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## The Bipartite System of Laws in *Paradise Lost*

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Within Milton's epic, *Paradise Lost*, much depends on the way the Father's power functions. If the Father's power functions absolutely, then the failure of the Father's subject (that is, Satan and his renegade angels' fall from Heaven, and Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden) is the Father's fault, and the goal of the epic, "to justify the ways of God to men," remains incomplete. On the other hand, if the Father's power functions only sometimes or less than absolutely, he will be depicted as less than all-powerful and the poem will not be theologically credible. In other words, the Father's power function (how he controls his subjects) is both a narrative and a theological problem for Milton.<sup>1</sup> Milton seems to have solved this problem by creating a God character whose power is alienated from him. It works through his absence and within his laws. That is, the Father in *Paradise Lost* attempts to control his subjects through laws that absolve the Father from the responsibility of his subjects to follow those laws, while maintaining his omnipotence. This strategy reorients the burden of the narrative on the system of laws and away from individual agents. By focusing on the Father's power function, a reading of *Paradise Lost* emerges that minimizes individual agency and places the cause of the fall within the system of laws that the Father creates, a system that eventually collapses under its own contradictory logic.

Before describing this contradictory logic, the importance of the Father's laws and their relationship to his power needs to be established. The Father's power function can reasonably be analyzed by investigating his laws because within the poem the Father is depicted as a king and the other characters his subjects. The first time that the reader is introduced to the Father in *Paradise Lost*, he is described as "sitting on his throne" ("The Argument" Book 1). From the outset, the Father is described in regal terms, and this characterization continues throughout much of the poem. Because the Father functions as a king, his power will function politically, and a political king's power functions primarily through his decrees or laws.<sup>2</sup> However, as Louis Althusser has shown us, and as several generations of critics and theorists who have followed Althusser have demonstrated, the state's power does not merely issue forth from the enforcement of laws, what Althusser calls the Repressive State Apparatus, but also from and within more subtle forms of control, what he calls the

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Ideological State Apparatus. Milton's god-king seems to work through a similarly bifurcated system of control. The Father's laws (what he uses to control his subjects and get them to obey his will) take two forms, which can be categorized as external laws and internal laws. The external laws are those commands that emanate directly from the Father and are enforced with the threat of violence. These laws are akin to Althusser's conception of the Repressive State Apparatus which he maintains "functions by violence"—at least ultimately" (143). This type of control works only through violence, either the threat of violence or the enactment of violence once the command is broken. However, the Father's external laws are minimal; in fact, he only commands Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of knowledge and the angels to obey the Son (and the Son offers no commands).

The Father's control over his subjects goes further and deeper than these two commands; it also works within an internal set of laws. Similarly, Althusser argues that the state controls its subjects only partially through the Repressive State Apparatus; it also exerts power through an ideology of obedience that can be located within the Ideological State Apparatus, which contains institutions such as schools, churches, and unions (143-144). The Ideological State Apparatus finds a Miltonic analogue in a separate set of internal laws that control the subject in ways similar to those of the Ideological State Apparatus, subtly and without direct articulation or violence. The Ideological State Apparatus, as Althusser theorizes it, functions through a process of internalization: these institutions teach obedience to the state's subjects through ideology, so that the subject believes he or she is following his own beliefs but is actually following the dictates of the state. Although this process of internalization no doubt occurs within *Paradise Lost* (through the lessons Adam and Eve receive from the angels, for example), this study will not focus on this specific technique of control. Instead of describing this learning process, I argue that this ideology of obedience is always already internalized in the subjects through laws that are worked into the fabric of creation and implanted as "gifts" to human beings by the Father.<sup>3</sup> The gifts are freedom and reason, which allow the subjects to follow the Father's internal law without being told to do so. Freedom and reason give the Father's subjects (angels and humans) direct access to an ideology that ultimately follows the Father's will. When the Father's laws are understood to function in these two ways, it becomes clear that the internal laws are never broken; it is only the two external laws that are broken, which suggests the inherent instability of the external laws. However, as will be shown, without external law, internal law cannot properly function, making the external laws intrinsic to the Father's power, and ultimately the cause for the fall and the fall of the system of law.

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Freedom, as it is portrayed in *Paradise Lost*, is an important aspect of God's power since it is a mechanism of the Father's power, the field in which the Father's laws are implemented and the result of those laws. Separating the concept of freedom from Milton's theology and theodicy helps make clear that he considers freedom a political tool for creating obedience rather than a theological premise in a syllogism to prove God's goodness. When viewed this way, the Father's gift of freedom paradoxically becomes a mechanism of control by encouraging self-*obedience* in his subjects. This paradox is produced through Milton's understanding of freedom, which is quite different from the post-romantic notion of the term: freedom as the ability to act in accordance with one's wishes and without external restraint. For Milton, freedom is the ability to act in accordance with the wishes of God and with inner restraint.<sup>4</sup>

This construction of freedom is clearly articulated by the Father when he explains to the Son how Adam and Eve will fall:

They trespass, authors to themselves in all  
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so  
I formed them free, and free they must remain,  
Till they enthrall themselves. (3.122-125)

