in his account of creation, confirming that any hesitation about science does not stem from his distrust of its effectiveness.

How then can one account for Raphael’s advice for Adam to “be lowly wise” and at the same time account for Milton’s own knowledge of science, and particularly astronomy? Raphael argues that, because such knowledge of the world is unavailable, Adam would be spending his time more wisely by thinking only of what “serves [him] and [his] being” (*PL* VIII. 174). This bit of Raphael’s advice, in accordance with his mocking attitude about astronomical speculation (cf. *PL* VIII. 77ff.), has a distinctly Nominalist ring. He summarizes his advice to Adam by saying: “Heav’n is for thee too high / To know what passes there; be lowly wise: / Think only what concerns thee and thy being” (*PL* VIII. 172-174). Raphael is not recommending that Adam turn his attention to the plants and animals in Eden; rather, because this entire conversation takes place as a result of Raphael’s warning to Adam about the ensuing threat posed by Satan, the suggestion is that Adam had better attend to his obedience. Knowledge of the heavens would for this end be no help at all, and might in fact constitute a deadly distraction from this end, in that the desire for any knowledge may make Adam more susceptible to the promise of forbidden knowledge.

In making this argument, however, Raphael adumbrates the astronomical theories that will keep men looking up at the stars for millennia. As suggested above, Milton could not have shared this attitude, or he would not have had the knowledge to put in Raphael’s mouth. The advice is not only prohibition: it does not explicitly forbid scientific inquiry into the workings of the world or, for that matter, the heavens. It rather sketches out praxical parameters according to which Adam can

assess whether his desire for knowledge and his will to inquire are appropriate: whether it serves him and his being.

Raphael's tone, however, is clear: the kind of question Adam is asking is not appropriate, it does not serve his life. His only argument that suggests Adam is wasting his time concludes that the knowledge he desires is not available. If this is the standard by which to judge, it would shut down all inquiry immediately. And this is precisely Raphael's intention. Adam's question implies an attitude toward the world that is incompatible with the most significant aspect of the condition of that world: the threat to human integrity. Raphael's attitude is thus congruous with the Nominalist perspective discussed above not only in his intention but also in its effect. Even though Adam submits his curiosity to Raphael's advice, the stifling quality of such Paradise, within which any attention that is not directed to what cannot be called salvation, but perhaps his position with respect to God, threatens that position, motivates Eve in Book IX to go off by herself in order that she may more effectively improve the condition of the garden. It is only for this reason that Satan finds her alone and more liable to his temptation.

For this reason, curiosity in *Paradise Lost* is perhaps as loaded a topic as one could find. If curiosity is by definition directed at that which lies beyond the boundaries of what is known, then curiosity Eden has only one reference point. Adam and Eve had only one command to follow: not to eat of the tree. The tree offered to whomever ate its fruit the knowledge of good and evil, the knowledge that lay beyond the scope of Adam and Eve's reason. In this way, then, curiosity is temptation.

In Milton's treatment of science one can see a deep ambivalence. While on the one hand he has clearly spent considerable time and energy learning what human learning offers, on the other hand his epic retells a story that is, in effect, a warning to those who desire to overstep the

boundaries. What he does accomplish is the representation of an image of paradise that is qualified by the presence of temptation and doubt. The position of man, both before and after the fall, is troubled and tenuous.

Blumenberg's discussion of Nominalism is most instructive in settling this question. The conditions of existence in Paradise are equivalent to the psychological burden identified by Blumenberg within the Nominalist system of thought. Raphael's advice implies that the only appropriate attitude for Adam is one of constant awareness, one in which he is constantly on his guard against an inevitable attack. Whether or not this is a realistic response to the condition in Paradise, Adam does not question it. It is in fact Eve's rebellion against Adam's caution that allows for the situation to be relieved. Eve's rebellion, her refusal to remain by Adam's side, is furthermore motivated by her desire to alter the physical condition of the garden into a state that is better suited to human habitation. There is thus in her desire for separation a refusal of the insupportably limiting attitude recommended by Raphael and a movement toward the natural, physical world as the proper field for human activity. As a result of acting in accordance with these motivations, she finds herself vulnerable to and prepared for Satan's temptation, which appeals not only to her desire for personal advancement but to her desire for knowledge as well. Eve's refusal of the conditions of existence suggested by Raphael do not accomplish, at least not directly, an escape from those conditions. This escape is accomplished, rather, by the fall. Eve's refusal merely places her in a position to benefit from this fall. Blumenberg's analysis of Nominalism thus suggests an analogy whereby one may see the human condition in Paradise as a constant state of emergency with no possible relief available either in the world or in the hope of escape from the world. While there are no theological means to redeem theoretical curiosity within this system, the world does in fact get reclaimed as an appropriate field of human interest

