
Rediscovering the God/Satan Dichotomy

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton plays with the preconceived notions of his readers by presenting perspectives perhaps never before imagined. God is not strictly the protagonist and Satan is not strictly the antagonist, on the contrary Satan is presented in a triumphant, glorious manner though ironically he has just fallen from heaven and been condemned to hell. In Satan's eyes, God is oppressing him, and he is doing nothing more than Milton himself is doing in a literary context. Milton is a revolutionary, and writes that which is not commonly accepted. He has radical ideas on how society should and could be run better. Such parallels can be drawn with Satan, for he too is trying to make his own "heaven out of hell" and quite literally rise against the oppressive force in his life. Theologically, Satan's thought process on being evil is highly irrational, and thus he is cast outside God's good graces. What is inherent in this speech, however, is that true evil is done consciously only when good is knowingly turned away from. It is clear from the distinctions between Satan's use of first and second person that he has the knowledge of what is good, and yet by the end of the speech he still expels any goodness from his evil being. This is irrational, and it is this irrationality that causes both theological and psychologically pain. It is as if God's light and Paradise's beauty is causing Satan physical pain. He is in pain both in hell and now here, and it is as if Satan is quite literally bringing Hell with him wherever he goes. It is through Milton's brilliant portrayal of Satan's continual state of tension and dismay as a subjective soul that the reader finds sympathy for him, for Satan is no longer strictly evil, as is clear with his speech on Niphates, Satan he is merely a confused being who represents a lesser evil from a psychological and theological standpoint.

When Satan first catches sight of Paradise, he immediately switches into the second person. He is overwhelmed by its beauty, and unable to completely take in its purity and innocence he is forced to switch into, quite literally, another state of being. His speech starts with an appeal to "thou", where it is unclear initially whether the "thou" is God or in fact himself. He continues to say "O thou... Look'st from thy sole dominion like the god/Of this new world..." (lines 32-33), which makes it clear that he is looking upon paradise as if he were god, but he is not God. It is clear now that the "thou" is he, which makes it more confusing for the reader, for this is the first scene in which Satan's internal struggles have been put on display, literally for the entire "new" world to witness. He calls upon his other self, "thee" but "with no friendly voice", for the sun has reminded him of the former good he displayed, his former self that originally presided in heaven. He cannot identify with this other facet of goodness in his character, and so while subconsciously he realizes that he is the same and has the same qualities as before, his conscious mind refuses to accept this simple fact. Satan must branch off into two distinct sides of his being, the separated, former good self and his modern evil self. "O sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams" Satan says, for he is quite literally telling his former self how much his present

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self hates to be reminded that once he was different, once he was good and not prideful, but in God's service. Satan is forced to switch into first person when he says that he hates the sun's beams, for his former good self is too pure to express any kind of hatred. Satan in his fallen state is capable of hating, for he is resentful and now deceitful, but through the internal separation of Satan we can see now that Satan is only corrupt in his present state.

As Satan continues his speech, he notes that God created him (first person), implying that God made Satan with the evil that he now displays. God too has choices, like Satan and Adam and Eve. What makes someone evil is the active decision to turn away from good and go down a darker path of known evil. But in these lines, Satan brings to our attention the fact that God knew what he was doing when he created evil in the first place. If God has created everything, and knows of all that will happen, why is it that Satan is condemned to hell at all? What God says to his "only begotten son" (Book III line 80) is that he has created man "just and right, sufficient to have stood, though free to fall." (Book III lines. 97-98). God is the one who introduces sin by single handedly creating the possibility for evil to exist, and yet God justifies his actions by saying that without choices, man would not have been created free, and "free they must remain". God comes across in this interaction as being quite pompous. He declares that the only reason salvation will come about is because he is merciful and just. Though what he says can be understood, the practical logic behind his argument is quite cyclical and incomprehensible at times. Theoretically, God had the ability to create a more ideal universe in which Satan is not necessarily evil and man does not fall, and yet consciously God chooses not to. Satan on the other hand seems almost more human in the sense that he is a sensitive more conscious being. Satan is only vengeful because he believes that God will not have mercy for him, and this logic has no faults from the reader's perspective for in book III there is textual evidence that states that God will not help Satan and the other fallen angels because their sin has come from themselves, and from themselves alone. Thus Satan is condemned to Hell forever. When God is taken literally, evil undoubtedly arises, for Satan would cease to exist as an evil creature if it were not for God's rash tongue. In the first person, Satan recognizes that he owes God "a debt immense of endless gratitude, so burthensome still paying, still to owe..." but it is destiny, a God created destiny that keeps him an "inferior angel".

"I fell" indicates that it is the evil side of Satan that fell, not the "thou" or "thee" that represents his good state of being. Satan separates himself from his good state, but his motivation for doing thus is vague. He does not necessarily identify with the evil state more so than the good as one is wont to think, for this could only occur when goodness is accepted and evil surfaces not when goodness itself is ignored. He splits himself up into two beings to protect the goodness of his former self, thus shielding the good from being corrupted again like it was once before, that which culminated in his expulsion from heaven. "Pride" and "worse ambition" is the cause of his fall, Satan says, and yet it is clear that pride is not what motivated this speech, uncertainty is. "By thee [Satan], and more then half [of the human race] perhaps will reign" (line

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112), he says; for ambition here becomes a source of motivation when Satan is uncertain of himself, for he sees revenge through the corruption of Adam and Eve as the only way to possibly triumph over God. Satan has lost some of his previous glamour, but he has certainly gained some of the reader's compassion. The irony is that it is God's compassion that Satan fears not ever being able to have, and it is this belief that causes him to turn away from his former goodness forever, "For never can true reconciliation grow where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep..." The truest of sins is not believing that God is capable of mercy, for how can he grant forgiveness if one doesn't have enough belief in God to ask for it. As stated in the Bible, the one unforgivable sin is "despairing of forgiveness", and in doing so Satan has returned to his evil state. He no longer feels the need to repent, for repenting in his eyes is futile to God. "O then at last relent: is there no place left for repentance, none for pardon left? None left but by submission; and that word disdains forbids me..." (lines 79-82), for it is God that has made him so proud, and God that has made it impossible for Satan to yield. Thus Satan says, "Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost; Evil be thou my good..." turning away from goodness forever, and lacking God's guiding presence, he embraces evil as his guiding light. With remorse he also says farewell to hope and fear, for he now has not a single hope of ever being in God's favor, and therefore cannot any more be fearful of what his fate may hold in store for him.

Satan is unable to break free from the bondages of Hell. He has made his own heaven out of hell, and yet here it is clear that hell follows him even in heavenly paradise. God has provided everyone involved with the ability to choose. Choice is to blame for it is choice that traps not only Satan, but Eve as well, into either being right or wrong or good or bad. Satan is trapped by God, and the choices that he has provided him, and thus Satan dejectedly says "Which way I fly is hell; myself is hell" (line 75), concluding with the acceptance that "me [Satan is] miserable" (line 73). What makes *Paradise Lost* such a revolutionary body of work is the fact that Milton portrays Satan not as the embodiment of evil only, but as a subjective being who is not unlike us in the fact that he too is conflicted between good and evil, as can be seen in this passage. Milton plays with whatever preconceived notions we have of Satan, for as the reader we sympathize more with him after this speech than with God after any of God's speeches. The interesting thought that Milton leaves us with is the consideration that perhaps Satan is not actually satanic, but more humanistic, and if this is the case then, then what makes God so ideal if he cannot have mercy on Satan, the most conflicted of souls.

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