Here, freedom and enthrallment are shown to be both linked and mutually exclusive. Using freedom to disobey God and fall is the cause of losing that freedom and enthralling oneself, but you cannot have freedom with sin, and you cannot sin without freedom. Or as Thomas Wheeler states, "Freedom is full of risks because only the possession of it makes possible the loss of it. Once it is lost it is lost forever" (64). Wheeler's assertion doesn't go quite far enough since freedom exists *only* when it is used properly (when the free agent is obeying God), and it disappears when it is used to follow one's own wishes. This loss or self-enthrallment is the punishment for misuse of freedom, and misuse of freedom is in fact self-enthrallment. Because loss of freedom is the punishment for the misuse of freedom, it becomes a way for God's subjects to punish themselves—to become "authors to themselves" of their own destruction. Freedom is both the means for disobedience and the punishment (or self-punishment) for disobedience and so, conversely, becomes an incentive to obey. Note, however, that freedom is merely asserted by the Father; it is not controlled by him. He "formed them free" and does not, seemingly cannot, interfere with that freedom once it is created because to interfere would mean he would contradict himself, which for Milton is a logical impossibility.<sup>5</sup> Thus, he puts in motion this mechanism, but it exists external to him to the extent that once it is activated it cannot be halted.

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Not only does freedom provide a mechanism for self-punishment and inner restraint, it is also a concept that can exist only within a larger framework of obedience and hierarchy.

This is servitude,  
To serve the unwise, or him who hath rebelled  
Against his worthier, as thine now serve thee,  
Thyself not free, but to thyself enthralled.... (6.178-181)

Abdiel points out that servitude and enthrallment involves following one's own wishes not God's—the "worthier" or superior. Abdiel's argument is in response to Satan's view of freedom: "At first I thought that liberty and heaven / To heavenly souls had been all one; but now / I see that most through sloth had rather serve" (6.164-166). During her temptation, Eve will mirror Satan's view of freedom when she wonders about her place in the hierarchy and asks "for inferior who is free" (9.825). Both these views understand hierarchy to be antithetical to freedom, but these observations are in direct opposition to the way the Father has structured freedom to work. For Milton, it is the very state of inferiority that allows for freedom, the freedom to obey one's superior. It is only in the absence of freedom, as Abdiel points out to Satan, that one serves oneself rather than God. J.B. Savage nicely articulates this issue when he states, "'freely we serve' in the sense of being free *because* they serve" (292). The Father has created a conception of freedom that can be used only to obey, for when it is not used in this approved way it devolves into self-enthrallment. Freedom is a mechanism of obedience (and so a display of the Father's power) in so far as it provides the means to obey and the punishment for disobedience both of which emanate from within the subject rather than the ruler.

Although Milton's conception of freedom seems to encourage obedience, it does not guarantee it. In fact it allows for the possibility of failure: "free to fall" (3.99). As Laura Lunger Knoppers proposes, "Milton's depiction of human failure legitimates divine control and punishment and mandates a particular kind of inner discipline" (55). Knoppers' point is well taken. Freedom produces a field where God's laws can function since the freedom given to the Father's subjects requires a set of guidelines to follow in order for that freedom to be maintained through obedience.<sup>6</sup> It is within these guidelines (and hence within freedom) that the Father's regal power is displayed in two important ways: through internal and external laws.

Adam and Eve have freedom in Eden, but this freedom manifests itself in acceptable behavior only before the fall. Adam and Eve are not forbidden from engaging in bestiality, torturing animals for fun, or setting fire to large portions of the garden, but they do not do any of these things, presumably because they understand that these acts would be considered unacceptable. This is important since if they act

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against God's will, they forfeit their freedom—freedom necessitates discipline.<sup>7</sup> For instance, when Adam tells Eve of the command to not eat of the tree of knowledge, he asserts their freedom and illustrates what acts they should engage in:

Then let us not think hard  
One easy prohibition, who enjoy  
Free leave so large to all things else, and choice  
Unlimited of manifold delights:  
But let us ever praise him, and extol  
His bounty, following our delightful task  
To prune these growing plants, and tend these flowers.... (4.432-438)

There are essentially three actions or promised actions occurring in these lines which can be separated into two categories: 1) Adam will not eat of the tree, 2) Adam will praise God, 3) Adam will tend the garden. The first promised action is in response to the "easy prohibition." The second and third promised actions, however, do not spring from a command but seemingly come spontaneously from Adam. Indeed, Eve seems to think so since she attributes that idea to Adam: "what thou hast said is just and right" (4.443).

Adam's assertion that they have unlimited freedom is misleading since they choose the actions only among the "manifold delights" which please God. As Knoppers observes, "This unlimited choice is quickly and sharply limited" (552). It can almost go without saying that the Father wishes them to praise him, as that seems to be the reason for their creation: "for thy glory thou hast made [humans]" (3.164). Likewise, the Father had previously told Adam that he should tend the garden.