by means of “a fundamental change,” “which represents not the summation of facts of experience but rather a summary of things taken for granted in advance,” and is thus equivalent to self-assertion as a response to the conditions under Nominalism (*LMA* 177-178).<sup>9</sup> Likewise for Adam Milton does not redeem the desire for knowledge by contradicting the angelic reservation, but it is by means of this desire that the world is redeemed for their use, and, as a consequence, that God’s ways are justified.

Lest this reading of curiosity In *Paradise Lost* seem to unorthodox because it views Satan as, in a sense, the deliverer of mankind from the untenable conditions in Eden, I will recast this reading in terms of less disputable assumptions. Milton asserts that God is good, omnipotent and omniscient, and thus his acts and creations are good (e.g. *PL* III. 80-134). At least after his defeat, Satan realizes this about God and attempts, by whatever means, to frustrate God’s plan (*PL* I. 157-168). God, being omniscient, is aware that this is what Satan will attempt, and that he will attempt to frustrate God’s plan specifically by causing the downfall of man. God knows furthermore that Satan will cause this downfall, but that he will nevertheless not disturb God’s plan. The fall is thus a part of God’s plan for mankind, and Satan’s attempt upon man, his successful attempt, is willed by God from eternity. But Satan is unable to accomplish anything

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<sup>9</sup> “Thus ‘self-assertion’ here does not mean the naked biological and economic preservation of the human organism by the means naturally available to it. It means an existential program, according to which man posits his existence in a historical situation and indicates to himself how he is going to deal with the reality surrounding him and what use he will make of the possibilities that are open to him. In man’s understanding of the world, and in the expectations, assessments, and significations that are bound up with that understanding, a fundamental change takes place, which represents not the summation of facts of experience but rather a summary of things taken for granted in advance [*Präsumtionen*], which in their turn determine the horizon of possible experiences and their interpretation and embody the ‘a priori’ of the world’s significance for man” (*LMA* 138).

contrary to God's will, and is thus reduced to an instrument for the working-out of God's design for the world.

My claim, however, is that what is accomplished in the fall itself is a movement to a new way of life that, without denying what was lost nor ignoring the difficulties that were acquired, is nevertheless beneficial for mankind. Milton thus maps what Blumenberg calls the "second overcoming of Gnosticism," the redemption of the world as a field for man's activity and attention, back onto the world as we know, but at its very beginning. Milton's theodicy succeeds in this way, not because man, whose will is free, becomes evil so that God may be seen to be good, but because he conceives of the world as an appropriate place in which humans may work and live.

## CHAPTER THREE

### “A THING NOT UNDESIRABLE:” FREEDOM AND THE FORTUNATE FALL

There is, and has been for some time, much controversy regarding Milton's depiction of Eve in *Paradise Lost*. This paper, although it is concerned primarily with this character, is intended as no part of this debate. The passage in question here (IX.795-833) presents Eve at her worst. This is, in fact, quite bad. What interests me, however, is not Milton's misogyny, but how Eve functions within the text. Milton is faithful enough to his sources to retain the basic sequence of events in Eden, and according to this sequence, Eve eats first. When I began this paper, I had intended to analyze the rhetorical structure of Eve's first speech after the fall, because I had a suspicion that, in order to indicate in what way and in how far the fall was indeed fortunate, Milton would have undermined the largely negative portrait of Eve derived from her reasoning in the passage. I have not been able to do so. What stood out in this passage is something quite different and really has little to do with Eve as a character. What I find most interesting are the textures produced by passages such as this one in which Milton contracts his “great Argument,” how he replays over and again the same concerns in different contexts (I.24). This contraction is in fact a figure for one of his primary concerns, that of perspective. It is to Eve's new perspective immediately after the fall that I now turn.

