

Paradise Lost: Outline

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surrounded by the spheres of the moon, Mercury, Venus, the sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Beyond Saturn is the sphere of the "fixed stars," among them the twelve constellations that constitute the signs of the zodiac. Before the Fall this zone (meaning "belt"), about 18° wide, revolved around the earth parallel with the equator, and within its boundaries moved (as they still do) the sun and all the "other" planets—each at a different speed (and in some cases, apparently, not always in the same direction). The twelve constellations that stud this belt are set about 30° apart, and during the course of a year the sun, revolving at a different speed from that of the zodiac, passes through each of the twelve signs. At creation the sun was thought to have been "in" Aries, that is to have been traveling in a position between earth and the constellation of Aries. Aries is the sign in which (until recently) the sun travelled from March 21 to April 20—in the northern hemisphere, the first month of spring.

But Eden was perpetually in spring because before the Fall the plane of the earth's equator coincided with the plane of the sun's orbit (or, in a heliocentric system, the plane of the earth's equator would always intersect the sun)—hence there were no solstices, but perpetual equinox and, at the latitude of Eden, perpetual temperate or spring-like weather. After the Fall, the earth was tipped on its axis, and the cycle of seasons was introduced—with its painful extremes of temperature. The sun continued to travel in the zodiac, but now, for the earthly observer, that path across the heavens moved slowly during the year from south to north to south, so that at noon in January in our hemisphere the sun, and the constellation of Capricorn (the Goat), with which it is in conjunction, were "low" in the sky, and in June the sun and Cancer (the Crab) were "high." Before the Fall all astrological patterns of relationships between the planets and the stars were benign; after the Fall, God sent angels down to instruct the stars and planets how in certain astrological relationships to rain down on earth various malign "influences"—meteorological, natural, physiological, and psychological.

Beyond the sphere of the fixed stars were two more spheres: the "crystalline" (III.482)—invented by a thirteenth-century astronomer to account for a celestial phenomenon that later proved to be an error in observation—and the *primum mobile*, or "homb" (VIII.134), which somehow moved all the spheres within it.

The space between the surface of the earth and shell of the universe was conceived of by the ancients as consisting of two main divisions separated by the sphere of the moon. What was within that sphere (sublunar) was made of the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water. What was above or beyond the moon's sphere was made of a fifth element called "quintessence." The planets and stars were made of this "most pure" element, as was the atmosphere or ether of the upper world. The sublunar atmosphere of the earth was bounded by a sphere (or "region") of fire, and between this region and the surface of the earth there were three regions of air, the one nearest the region of fire being very hot and the one nearest the earth being warm from the heat of the sun reflected from the earth's surface. The middle, very cold region, barely penetrated by the tallest mountains, was the home of the imaginary Greek gods, and was the source of

weather: clouds, rain and snow, winds, thunder, and lightning. Meteors were generated in the upper, or third, region of air.

When on the last two days of Creation God made animals and human life, he continued the basic process of ordering forces and sublunar elements of water, earth, air, and fire (See "Physiology and Psychology," below).

The universe (meaning "the whole turning") revolved on an axis running parallel to the floor of Heaven so that when God looked down through the opening at the "top" of the stationary shell he was directly above the Garden of Eden. And the revolving planets and constellations, like clock-work, marked time in units of days, months, and years.

From man's point of view the most compelling of all the parts of his universe was the sun, in which on the fourth day of Creation God concentrated the light which he created on the first day, and *Paradise Lost* is full of evidence of man's ancient belief that the sun was the immediate source of all physical energy, the maker or sire of all phenomena: mineral, vegetable, and animal.

Physiology and Psychology

Just as the cosmology of *Paradise Lost* allowed for the possible truth of the discoveries of Galileo and Copernicus, none of the poem's assumptions about human physiology does violence to the implications of Harvey's discoveries of the circulation of the blood. One of the four humors (literally "fluids") of the body, blood was the means of distributing the other three humors (black bile, yellow bile, and phlegm), as well as the spirits "vapors" that performed the functions of what we might now call the nervous system. A person's temper (or humor) depended on how the humors in him were tempered (literally "mixed"). Melancholy, for example, was the result of a disproportionately large amount of black bile. As in the creation of the universe, so in the creation of life, heat and moisture were determining factors, and all organisms consisted of variously proportioned and arranged elements. The four humors were associated with the four elements in that each humor was either moist (water) or dry (air) and cold (earth) or hot (fire). Both temperamentally and physiologically phlegmatic people were cold and moist; sanguine, hot and moist; choleric, hot and dry; melancholy, cold and dry. The art (practice) of medicine and the science (knowledge) of biology developed elaborate theories of pathology based on the theory of the humors.