This Paradise I give thee, count it thine  
To till and keep, and of the fruit to eat:  
Of every tree that in the garden grows  
Eat freely with glad heart; fear here no dearth.  
But of the tree whose operation brings  
Knowledge of good and ill, which I have set  
The pledge of thy obedience and thy faith,  
Amid the garden by the tree of life,  
Remember what I warn thee, shun to taste,  
And shun the bitter consequences: for know,  
The day thou eatst thereof, my sole command  
Transgressed, inevitably thou shalt die;  
From that day mortal, and this happy state  
Shalt loose, expelled from hence into a world  
Of woe and sorrow. Sternly he pronounced  
The rigid interdiction.... (8.319-334)

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Adam was told to “till and keep” the garden; thus, he responds to the choice of “manifold delights” in a way that pleases the Father, but this command to “till and keep” is in stark contrast to the command to not eat of the tree, which carries with it the threat of “bitter consequences.” There is a vast gulf between the two directives. The first is more of a suggestion given to Adam after he awards him the garden. It is like an instruction that comes with a gift: “I am giving you this book *to read*.” The second directive clearly carries with it the force of a command, coupled with the threat of punishment.<sup>8</sup> It is a repressive command in the Althusserian sense: a command linked with violence. Likewise, Adam’s recollection of these laws illustrates this difference; he characterizes the external command as a “prohibition” and the suggestion to work the garden as a “delightful task.” He freely offers to tend the garden without the threat of punishment; in fact, he even enjoys it, but the “prohibition” is obeyed without question. Raphael also provides a source for Adam’s desire to tend the garden. During the creation scene, he tells Adam that one of the purposes of man is “to till the ground” (7.332). However, the point is not that Adam came up with the idea himself, but that he offered to obey the suggestion without a threat of punishment or intervention by the Father, that is, without an overt act of power, without a repressive apparatus. There seem to be two kinds of laws in Eden, those that are explicitly commanded by God and involve his explicit punishment (external laws) and those that are followed freely without such threats (internal laws).

The angels are faced with a similar system of laws. After God creates his Son, he tells his angelic subjects:

him who disobeys  
Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day  
Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls  
Into utter darkness, deep engulf, his place  
Ordained without redemption, without end. (5.611-615)

This command, like the command not to eat of the tree, demands obedience and threatens with violence. However, it seems that the angels are able to obey and please the Father without such laws. Perez Zagorin remarks that “*Paradise Lost* emphasizes the hierarchic character of celestial society.... Within the hierarchy of heaven, however, superior merit founded on virtue holds the highest place” (129).<sup>9</sup> The angels’ ability to be placed in various positions within the hierarchy according to their own merit assumes that they are able to please the Father to a greater or lesser degree. For instance, when they approach the Father, they are described as carrying banners on which are written “acts of zeal and love” (5.593). Their actions are indeed judged, but there does not seem to be an external

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command against which their actions can be judged. This system of merit stands in opposition to the external command to obey the Son, which brings with it the threat of punishment, not promotion.

Indeed, Satan is able to point out just this dichotomy between acts that are freely given and those that are commanded. When he attempts to convince his fellow angels to rebel, one of the most effective strategies he employs is to point to the novelty and uselessness of the law to obey the Son. He asks, “[Who] can introduce / Law and edict on us, who without law / Err not” (5.798-799). This challenge illustrates that this is the first command that the angels have been given, for as Bennett suggests, “up until now [they] have been free and have acted without checking their actions against a codified law” (75). Satan’s question also shows that before this law they did not err. The idea that they have not erred without being issued a command implies, if we are to take Satan seriously here, that they were able to please the Father without an external command from him, which further implies an internal ability to please and obey him. It also seems to imply that there are laws to obey, which do not take the form of an external command because in this context to not err signifies not breaking a law, indicating that a law exists. Bennett’s modifier “codified” is suggestive; there did indeed seem to be law in heaven before the Son’s entry, it simply was not codified or articulated, that is, externalized. Instead, the angels seemed instinctively or intuitively to understand how to “Err not,” thereby achieving merit. There are two sets of laws in heaven, as on earth: those that have just been introduced and explicitly enforced and those that preceded such explicit law, the internal laws that have not been codified.

Eve clearly illustrates the distinction between these two laws when she responds to Satan’s initial temptation:

But of this tree we may not taste nor touch;  
God so commanded, and left that command  
Sole daughter of his voice; the rest, we live  
Law to our selves, our reason is our law. (9.651-654)

Again this illustrates the dual nature of God’s commands: there is his sole command and what Eve calls the “law to our selves.”<sup>10</sup> Eve’s speech also illustrates how these internal laws are followed, through reason—a mechanism of power that the Father puts into place to enforce the internal law. This mechanism of power functions in *Paradise Lost*, like freedom, not as a neutral concept but as a way of controlling behavior even while it exists apart from the Father.