Eve's first speech after she has eaten the fruit of the forbidden tree begins with an apostrophe to the tree itself. She addresses the “Sovran, virtuous, precious of all Trees / In Paradise” (IX.795-6). “Sovran,” the second word of this speech, indicates the position to which Eve, who after eating the fruit was “height'n'd as with wine,” has elevated the tree in her mock prayer (IX.793). Although the tone of this apostrophe, at least at the beginning, is playful, Eve

quite seriously credits the “virtuous” tree and its fruit with the power to elevate her to the heights of knowledge. This elevation is significant, for the source of her joy is “the expectation high / Of knowledge” (IX.789-90). The metaphor of elevation is important in this passage. The increase of knowledge accomplished by the fruit enables Eve to see more, as if she were standing on a hill. Because she can see and know more, however, this elevation also suggests to her a possible increase of power. In fact, knowledge and power seem almost to be coterminous in this passage. No sooner had she eaten the fruit than she realized that the new perspective provided by the increase in knowledge placed her in a new and more desirable relation to Adam, and even “God-head” was not far “from her thought” (IX.790). It is to such heights that Eve anticipated being raised by her new-found knowledge. Her praise, then, is not disingenuous, but neither is her tone one of reverence, rather of fun (IX.794). Even in these first lines, however, the poet undercuts Eve’s pleasure: “precious,” which derives from the Latin *pretium*, the equivalent of the English word “price,” indicates not only the value she accords to the tree, but what she has given in exchange for its fruit.

She separates this tree from all others by its merit: it alone is “of operation blest / To Sapience” (IX.796-7). Because the work done by the tree is the condition of its uniqueness, and in this sense, its isolation, it becomes a figure for God, Eve and Satan. It is a figure for God in that, according to this narrative, he is the only one who can effect the exaltation she desires. She attributes to the tree one office of God: the power and authority to judge and separate. Just as God, because only he has this power, is thereby himself separated, so is the tree unique. The kind of separation Eve anticipates, however, is not within the tree’s power to give. Eve does not approach divinity through her knowledge of good and evil and is in fact cut off, removed from paradise and denied the direct communication with God and Angels that she and Adam enjoyed

until the fall. It is in this sense that the tree is, here, a figure of Adam and Eve's condition after the fall: they are held apart from God, separated by sin which, in this, its original form, involves knowledge. Satan, for his part, is the first to be thus set apart. For his rebellion he was cast out of Heaven, separated, apostate. By attributing to the tree the power not only to effect separation but the condition of being thereby separated, Eve attributes the agency and the responsibility to the tree and thus removes it from herself.

The tree's power is that of giving knowledge, as Eve says it is "of operation blest / To Sapience" (IX.796-7). With the term "sapience" Milton introduces the alimentary metaphor which, surprisingly, plays a relatively minor role here. Sapience derives from the Latin *sapere*, which means both "to taste" and "to be wise." This word repeats Eve's sin. This line ends with the two paths by which wisdom, in all cases other than this, gains entry to the human mind: the visual ("obscur'd") and the auditory ("infam'd") (cf.III.50). God, in forbidding this fruit, blinded Eve to the power of the tree which, as she sees it, is the power to open her eyes. The ill report that comprised the interdiction was spoken in ignorance, and now only Eve (and, perhaps, the serpent) can speak knowingly of the tree's power. It is because she eats, because she tastes, that she attains this knowledge. God's command not to eat, which not only forbade knowledge, but which provided an indirect and therefore less reliable kind of knowledge, can now be overridden. Eve no longer needs to trust what she sees and hears, because the knowledge she now has is her own. It is empirical and scientific knowledge, the first of its kind, and even in Paradise such knowledge appears to contradict revelation. This knowledge, in fact, has become physically a part of her: she is now its source.

Here the tone of Eve's apostrophe shifts. Whereas the first three lines resemble a prayer, the fourth introduces an element as yet not found in prayer. Eve, still speaking to the tree, praises