Spirits or vapors, the active principles of life, were of three kinds—natural, animal, and intellectual. Natural spirits (generated in animals in the liver) controlled the basic vital functions of the body (e.g., digestion); animal spirits (generated in the heart) carried sense perceptions to the brain, and directions from the brain to the muscles; intellectual spirits controlled and communicated to the body the commands of the faculties of reason and will. In animal souls, both vital and sensitive spirits operated to work with. In animal souls, both vital and sensitive spirits operated. Human souls had all three—vital, sensitive, and intellectual.

The psychology of Milton's time was similarly neat and simple. The

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brain, seat of mental *faculties* (literally the "powers to act") consisted of three cells. To the first cell, that of the fancy (literally *phantasia*, or "imagination") the spirits communicated the messages from the five senses. The fancy passed these impressions on to the second cell, that of reason, which acted upon the image (creating perhaps what we might call an idea) before passing it on to the third cell, that of the faculty of memory. Sleep was a condition in which the second faculty ceased to operate, and dreams were a product of the first and third faculties, uncensored or unrationalized by the reason, which in healthy wakefulness was what controlled the will. (Cf. V. 100-113.) Milton did not believe in the existence of a human soul apart from the live body in which it operated. (Cf. X. 782-93n.)

One way to describe the Fall and its consequences is to call them a distemper and a disturbance of the perfect balance in the mixture of elements and forces in all aspects of the world, which God created perfect. When Nature sighed "through all her works" (IX.783 and 1001) at the time of the Fall, storms as well as stomach-aches, earthquakes as well as shivers, extremes of heat and cold as well as manic and depressive states of mind—all forms of disequilibrium—began to plague mankind.

Reason

The Cambridge Platonists, a group of thinkers contemporary with Milton, who opposed the mechanistic, deterministic, atheistic ideas of Thomas Hobbes, called reason "the candle of the Lord," and believed that this light was innate in every man. The light was not only what we call conscience in ethical matters but also that intuitive intelligence by means of which we discern the laws of nature—as distinct from what Raphael calls "discursive" reason, or what we loosely call logic, or the human faculty by which we figure things out, or arrive at conclusions from a set of data. Milton's Raphael agrees with the Cambridge Platonists that the difference between faith and reason is only a matter of degree. He tells Adam that man depends most on discursive reason, whereas angels depend most on intuition, "Differing but in degree." Even after the Fall man was left with enough unimpaired reason (of both kinds) to know God's will, to see the difference between right and wrong. Sir Philip Sidney was thinking of *ratio recta*, or right reason, when he said, "Our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it." See also, under "Freedom," below.

The Scale of Nature

Nature, meaning sometimes the forces and processes that produce everything according to the laws of nature (which include what we call physical laws), sometimes simply those laws, and sometimes all that Nature produces—Nature, after the Fall, did not wholly lose her original power to produce and control natural, perfect, ordered phenomena, any more than Satan lost all his original brightness or man all his power to reason or to intuit natural law and God's will. What was left to fallen man was all the glories of the natural world and of humanity as we know them—that is, the glories that help us understand the perfection of the paradise we lost.

Milton's concept of nature, animate and inanimate, is not so mechanical as our simplifications of seventeenth-century "science" make it sound. The force in Mother Nature is identical with the force of God the Father as Abdiel suggests (VI.174) when he argues that wise and happy angels "serve whom God ordains./Or nature; God and nature bid the same." Both are benevolent, or in Milton's diction, provident (i.e. seeing or planning ahead—exercising loving care and guardianship). And in this best of all possible universes everything had been thought of—no thing, being, or force had been omitted. This idea of perfection as completeness goes back to Plato, and as elaborated by the Renaissance Platonists was well known to Milton. Sometimes called the concept of plenitude, it is a help to the understanding of the idea of good in *Paradise Lost*. God's goodness was in giving every conceivable thing. The gift was not a static complex, or inorganic mechanism. Its chief characteristic was not its matter, but its activity and, in one of Milton's favorite words, its variety. As Raphael tells Adam, God made of one primordial matter, "various forms, various degrees/Of substance, and in things that live, of life."

The arrangement of all the things in the universe, their articulation with one another, had been conceived as a dynamic hierarchy, from lowest or simplest or least good (not of course to be confused with bad or not good) to the highest, the perfect (full or complete) or best, which was God Himself. In the scale of nature each form or creature (created thing) incorporated the virtues of all the forms beneath it. Satan knew that in man were "summed up" all the lower forms of "growth, sense, reason"—that is, of all vegetable, animal, and human life (IX.112). Everything, therefore, was served by what was below it and in turn served what was above it. The two most common metaphors for this arrangement were a chain and a ladder or stairway (the basic meaning of *scale*—as in a musical scale). The golden chain of II. 1005 and 1051, by which the universe hangs from heaven, symbolized "the universal concord and sweet union of all things which Pythagoras poetically figures as harmony." The history and meaning of ideas about the scale of nature are the subject of Arthur O. Lovejoy's famous book, *The Great Chain of Being*.