Michael explicates the mechanism of reason when he explains to Adam why the postlapsarian world will contain tyrants:

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Justly thou abhorr'st  
That son, who on the quiet state of men  
Such trouble brought, affecting to subdue  
Rational liberty; yet know withal,  
Since thy original lapse, true liberty  
Is lost, which always with right reason dwells  
Twinned, and from her hath no dividual being:  
Reason in man obscured, or not obeyed,  
Immediately inordinate desires  
And upstart passions catch the government  
From reason, and to servitude reduce  
Man till then free. (12.79-90)

Here liberty (the ability to do good) and rationality (the ability to discern the good) are linked.<sup>11</sup> They must dwell in harmony to function properly. This concept of “rational liberty” leads Bennett to comment that Adam and Eve could behave like the angels, whose “own actions, though freely willed, [are] so closely in harmony with their ruler’s will as to be thought of as part of him” (65). Following a similar train of thought, William Walker notes, “What obeys reason is free” (149). Even though freedom is the field where God allows for and encourages obedience, or the possibility of obedience, in his subjects, it is reason which controls those subjects and leads them to choose the correct actions, and those actions, as Bennett points out, are similar if not identical to the will of God. Reason then is not a neutral concept, which allows individuals to think on their own to reach individual conclusions, but is rather an ability given to humans in order to control their behavior. It is a part of the Father’s power function.

Several critics have posited a similar conception of reason, reason as a form of law that demands obedience. Richard Arnold, who gives the most detailed analysis of reason, calls this conceptual construction “right reason” and traces it to a long theological tradition, which differentiates between right and pure reason—a construction that Milton adhered to. For Arnold, “right reason” comes from God, whereas “pure reason” is ultimately created by Satan: “Right reason, revealed as the ‘prime wisdom’ in *Paradise Lost*, is divinely bestowed on Adam and Eve at their creation: God gives them ‘Right reason for their Law’; whereas syllogistic reasoning, portrayed as ‘notions vain,’ will characterize and perpetuate Satan’s ‘studious thoughts abstruse’” (24). Arnold goes on to argue that the use of pure reason is the ultimate cause of the fall. However, he seems to be interpreting the poem as engaging in the intellectual debates of his time: “The intellectual history of the seventeenth century can be seen, at least in part, as a conflict between the upholders of right reason ... and the proponents of the new mentality of pure

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reason and inductive scientific inquiry” (11). This didactic purpose of the poem does not fully account for the foundation of the fall. This becomes clear when one takes into account Arnold’s understanding of the origin of right reason: “reason rectified to its pre-lapsarian wholeness and clarity of vision” (7). In other words, it seems that in a pre-lapsarian world right reason functions perfectly. Thus, it is difficult to understand (based on Arnold’s distinction) how pure reason entered a pre-lapsarian world.<sup>12</sup> He points to Satan as the ultimate cause of pure reason, but does not explain why Satan would resort to this type of reason, when he, like Adam and Eve, had the “clarity of vision” of right reason to guide their actions. In short, if pure reason exists in *Paradise Lost*, it seems to exist as a way of criticizing “inductive scientific inquiry” via the story of the fall, rather than as a part of Milton’s effort to give a theological/historical narrative of the fall. Nevertheless, the important aspect of reason that Arnold clarifies is that reason in a pre-lapsarian world is almost synonymous with God’s will. If reason does not correspond to the Father’s will, then it is no longer “right reason.”<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the most stunning example of reason dwelling in harmony with the Father’s wishes occurs when Adam, in his first conversation with the Father, challenges the wisdom of his creation by arguing that the Father should have paired Adam with a female mate. John Leonard claims that Adam’s “sudden apprehension” tells him how far he is from understanding “his Creator’s glory” (25). However, Adam does seem to understand at least a part of his “Creator’s glory” since he is able to use his reason to reach the conclusion that the Father wished him to arrive at all along: that he (like the animals) should have a mate. For when the argument between God and Adam is finished, God states:

Thus far to try thee, Adam, I was pleased,  
And find thee knowing not of beast alone,  
Which thou hast rightly named, but of thyself,  
Expressing well the spirit within *thee free*,  
*My image*, not imparted to the brute,  
Whose fellowship therefore unmeet for thee  
Good *reason* was thou freely shouldst dislike.... (8.437-443, italics mine)

Here is what Arnold calls right reason: reason that spurs the reasoning subject to action. In this case, the action is an argument with the Father. His reason informs this discourse which pleases God. In other words, what follows reason follows God’s will.<sup>14</sup> Although this process would not be described as a law in the traditional sense of “though shalt do this” and “thou shalt not do that,” it is a form of law in the sense that it rules a set of interior guidelines, which influences, indeed controls, how one acts. What else could have informed Adam’s challenge of God

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within a few moments of his creation? Adam did not recall explicit instructions from God (no such laws were given), but rather he discovered the internalized law through reason, the same mechanism that helps Adam and Eve curtail their “manifold delights” in ways that are pleasing to God.