its “fair Fruit” which has been left to “hang, as to no end / Created” (IX.798-9). This observation calls into question the wisdom of God’s design. The pun on the word “end,” employed here to indicate both destination and purpose, functions in a very interesting manner in that it makes no sense to speak of the destination of a piece of fruit. Eve cannot, however, have in mind only the forbidden fruit when she argues thus to herself. This argument, though a new addition to Eve’s prayer, has been heard before. At the beginning of Book VIII, Adam asks Raphael why there is such an enormous universe that exists for no other reason than to provide light and beauty for the Earth. Adam’s question, which oversteps the limit of either human or angelic knowledge, is yet posed in innocence. He is, it seems, innocently wondering, if such a thing is possible. Although this last formulation of the question does not relate as directly to the passage under consideration as the first, it introduces two themes that are relevant to the discussion. Adam wonders “How Nature wise and frugal could commit / Such disproportions” (VIII.26-7). This suggestion of disproportion amounts to a rather serious accusation, that God has not planned the world wisely, although Adam enjoys the benefits of God’s “superfluous hand” (VIII.27). Raphael assures both Adam and the reader that the desire for such knowledge is not inherently sinful, it is simply that such knowledge “From man or Angel the great Architect / Did wisely to conceal” (VIII.72-3). It is interesting, however, because the status of knowledge is at issue in this passage. Adam poses this question at the end of a long day of instruction, during which he learned of Satan’s rebellion, the war in Heaven, Satan’s defeat and banishment and the creation of the world and of man. The attitude regarding Adam’s desire to know things that are out of human reach that Milton places in Raphael’s mouth casts a surprising light on God’s command. There is no suggestion that the answer to Adam’s question would be harmful to him or to God. It is simply not given us to know such things, as they are too big, too far away for human minds to grasp.

This question of proportion is central to *Paradise Lost*. Milton is attempting to narrate not only the creation of the world and the fall, but to tell what happened before the creation, how these events render our world and our condition comprehensible and yet allow God to appear just and good. In order to do so, he uses the biblical accounts and, in addition, must include things not found in these accounts. Milton's task requires of him things to which he can pretend no access. He has taken on the burden of describing that which is beyond the pale of human knowledge, out of all proportion to what humans can learn either of the world or of its beginning. It is for this reason that the question of inspiration becomes so important. Milton is concerned, throughout the epic, with his ability to speak as he does. In book one, he invokes the "Heav'nly Muse" who "did'st inspire / That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed / In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth / Rose out of Chaos" (I.6, 7-10). Milton does not limit himself to these events, for which he could rely on the prior narration, but wants also to fill in the gaps and provide the history of these events. He must, in addition, tell the story in such a way that he can "assert Eternal Providence / And justify the ways of God to men" (1.25-26). Such a project, however, exceeds any merely human capacity by a margin equivalent to that which separates God's power from Satan's. The project announced in the invocation to book one, then, expresses the fear that must accompany the presumption not only of speaking for God but in speaking for him in such a way that one can justify his design. Milton attempts to do precisely that which Raphael will not do for Adam, to make God answerable for his creation. Because the course of the poem, in the first few books at least, is exactly parallel to Satan's, his concern with his muse, that his inspiration be heavenly and not infernal, betrays a fear that his presumption in writing this epic is the same kind of presumption, based on the same disproportion, as Satan's rebellion against God.

Milton faces an equivalent problem with regard to his style. Just as the substance is out of the reach of any human mind, so the manner in which it must be told exceeds any merely human language. The highest traditional style, that of classical tragedy and epic, still falls short of the Milton's needs in that, although it is appropriate to *its* subject, this subject is inferior to Milton's subject by the same margin that separates human from divine. No model, in (by) itself, will suffice. Milton's style must be in proportion with his subject, because it is precisely the presumption of the inferior to the position of superiority, the misrecognition of proportion, that is at stake in the poem.

Adam's question reappears, in modified form, when Satan, disguised as the serpent, tempts Eve.

With ravishment beheld, there best beheld  
Where universally admir'd: but here  
In this enclosure wild, these Beasts among,  
Beholders rude, and shallow to discern  
Half what in thee is fair, one man except,  
Who sees thee? (and what is one?) who shouldst be seen  
A Goddess among Gods, ador'd and serv'd  
By Angels numberless, thy daily Train.

(IX.540-8)

Whereas in the first instance (VIII.15-38), Adam is tempted to inquire further by the amount and kind of unexpected new information, thereby surpassing the boundaries of the knowable while remaining innocent, in the second instance (IX.540-8) the logic that produced this question is used to tempt Eve to violate God's sole injunction. Satan overheard a conversation in which Eve

relates to Adam her first experience, in which she was so impressed with her reflection in a pool that she would not have left it, had not a voice informed her that what she saw was only herself. This predisposition to self-awareness, now known by Satan, is Eve's weakness and, because he learns in the same conversation that the tree of knowledge is forbidden, this becomes the basis of Eve's temptation. When Satan reformulates Adam's question, he puts Eve in the position of the heavens. Eve's beauty is so rich that it seems out of proportion, unnecessary because there is only one man who can appreciate what he observes, "(and what is one?)" (IX.546). Satan's suggestion reflects Eve's self-absorption at the pool in that it asks her to see herself not being seen. He promises her that the fruit will elevate her to a position where all can see her beauty, as naturally they should. He couches the question within such flattery, praising Eve's "Celestial Beauty," that even though Eve recognizes the excess in this praise, she is inclined to think that he is right. The sense of his suggestion, too, is familiar, as Adam's formulation, referred to above, merely echoes her own from several books earlier (IV.657-8).