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Uzziel ("strength of God") appears as a human being in the Old Testament, but commentators had made him, like Uriel, one of the seven "eyes of the Lord"; Zephon ("searcher of secrets") is a human being in the Old Testament; and Zophiel means "spy of God," but not much else is known about him. Angelology began with the Jewish commentators and was made more confusing by Christian commentators. Robert West's *Milton and the Angels* is the last word on the subject.

God

Milton's God personifies "eternal providence." He foresees—cf. Latin *pro* (before) + *videre* (to see)—and provides everything, including his son, Christ, by whose agency God's will was manifested in the creation of the world, and by whose love God's justice and mercy and grace are manifested and man's salvation is effected. The Christian concept of the Trinity (by which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are both three and one) was not important in Milton's theology, and the mystery of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ, though alluded to in *Paradise Lost*, is not part of the narrative.

Milton had little patience with metaphysical speculation of the kind practiced by Scholastic philosophers, or with other "vague cogitations and subtleties." Nonetheless, in justifying God's ways, Milton could not avoid being theological, and hence could not help asserting or implying things about God that were just as debatable in Milton's time as they had been for centuries before and are still today, three centuries later. Some of these are not crucial to the understanding or enjoyment of the poem, but a few that are central to its argument deserve to be understood and in our time may need explanation. The first of these is the relationship of God's foreknowledge to man's freedom.

In foreknowing all events God did not cause them. He made man capable of falling, knew he would fall, but did not make him fall. Thus foreknowledge is not the same as predestination in its general sense. (Milton did not believe in predestination in its special Calvinistic sense—that God decided from the beginning which individuals would be damned and which saved.) Next to the gift of life itself, Milton thought God's greatest gift to man was reason and the freedom to exercise that reason in the act of choosing. A man incapable of making a mistake would have been a man incapable of significant decisions, incapable of enjoying a sense of achievement, and incapable of the God-like pleasure of freely making a gift—as in the joy of giving thanks. Such a man, incapable of true obedience to God, would have no human dignity, or worth, as Milton defined those terms.

It would have been illogical to make man free to choose and at the same time not free to make wrong choices. And Milton believed God incapable of acting illogically. This argument seems sophistical to those who feel that a good God would not have made man capable of doing anything that would have undesirable consequences—that a good God would not have spoiled Paradise by planting the Tree and requiring obedience—or have allowed Satan to revolt—or Christ to suffer. Milton was, of course, aware of

such objections. In fact, *Paradise Lost* is an attempt to meet them. (Cf. *Christian Doctrine*, I. iii.).

Freedom

Man's liberty before and after the Fall depended upon his following the dictates of the two-fold, God-given power (i.e. virtue) of reason (XII.79 ff.), which must govern his will. In *Paradise Lost* when Abdiel, the faithful angel, returned to Heaven after his encounter with Satan, God characterized the fallen angels as those who "refuse/Right reason for their law." And though in the war in Heaven the good angels employ force against the rebel angels, the victory is achieved only by Christ, the personification of reason, the *Logos*. Reason, like love, is a form of obedience. As Abdiel tells Satan, servitude or slavery is simply a state in which men "serve the unwisely"; and Gabriel in his preview of postlapsarian history, expresses Milton's own protestant liberal conviction that no man should forfeit his God-given freedom to any other man, but should preserve his liberty to serve God according to the dictates of his reason and in the light of the candle of the Lord. When, after Raphael's instruction, Adam tries to make Eve understand the nature of their freedom in Paradise, he applies the same freedom-through-obedience formula to the relationship between the will and the reason (or judgment). Man's will is free as long as it obeys reason, but it may become enslaved to irrational forces if it disobeys reason. When reason errs, misjudges, mistakes, it will misinform and misdirect the will, but in following the false dictates of reason the will does not cease to be free.

Justifying his own ways, God says in Book III that both acts of reason and acts of will are forms of choice, implying that when human beings choose, both will and reason are involved, whereas choice in animals is simply an act of will. Therefore, presumably, if animals can be said to obey, their obedience is irrational—predetermined, so to speak—and their lives are not blessed with the freedom (or the responsibility) that is a corollary of the gift of reason.

Covenant

Covenant is the word used by translators of the Old Testament for the Hebrew word *berith*, meaning a relationship between two parties and the terms thereof. God's covenants with the Patriarchs Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and through Moses with Israel (Gen. 6.18, 9.9, 17.1 ff.; Exod. 24.7, 8) were collectively called by Christian writers the Old Covenant—with special reference to the institution of the Mosaic Law as well as to the Law itself and its observance. The Greek word *diatheke*, used to translate the Hebrew *berith*, carried the meaning of *testament*, as in "last will and testament," and hence the New Covenant, prophesied by Jeremiah (31.31) and interpreted by Luke and Paul in the Greek New Testament as God's promise of salvation to all believers in Christ, was called the New Testament. Eventually the Christian books of the Bible were called the New Testament, and the pre-Christian books, the Old Testament. The New Covenant (that all believers in Christ would be saved by faith) was

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