This description of reason requires two caveats. First, Milton seemed to be of the opinion that reason precedes God. Bennett makes this observation, pointing out that within Milton’s poetic vision “law is only descriptive and only secondarily or derivatively prescriptive” (65). Andrew Milner concurs, citing Milton’s defense of regicide: “when Milton seeks to justify the execution of tyrants on the grounds that God has so commanded, he is careful to add that: ‘It was not therefore lawful to kill a tyrant, because God commanded it; but God commanded it because, antecedently to his command, it was a justifiable and lawful action’” (116). This is important if we are concerned with whether God is a good king or not since if reason exists prior to God, then the Father’s gift of reason to humans becomes a way for humans to enjoy the same harmony with reason that God enjoys. However, for a discussion on how the Father’s power works in *Paradise Lost*, this distinction is less important since if God is necessarily reasonable, and this same reason is placed within human beings, then reason is still the internalized law of God. Put another way, if God follows reason, obeying reason is obeying God. Second, this description of reason only concerns itself with the Father’s human subjects since, unlike freedom, reason seems to be a mechanism that functions differently in angels from the way it does in humans. The Father explicitly mentions that both angels and humans are responsible for their own freedom—“Sufficient to have stood, through free to fall / Such I created all the ethereal powers” (3.99-100)—so the discourse surrounding the fall of the rebel angels is concerned with this mechanism. On the other hand, angels are described as having a higher command of reason, reason raised to the level of intuitive knowledge. However, as Raphael tells Adam, these two types of reason differ “but in degree, of kind the same” (5.490). Without stretching the tenuous connection between angels and humans too far, one can reasonably assume that this reason (“of kind the same”) works in angels as it does in humans: to internally channel freedom into appropriate actions.

Thus far, the Father’s power has been located within concepts which function within his subjects. He exercises this power by creating the mechanisms which allow or force his subjects to control themselves by following an internal reason and exercising their freedom or, conversely, enthralling themselves. However, in the scene where Adam challenges the Father, he also tests his subjects thereby reinforcing those mechanisms. In the case of Adam’s challenge, that mechanism is

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reason, that which allows Adam to understand actions that will please the Father. This type of reinforcement also occurs through the Father's more active power-role of observation. Milton's God is orthodox in the sense that he is omnipresent and omniscient, and several critics have pointed out how God's role as observer functions as a means of controlling his subjects via self-discipline. For instance Wilma G. Armstrong, following Foucault's analyses of eighteenth-century France, cites numerous examples of God's surveillance system in *Paradise Lost* and concludes, "The ultimate goal of surveillance in either a Miltonic or Foucauldian system is discipline.... Milton envisions a society of reformed, redeemed individuals who observe God's laws spontaneously and not through fear" (104).<sup>15</sup> Rather than rehash this argument, I will merely point out that God's role as observer is another way of reinforcing the mechanisms of power that he puts in place, and suggest that the Father's surveillance allows him to reinforce these mechanisms without directly interfering, thereby further separating himself from these mechanisms and internalizing them within his subjects.

This method of controlling his subjects is in direct opposition to the explicit way God punishes them. The mechanisms of power that enforce the internal laws (i.e., reason and freedom) are not utilized to enforce the external commands. Again, Eve's response to Satan's initial temptation is instructive (9.651-654). The "sole daughter of his voice" is not linked with reason and is described as coming directly from God instead of existing internally.

Likewise, after Adam and Eve fall, the epic voice describes the fall in terms that separate the two types of laws:

Of man, with strength entire, and free will armed,  
Complete to have discovered and repulsed  
Whatever wiles of foe or seeming friend.  
For still they knew, and ought to have still remembered  
The high injunction not to taste that fruit.... (10.9-13)

Here, "discovered" and "remembered" illustrate these two forms of laws. They could have *discovered* how Satan's ploys worked through reason, but all they had to do is *remember* the external command "not to taste that fruit." The punishment for this sin also follows a similar distinction.

But fallen he is, and now  
What rests, but that the mortal sentence pass  
On his transgression, death denounced that day,  
Which he presumes already vain and void,  
Because not yet inflicted.... (10.47-51)

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It seems that Adam and Eve are already fallen even though God has yet to inflict punishment. Indeed, shortly after Adam eats the fruit, he is described in fallen terms:

Soon as the force of that fallacious fruit,  
That with exhilarating vapour bland  
About their spirits had played, and inmost powers  
Made err,  
...  
Soon found their eyes how opened, and their minds  
How darkened; innocence, that as a veil  
Had shadowed them from knowing ill, was gone....  
(9.1046-1049, 1053-1055)

The fruit immediately affects their “inmost powers.” Presumably these inner powers are their reason and freedom, which Michael tells Adam are lost after the fall (12.82-84). The narrator also describes the fall as affecting their minds and their vision, their unfallen ability to ignore evil and only see the good. All of these effects of the fruit take place within human beings and come without the direct intervention of God. Here again is the self-enthralment that is built into the mechanisms of freedom and reason. This punishment works on its own, and all that is left (“and now / What rests”) is for the Father to enact the external punishment.