When Eve repeats this argument, it takes the form of Satan's, which is an inversion of the original. The forbidden fruit would be superfluous if it were really forbidden. It would stand as a blemish on God's creation. What is most interesting about Eve's use of this argument here is that, because she was the object superfluous unless enjoyed in Satan's argument, which would still be ringing in her ears, she becomes the object of praise in the midst of her prayer to the tree. Unlike her prayers to God earlier in the book, her attention shifts, after only three lines, to herself.

As she continues, this becomes more obvious. Rather than praising the tree she speaks of what she will do for the tree. With care and praise, accompanied by singing, she will "tend" the tree, an interesting formulation because the tree stands in as the beneficiary of praise, which is

the place rightfully occupied only by God (IX.799-801). The term “tend,” however, could describe her given occupation, which would make her worship of the tree a perversion of what work God has provided in Paradise, rather than a denial of God altogether. It also allows Eve to remain the object of worship, in some sense, since she has dominion over those things she tends, or has until this point.

Her next phrase indicates that her attention has shifted entirely to herself: “dietet” by the fruit of the forbidden tree, she will “grow mature / In knowledge, as the gods who all things know” (IX.803-4). The tree, whose daily worship she has just described, because its operation is effective, consumes its own use. Once Eve has received its benefit, she will need it no longer. It provides no limit to Eve’s exaltation. It is interesting to note that she anticipates being elevated to the level of “the gods:” is her ambition more humble than was Satan’s, or does she merely here disregard God’s existence? Either is plausible, but I prefer the second reading, because, insofar as this passage expresses the height of her ambition, it indicates that her thoughts are not really occupied by any being outside herself, and “naught else / Regarded” (IX.786-7).

This continues the alimentary metaphor, referred to above, but here she anticipates the end of the process, a time, in the foreseeable future, when knowledge will be fulfilled in her and she will become like God. If we assume that her thinking is coherent in this passage (should we? Tree of knowledge but “height’n’d”), this ambition muddles the sense, discussed above, of her calling God’s wisdom into question. Her question then may not function so. It may suggest, rather, that since the tree exists, and bears fruit that is pleasing, it must not really be forbidden. Or, again, that she is thinking of herself rather than God, in which case she cannot really call his wisdom into question. In either case, it is clear that here Eve becomes the object of her own prayer.

Eve's language suggests that the tree fills her in two important ways: as suggested above, her mind is filled with knowledge as her stomach is filled with food. What is perhaps more interesting, however, is that the fruit, described as the tree's "fertile burden" causes Eve to "grow mature" (IX.801, 803). This impregnation both looks back to the Holy Spirit who "with mighty wings outspread / Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss / And mad'st it pregnant," (I.21-3) and forward to Eve as the "mother of mankind" (V.388), the type of Mary. The tree is thus the Father and the Holy Spirit of Eve's new trinity.

Eve's next phrase is perhaps the most surprising in the entire passage. She wants to ease the "fertile burden" of the tree's branches which are "offer'd free to all" (IX.802). Though the tree itself may offer (which it, being inanimate, cannot), the contents of its branches are the one thing in Eden that God has forbidden. That she would say to "all" too is strange, in that she and Adam together comprise "all." She does manage to complete her trinity, with the tree now fulfilling the office of the son, i.e. his offering of grace. Furthermore, she has not yet decided to offer this knowledge to Adam, in which case "all" designates only Eve, which, I suppose, would not be too inconsistent with her thinking, at least on this occasion. The tree achieves God-head, but Eve's thoughts return to herself: even now she knows that no tree deserves such praise.

Her attention does now shift to God, but the worst I have suggested falls short of her thought, which does not in fact follow logically from any of her thoughts thus far. God, she suggests, has commanded that they not eat this fruit because he envies what he "cannot give" (IX.805). Although this is clearly the implication of her claim, she continues the plural and impersonal, indirect reference to God found in the previous line: "others" envy what "they" have no power to give. That God would enter her thoughts here is not strange, as she expressed her aspiration to His position in the previous line, but such a claim amounts to either a limitation of

God's power or a denial of his creation. The tree itself is the source of knowledge; had God the same power, the tree would not both grow in the center of the garden and be forbidden (IX.806-7).