The Father enacts this secondary, external punishment through his son by transferring his power to him: “to thee I have transferred / All judgment” (10.56-57). Hence, the Son speaks for the Father when he judges Eve, saying to her, “Thy sorrow I will greatly multiply / By thy conception; children thou shalt bring / In sorrow forth,” and to Adam, “I charge thee, saying: Thou shalt not eat thereof, / Cursed is the ground for thy sake” (10.193-195, 200-201). This punishment does not affect their inner selves but affects their outer bodies. Furthermore, it comes directly from God (“I have transferred,” “I charge thee”) rather than through the mechanisms that he creates. The external law concerning the tree is a completely different paradigm of law and punishment than those mechanisms of power that punish from within the subjects that they work upon. With the breaking of the external law does come the inner self-enthralment, but the delay between the self-enthralment and the external punishment illustrates the distinction between the two. The external punishment of the Son comes after the mechanisms of power (which have been in place since creation) have already been activated by the subjects they work upon and within. The internal law was never broken; it was the transgression of the external law that triggered the enactment of inner self-enthralment.

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Likewise, Satan and his allies are also externally punished for breaking the external law. After Raphael finishes his description of the war in heaven and Satan's ultimate defeat by the Son, he tells Adam the lesson of Satan's fall, describing it as a "terrible example the reward / of disobedience; firm they might have stood, / Yet fell; remember, and fear to transgress" (6.910-912). It should be remembered that the entire narrative of the war in heaven is Raphael's response to Adam's question, "What meant that caution joined, If ye be found / Obedient?" (5.513-514). Satan's punishment is framed in terms of obedience and disobedience: that is, the story is told to teach Adam to obey the sole command of God (the external command). Similarly, before Raphael begins the story, he gives a short speech urging Adam to obey (5.519-543). Throughout the speech Raphael does not discuss reason. Like Eve's distinction between "sole command" and "reason is our law," Raphael's omission illustrates that reason is not used to obey the external laws. Instead, the story of Satan's fall from heaven is firmly cast in terms of external punishment and external law.

Like Adam's fall, Satan's fall comes with internal punishment, not from breaking internal laws, but from breaking the external law. For instance, when Satan views creation and comments upon its beauty, he complains:

but I in none of these  
Find place or refuge; and the more I see  
Pleasures about me, so much more I feel  
Torment within me.... (9.118-121)

Satan is unable to find solace from his suffering because his suffering is within him. His vision, like Adam's vision after he falls, has been corrupted so all he sees produces misery. In fact, he suggests that if he were in Heaven, "much worse would be my state" (9.123) since, from his viewpoint, that great good of Heaven would be transferred through "the hateful siege / Of contraries" (9.121-122) into great evil. A more concrete example of his fallen state occurs when he hatches the plot to rebel against the Father, and Sin springs forth from his head. This birth is described in painful terms and juxtaposed with the subversive plot: "In bold conspiracy against heaven's king, / All on a sudden miserable pain / Surprised thee, dim thine eyes" (2.751-753). Although Sin, and her progeny Death, do not really punish Satan (in fact they end up becoming his allies), the initial pain that comes from within which is linked to Satan's "bold conspiracy" is an internal or self-punishment brought on by the breaking of an explicit command, the command to worship the Son. However, this inner punishment is not linked to the Father's power (his mechanisms of power) in the same way that freedom and reason are explicitly shown to be given to humans by the Father. Again, the tenuous

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connection between angels and humans is stretched. Nevertheless, the paradigm of internal punishment mirrors the one that Adam and Eve are subject to, and, in any case, in an *ex deo* universe the mechanism that functioned to create Sin would presumably originate in God.

Although the mechanisms of power break down with Adam and Eve's fall and Satan's rebellion (the Edenic couple and the rebel angels are both punished from within), this rupture of the system of inner laws is the result of the breaking or plot to break the external laws. In other words, the mechanisms of power only break down when they are linked to the transgression of the external laws. It is the external laws that attract subversion not the internal laws. It is clear that these internal mechanisms of power stay intact before the transgression of the external law because of the binary portrayal of freedom and its link with reason. As illustrated when Adam falls, great pains are taken to describe his fallen state (9.1046-1049, 1053-1055), where those mechanisms of power (the "inner powers") start to err. Likewise, Michael's description of tyrants illustrates how reason and liberty are to a certain extent lost after the fall (12.79-90). Satan's assertion that he did not err before the institution of the external command to worship the Son (5.798-799) illustrates that these internal mechanisms functioned before such external laws were articulated and then promptly broken. Paradoxically, it is the tenuous nature of the external commands that is the reason for their creation and articulation: they are made to be broken.

The instability of the external laws is noticed by Adam when he is told of all the commands that will be given to humans after the fall:

But now I see  
His day, in whom all nations shall be blest,  
Favour unmerited by me, who sought  
Forbidden knowledge by forbidden means.  
This yet I apprehend not, why to those  
Among whom God will deign to dwell on earth  
So many and so various laws are given;  
So many laws argue so many sins  
Among them; how can God with such reside? (12.276-284)

Adam's discourse links his transgression of the external command to not eat of the tree and his question about the reasonableness of other external commands: he acknowledges that he broke an external command and then immediately asks why such laws are put into place. Michael's answer to this question is instructive: "And therefore was law given them to evince / Their natural pravity, by stirring up / Sin against law to fight" (12.287-289). This line is often glossed as a reference to the Protestant belief that Old Testament laws are given to manifest or "evince" humans' fallen and therefore depraved

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state. However, this interpretation of Michael's answer picks up on only one of the possible meanings of Adam's phrase, "So many laws argue so many sins." "Argue" can mean "evince," but in this context it can also mean something like "follows" or "comes with," as it does in Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV*: "So bad a death argues a monstrous life" (3.3.30). When "argue" is read this way, Adam is making a strong connection between sin and laws. The one follows from the other. This reading of the lines amplifies Michael's phrase "stirring up." Laws stir up, or provoke, sin because sin and laws are necessarily linked. That is, laws seem designed to provoke sin and transgression. If we are to accept the link between the external law that Adam broke and the external laws that are articulated after the fall (which seems tenuously suggested by Adam), then the purpose of the external laws to worship the Son and not eat of the tree are also designed to stir up sin. External laws argue transgression.

This reading of the poem's description of laws is similar to Stanley Fish's well-known argument that the command to not eat of the tree is a kind of test. He offers this reading of the poem through his distinction between faith and reason; the law to not eat of the tree stands as a test of faith that works against reason. "If Adam and Eve agree that it is reasonable and, *as far as they can see*, attractive to *not* eat the apple, obedience is not only possible, but easy, and an inadequate test of faith" (243). Walker challenges Fish's argument that it is lack of faith and not faulty reasoning that is responsible for the fall; for Walker, the command to not eat of the tree is not unreasonable because reason and obedience are always linked, and so to obey God is reasonable, and thus "rational analysis of their situation is of the utmost relevance to their freely chosen obedience and the happiness that depends upon it" (155). To further explicate the situation, Arnold offers yet another distinction. He argues that it is impure reason not right reason that leads Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge and thus disobey the Father. However, under the radical break between external and internal commands that I have attempted to establish, a different reason emerges for Eve's failure since neither reason (impure or otherwise) nor faith is required to follow the external law—all that is required is fear of punishment, fear of the repressive apparatus that the Father clearly articulates. Satan, when he tempts Eve, draws on this requirement for obedience to the external law:

Queen of this universe, do not believe  
Those rigid threats of death; ye shall not die:  
How should ye? By the fruit? It gives you life  
To knowledge. By the threatener? Look on me,  
Me who have touched and tasted, yet both live. (9.684-688)

Satan knows that once he renders the threat of punishment moot, the external command is no longer effective. Satan knows this because he himself did not

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believe that he would be punished for breaking the external command. When he reaches Hell he asks, “who knew / The force of those dire arms?” (1.93-94). In short, the threat of violence does not work in either case. Furthermore, given Adam’s suggestion that external laws argue sins, the creation of external laws all but guarantees sins. What *Paradise Lost* seems to be telling us is that external commands do not work. Of course, it is possible to posit another narrative where the external laws are not broken and the internal laws continue to function, but that is not the narrative of *Paradise Lost*.

It is the effectiveness of God’s rule through his mechanisms of power and the internalized law that makes the external law, which by its very nature is ineffective, necessary. The ineffectiveness of the external law is somewhat like the anecdote of the Persian rug maker who gets so good at his art that he must improperly tie one knot less he attain perfection and rival God. The Father’s power cannot operate perfectly; perfection is not the desired result. Again Milton’s belief that God cannot contradict himself is important. The Father cannot create subjects who control themselves through the mechanism of freedom and reason and have those mechanisms work so well that they limit freedom, for if they limit freedom, then those mechanisms of power cease to function. Apparently, the way out of this contradiction is to create a separate set of laws that works externally, thereby, bypassing the internal mechanisms of power that would ensure perfect obedience. Those external laws produce transgression, which then undermine the internal laws. In short, it is the structure of the Father’s power (his bipartite system of laws) which produces the fall.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dennis Danielson has thoroughly investigated how Milton’s narrative and his theology interact and depend on one another. However, Danielson focuses on the Father’s goodness (i.e., his theodicy); I primarily focus on Milton’s portrayal of the Father’s omnipotence.

<sup>2</sup> This depiction has puzzled many readers of the poem, particularly those who have viewed *Paradise Lost* alongside Milton’s political beliefs, which are almost always vehemently anti-monarchy. Several critics have addressed this issue and proposed various solutions to the apparent contradiction between Milton’s poetical god-king and his view of kings in general. Malcolm Mackenzie Ross is perhaps the first to confront explicitly the contradiction between Milton’s political imagery and his beliefs and actions. Ross views this as an inevitable contradiction since regal imagery is so thoroughly linked to the power and might Milton needed in order to convey a powerful God, but Ross reads Milton as being aware of this contradiction and trying to make a clear distinction between the heavenly kingdom and the earthly kingdom, though he sees this as a poetic failure. Likewise, Robert Fallon traces the imagery of *Paradise Lost* to the various monarchies of Milton’s time but argues that this does not contradict Milton’s negative opinion of kings since, as he argues, Milton did not have a problem with kings, only tyrants. Similarly, Stevie Davies sees monarchal imagery in *Paradise Lost* but finds such imagery in all the major characters in the poem not just the Father; furthermore, he argues that Milton gives the Father regal qualities because he is necessarily a good king and deserving