Eve now shifts her attention again, now praising "Experience" as her "best guide" (IX.807-8). This second apostrophe is perhaps more unsettling than the first. There is a note of humor in her hymn to the tree that is notably absent here. Experience replaces the tree, whose praise she has exhausted in her construction of a new trinity. Experience, though, is spoken of in language which is appropriate to the second person of the trinity, the Son of God. The Son is he who will open the door to whomever knocks, who is himself the way, truth and life. Experience now becomes the "best guide" which "op'n'st Wisdom's Way" (IX.808, 809). There is a pun on "Experience" that makes these lines more ominous, in my estimation, than those preceeding. "Experience" is related to the Latin *periculum*, which means danger, test, or trial, from which the English word "peril" also derives. Milton's pun suggests that Eve, if indeed she sought and found experience that morning when she set off on her own, in fact acted out of, i.e. from within, a condition of peril. She was tempted, or tried, before she encountered the tempter: her solitude was her test. She is her own peril. That this is possible in Paradise raises in a new way the question of the wisdom of God's creation. Eve's temptation is self-regard, and this is the condition into which she awakens. What chance did she have to avoid the fall?

In her argument with Adam that morning, however, she did not suggest that it was for the sake of experience that she set out alone. Indeed her motives, as she delivers them, seem innocent: she wants merely to accomplish more that she and Adam would if they worked together. Why, then, does Eve map the effect of her fall, the experience thus gained, back on to her motivations? If the desire for experience caused her to seek solitude that morning, then she

can take credit for the knowledge gained through that experience: experience has taught her to glorify herself.

Eve continues the metaphor of experience as God, and the way she accomplishes this is quite subtle. Experience “op’n’st Wisdom’s Way” and “giv’st access” to a wisdom that otherwise would retire in “secret” (IX.810). Just as Christ opens, or is, the way to God the Father, who is hidden, experience opens the way to wisdom. In *Paradise Lost* access is denied only to God’s intention and the knowledge of good and evil. The only wisdom that is hidden from humans is the wisdom of God’s creation and that given by the tree. Wisdom is appropriate to both, the latter she has already, and she anticipates the attainment of the former. Her experience has shown her one sort of wisdom, although it is not the wisdom counseled to Adam and Eve by Raphael, which is obedience. What she has gained convinces her that she can gain more, but that leap is not justified by her experience. Though her reasoning is more subtle than any we have yet seen in Eve, her arguments, her behavior and her attitude seem to fall somewhat short of the mark.

Eve betrays this shortcoming in her next line. Her apostrophe to wisdom thus ended, she shifts again to herself. What sounds at first like an equation between wisdom and herself, quickly takes on the pall of fear: “And I perhaps am secret” (IX. 811). In a surprising inversion of the metaphor of perspective discussed above, “Heav’n,” because high, is perhaps too “remote to see from thence distinct / Each thing on Earth” (IX.811-13). Up to this point the one who is elevated has, consequently, a vantage point from which to see better. This is indeed the case with God, and is the aspiration previously found in Eve and to which she will return. Her speculation, for that matter, proves that her inversion of this metaphor does not hold. Just as knowledge of the stars, planets, etc., is inaccessible to those on Earth, knowledge of the highest is denied to Eve,

despite her new-found wisdom. This mistake, however, is in line with her earlier suggestions that God lacks sufficient wisdom (IX.798-9) and power (IX.805).

Her fear at this point is still tinged with hope, foolish though it may be, that God may not have seen her infraction. She soon must reach further, must grasp more wildly to retain her hope. It is not the distance, but some “other care perhaps,” which “May have diverted from continual watch / Our great Forbidder” (IX.813-15). These lines, in fact, express less hope than sarcasm, which suggests despair. The bitterness increases: the great Forbidder is “safe with all his spies / About him” (IX.815-16). This makes no sense. It is not God’s safety but her own about which she is concerned, and God’s spies would not serve His safety but would threaten hers, that is unless she takes her ambition to divinity as seriously as does Satan. Her tone in this passage does not, however, indicate any serious hostile intent: when she regards God, she fears him.

At this point she shifts her attention away from God. She now considers, for the first time since she ate the forbidden fruit, Adam, or she at least wonders whether she should “make known” to him her “change” (IX.817-18). Here too, her language is revealing: she wonders “in what sort” she should “appear” (IX.816-17). Only Satan thus far has practiced such deceit as Eve now considers: just preceding this speech in the guise of a serpent (IX.157-171) and on the sun when he appears before Uriel in the guise of a lesser angel (III.634-644). Eve contemplates hiding her true self as God and wisdom hide. If she does not decide to remain thus hidden, Adam can “partake” with her the “Full happiness” of divine knowledge (IX.818-19). It is interesting that Eve, in this passage, has decided that Paradise is not sufficient to give this happiness, but that knowledge is. Once she has attained knowledge equivalent to God’s, she will be fully and truly happy. But this word play is suggestive: Would Eve’s happiness still be full if Adam shared a part? She begins to reconsider. If she decides not to share this change, this knowledge, with

Adam, she can “keep the odds of knowledge” in her “power” (IX.820). Eve, who was created the intellectual inferior of Adam, stands to gain what she sees as equality (could she be wrong?), “to add what wants / In Female Sex” (IX.821-2). Her motivation here seems confused. She wants to deceive Adam, to gain knowledge for herself, but the explicit reason for doing so is not yet greed; rather, she wants to attain the wisdom of knowledge she lacks “the more to draw his love” (IX.822). The resonance of the word “draw” may, however, qualify the otherwise sympathetic quality of this sentiment. “Draw” reminds one of the withdrawal of Wisdom, in imitation of God, and that she hopes to draw towards herself Adam’s love by withdrawing into herself, i.e. by hiding her changed character from him. “Draw” also begins a pun that continues on the next line: Eve wants to draw Adam’s love and at the same time to “render herself” more equal (IX.822-3). Rather than summoning Adam’s love, she hopes to form it (in her own image?). The image is one of power rather than affection.

This desire is made explicit in her next statement. She looks forward not to equality, but to “A thing not undesirable,” the prospect of superiority to Adam (IX.824). It is unfortunate that Eve feels desire for superiority (rather than hope, for instance). Desire derives from the Latin *desiderare*, desire is precisely for the stars: it is, by definition, out of her reach. Furthermore, the desire to know, to possess, that which is out of reach is the sin that causes Satan’s fall and the aspiration that led to Eve’s. The question of perspective is continued in the next line. This metaphor by which degree of elevation refers to the position from which one sees, this vision a cipher for knowledge, accrues another dimension here. Eve wants to be superior to Adam, “for inferior who is free?” (IX.825). This manner of thinking poses an immediate problem, because the knowledge that leads to Eve’s liberation, if withheld from Adam, implies his subjugation. This ethical problem, however, is immediately overshadowed by a much bigger question, one

that looms just behind the entire epic: if inferiority implies subjection, then in what sense are humans both free and inferior to God? This question informs my earlier claim that with the term “experience,” Milton implies that Eve’s position while still innocent is perilous. This is evident from her first experience, her willingness, call it desire, to spend her life looking at her own image in a pool. If this is the first quality she manifests, in what sense is she free to resist temptation?

This reminder of God’s superiority causes Eve’s mind to shift again: all thoughts of ascension are left behind and she faces directly, for the first time, the reward promised in the event of her infraction. If she does not share her change with Adam, she will die and he, “wedded to another Eve, / Shall live with her enjoying” (IX.828-9). Fear that she will lose Adam, that he will enjoy an eternal life with another woman, overshadows her fear of death. Her loss of his life, not her own, is too much to bear, i.e. “A death to think” (IX.830). This phrase is interesting. The action that has given her the ability to think, or to know, is that through which death has entered the world.

She decides, then, that Adam will “share” with her “in bliss or in woe” (IX.831). One should, I think, hear an echo of the marriage vow in this line. She has no hope, however, of the bliss she suggests, has rather brought about the woe they both can expect. This is not to say that she is to be blamed for Adam’s sin or his suffering, but that she alone, in this passage, is inviting woe into a life that she intends to share with Adam (Satan too hopes to share such a life with others). For this reason one cannot accept that the sentiment expressed in Eve’s last lines really is love. There is (still) no reason to believe that you can endure death with another, and the dependence expressed in the last clause is perhaps misplaced, in that it resembles the weakness

that produces Adam's fall. In fact, the subject of the final clause, Eve ("I", is consumed by the need for Adam: without him she simply is not).