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of such attributes in a way that earthly kings are not. Roger Lejosne agrees, arguing that Milton put himself into the role of Satan (and Salmasius into the role of Abdiel) only to illustrate that while Milton was right on earth, he would be wrong in heaven. Conversely, Bryson argues that the Father in Milton's epic is not a good king but a tyrant and is an illustration of the false way God has been imagined for hundreds of years. Like Ross, Bryson sees Milton as making use of the theological imagery that he is forced into using, but unlike Ross, Bryson points out that Milton is critiquing this imagery while using it rather than merely differentiating himself from it. Richard F. Hardin provides a similar reading of the poem but places Milton's critique of kingship in Hell and in the figure of Satan. Yet another point of view is that of Joan S. Bennett who believes that we should judge the Father's heavenly government according to the rules that Milton sets up for earthly government. She concludes that the Father has produced an effective political regime in heaven.

<sup>3</sup> Thus, I will not be offering, strictly speaking, an Althusserian reading of *Paradise Lost*. Rather, I will use Althusser's notion of RSA and ISA as a critical tool to investigate the Father's system of laws.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Schoenfeldt also notes how Milton's conception of freedom (what he calls autonomy) is different than a contemporary understanding of freedom. Schoenfeldt, following William James, traces it to a "post-Romantic suspicion of the virtue of obedience" and a "Protestant belief in economic self-reliance" (363). Stephen Fallon, however, shows that Hobbes provided another concept of freedom for which "liberty lies in the absence of external impediment in acting on the necessary choices" (37). Thus, Milton's conception of freedom was not merely inherited, but was strategically chosen. For a detailed discussion of the difference between Hobbes' and Milton's notions of freedom, see Martin Dzelzainis' "Liberty and the Law."

<sup>5</sup> Harinder Singh Marjara makes this assertion that Milton subscribed to the belief that God's omnipotence is subject to the law of non-contradiction (225).

<sup>6</sup> Although her broad line of reasoning will be followed, Knoppers focuses on familial and penal models of self-discipline, whereas I focus on the political power of the Father.

<sup>7</sup> See Christopher Hill's *Milton and the English Revolution* for a discussion of this tension between freedom and discipline in Milton's thought (253-267).

<sup>8</sup> Earl R. Boggs suggests that their decision to not eat of the tree in this scene is the result of "conscience and reason" (280). However, as I will attempt to make clear, their decision not to eat is simply obeying an explicit command; obeying does not mean following reason, which suggests an attempt to follow internal laws. Furthermore, conscience is portrayed as given to humans after the fall, not before, as in "umpire conscience" (3.195).

<sup>9</sup> Mary Ann Radzinowicz also stresses the system of meritocracy in Heaven.

<sup>10</sup> William Walker also notes that Eve's response implies a two-part system of laws. Walker contrasts inner reason with divine command: "Eve says, they have a ground for behavior other than the inner reason that they take to be their ground of behavior regarding everything else in the garden—a divine command. She thus speaks of divine command as a ground for action, as her internal reason is" (153). Walker's larger point, however, is to show that Eve understands the law to not eat of the tree as reasonable (as opposed to Fish's interpretation) and not that her comment refers to a system of laws that is dispersed throughout the poem's universe. Furthermore, I do not disagree that the Father's command is unreasonable, but merely that reason is not necessary to obey that command. Eve simply has to remember the external command rather than use reason to discover and obey the internal law.

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<sup>11</sup> Schoenfeldt also notes this link between freedom and reason; in fact, he conflates the two concepts into one term: “rational autonomy” (365). However, Schoenfeldt stresses the importance of this concept after the fall, whereas I argue that reason and freedom are already linked before the fall.

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Arnold sometimes seems to conflate pre- and post-lapsarian worlds. For instance, he argues that “God has imbued the human pair with right reason,” citing the lines, “And I will place within them as a guide / My Umpire Conscience, whom if they will hear / Light after light well us’d they shall attain” (41). However, the Father here is clearly speaking of what the post-lapsarian world will be like, not the pre-lapsarian world of perfectly functioning right reason. It is only after the fall that “umpire conscience” will be necessary.

<sup>13</sup> Schoenfeldt and Walker also posit a similar conception of reason, a faculty that is completely tied to the Father’s will.

<sup>14</sup> Although this argument with the Father is a good example of reason functioning in accordance with the Father’s will, it somewhat destabilizes Arnold’s distinction. Arnold argues that when Adam questions the Father’s creation in his conversions with Raphael, Adam is employing pure reason—he is attempting to know the mind of God and contemplating the logic of creation rather than focusing on obedience (41-57). However, his argument with the Father seems to be a form of questioning the logic of creation, but this questioning (use of pure reason) is praised by the father and labeled as “good reason.” Arnold does not explicate this passage to explain this apparent inconsistency.

<sup>15</sup> See also Knoppers, Robin Jarvis, and Jackie DiSalvo (esp. 328).

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