One must remember that Milton's project in *Paradise Lost* is to "assert Eternal Providence" that he may thereby "justify the ways of God to men" (I.25, 26). Eve, however, both explicitly and implicitly, returns repeatedly to thoughts that question the wisdom of this world and the condition of innocence. There is no argument in this passage that demonstrates apodictically that Eve was in fact not free to resist her temptation, but it does seem apparent that she was created in such a way that she could not help but fall. This passage is deeply unsettling. In Eve we see ambition, pettiness, fear and finally despair. There is much of which she, in this passage, should be considered guilty. These are not the sins that bring "Death into the World," but rather the effects of this sin (I.3). The rhetorical structure of Eve's speech suggests that the freedom accorded to the human condition in Paradise was itself untenable, was in fact not supposed to endure. Otherwise the fall would be a disaster, and God would be no God. If God has been justified, i.e. if Milton has succeeded, then edenic freedom, even if eternal and happy, is inferior to the finite suffering of life on our earth, in that this suffering is accompanied by knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has left unquestioned, up to this point, the premise that a theodicy, for John Milton, can function in the same way as Augustine's theodicy, as analyzed by Blumenberg and discussed in the first chapter. While I do not affirm that the historical, social and religious conditions, which had changed radically in the intervening thirteen hundred years, would call for, or even allow for, any such identity between Milton's attempt to "Justify the ways of God" and Augustine's "exoneration," this unquestioned premise is not without its purpose. Milton, for his part, mobilizes the relevant points of the Augustinian theodicy, namely the freedom of the human will, predestination, and original sin, placing them specifically in the words spoken by God and His emissaries. This thesis has focused on the points of contact between Milton and Augustine, not with the intent merely of weighing Milton's work against an indisputable and trans-historical standard which he fails to meet, but rather of showing how these points of contact reveal the distance between the two authors, one who is writing at what may be called the beginning of the Middle Ages and the other on the other side of the epochal threshold, in the early part of the Modern Age.

This premise, however, cannot be allowed to remain unquestioned. Much separates Milton's *Paradise Lost* from the theological treatises of Augustine, including the most obvious, which nonetheless must not be ignored, that *Paradise Lost* is a narrative poem, and not a theological treatise. The theological content of this poem, then, must be viewed in light of its function in the telling of the story. This is not to say that the theology in the poem can be ignored, because it is this theology around which Milton chose to construct his epic. It can not,

however, be taken at face value, and need not be thought to be the theology for which Milton would argue in a theological treatise, and is in fact not.

From this generic distinction we may proceed a step farther. For it is not simply the fact that *Paradise Lost* is a narrative poem that differentiates it from Augustine's treatise on the freedom of the human will. More significantly this difference in the functioning of the respective texts is a result of the dramatically different status held by Christianity in the Seventeenth Century as opposed to the Fourth, when Augustine was writing. Augustine's theology developed during a time when the Catholic Church was still defining itself against considerable pressures, notably those applied by the various Gnostic sects and by the Montanist Church, which held considerable sway in North Africa during Augustine's life. Augustine's writings helped to solidify the theological position of the Catholic Church. Although *Paradise Lost* too was written during a time of great turmoil for Christianity, in the wake of the Reformation and in England, whose Church had split off from Catholicism some centuries before, the theological situation faced by Milton was radically different from that faced by Augustine. This difference may be illustrated succinctly by the fact that much of the theology found in *Paradise Lost* is based upon Augustine's theology or the long tradition of its interpretation, whereas Augustine himself had no corresponding body of work on which to rely.

The comparison of these two thinkers is not based upon the compatibility of their respective theological climates, however, but a personal interest in the question of the freedom of the human will. Blumenberg's text and his thought help to tease out the inadequacies of both Augustine's theological treatment and Milton's poetic treatment of this question. In both cases, the freedom of the human will is upheld in the face of an understanding of God that seems to preclude any such freedom. The emphasis the freedom of the will, however, stems more from my

preoccupations than those of either Augustine or Milton, and is not meant to produce a comprehensive treatment of either thinker. This thesis is intended rather as a meditation upon what I view as a central crux in the narrative of *Paradise Lost*, a crux which is all the while theological. My contention is that, although Milton is responding to wholly different social and theological pressures than was Augustine, his understanding of the problems associated with the freedom of the human will is based upon Augustine's treatment of this issue and the various interpretations of Augustine's work, and that for this reason the significance of this issue in *Paradise Lost* will emerge more clearly when viewed against the backdrop of the theology to which it is responding.

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