

THE THEOLOGY OF FREEDOM IN
PARADISE LOST

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ABSTRACT

Milton scholarship remains divided between characterisations of *Paradise Lost*'s theology as either "orthodox" or "heretical." In this study I situate *Paradise Lost* within its complex post-Reformation context, and I argue that its theology is more variegated and more elusive than either straightforwardly orthodox or straightforwardly heretical readings have tended to suggest. This study pursues the theological portrayal of freedom as it unfolds throughout *Paradise Lost*, and seeks to identify and explore the ways in which the poem's theology is continuous and discontinuous with the major post-Reformation theological traditions. By teasing out the complexities of this theology and the distinctive manner in which it draws on diverse post-Reformation traditions, this study offers a nuanced reading of the poem which allows its theology to emerge clearly on its own terms. In particular, this reading of *Paradise Lost* highlights the poem's profound commitment to both human and divine freedom. It is this commitment which underlies the poem's appropriation and reformulation of a wide range of existing theological concepts in its unique and compelling account of the idea of freedom.

For Elise

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	8
ABBREVIATIONS	9
A NOTE ON THE TEXTS	11
INTRODUCTION	12
I. Heresy and Orthodoxy	12
II. Continuities and Discontinuities	16
III. Dead Ideas	19
IV. Poetic Theology	21
1. SCHOLARSHIP ON MILTON AND FREEDOM	24
I. Recent Approaches to Freedom	26
II. The Contexts of Milton's Theology	30
2. THE THEOLOGY OF FREEDOM: A SHORT HISTORY	37
I. Augustine	39
II. Anselm of Canterbury	42
III. Thomas Aquinas	47
IV. John Duns Scotus	51
V. William of Ockham	55
VI. Martin Luther	58
VII. John Calvin	63
VIII. Reformed Orthodoxy	67
IX. Arminianism	76
X. Amyraldism	82
XI. <i>De Doctrina Christiana</i>	88
3. THE SATANIC THEOLOGY OF FREEDOM	96
I. Satan as Heretic	98
II. Divine Tyranny	102
III. Fatalism	110
IV. Devil Writ Large	117
4. PREDESTINATION AND FREEDOM	121
I. Universal Election	123
II. Reprobation	132
III. Predestined Freedom	139

5. THE FREEDOM OF GOD	148
I. The Free Creator	149
II. Arian Freedom	161
III. Divine and Creaturely Freedom	168
6. HUMAN FREEDOM AND THE FALL	175
I. Freedom and Necessity	176
II. Contingent Freedom	181
III. Contingence and Theodicy	189
IV. A Free Fall	193
V. Freedom Enthralled	205
7. GRACE, CONVERSION AND FREEDOM	217
I. Universal Prevenient Grace	220
II. The Conversion of Adam and Eve	235
III. Continuing Conversion	239
CONCLUSION	244
BIBLIOGRAPHY	250
I. Milton Editions	250
II. Primary Sources and Early Printed Sources	251
III. Secondary Sources	259

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My greatest debt is to my wife, Elise. Her wedding date was the anniversary of Milton's birth, and she has lived with Milton ever since.

ABBREVIATIONS

- ANF* *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. 10 vols. 1885-96; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956-62.
- Bentley *Milton's Paradise Lost: A New Edition*, ed. Richard Bentley. London, 1732.
- Bush *The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. Douglas Bush. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965.
- Campbell *John Milton: The Complete Poems*, ed. Gordon Campbell. London: J. M. Dent, 1980.
- CM* *The Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank A. Patterson et al. 18 vols. in 21. New York: Columbia University Press, 1931-38.
- CPW* *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe et al. 8 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-82.
- Flannagan *The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flannagan. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.
- Fowler *John Milton: Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler. London: Longman, 1968.
- Heppe Heinrich Hepppe, *Reformed Dogmatics Set Out and Illustrated From the Sources*. Ed. and rev. Ernst Bizer. Trans. G. T. Thomson. London: Allen & Unwin, 1950.
- Hughes *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes. New York: Odyssey, 1957.
- Newton *Paradise Lost: A Poem, in Twelve Books*, ed. Thomas Newton. 2 vols. London, 1749.
- NPNF* *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff. First Series. 14 vols. 1886-90; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979.
- OED* *Oxford English Dictionary*
- PL* *Patrologia Latina Cursus Completus*, ed. J. P. Migne. 221 vols. Paris, 1844-55.

- Schaff *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, ed. Philip Schaff. 3 vols. 1877; New York, 1919.
- s.l. *sine locus* (used in bibliographic references where no place of publication has been found)
- Todd *The Poetical Works of John Milton, With Notes By Various Authors*, ed. Henry J. Todd. 4 vols. London, 1809.
- Verity *Milton: Paradise Lost*, ed. A. W. Verity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910.

A NOTE ON THE TEXTS

I have generally used modern editions of primary sources where these are available. Where Latin theological texts exist in modern English editions I have generally cited these English translations, but have freely modified my citations against the original Latin, especially where I have judged it preferable to render technical theological terminology literally rather than idiomatically. Italics in citations are from the original texts unless otherwise indicated. All citations of Milton's poetry are from Helen Darbishire's edition, *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952-55).

INTRODUCTION

I. Heresy and Orthodoxy

Over half a century ago, A. S. P. Woodhouse remarked:

Nothing is more obvious in modern Milton studies than the emergence of two schools, one of which is so impressed by Milton's heresies as to lose sight of his fundamental Christianity, while the other ... insists on the traditional character of the poet's religion and, where it cannot deny the heresies, brushes them aside as peripheral.¹

In spite of the ways in which the discussion of Milton's theology has developed since the 1940s, Woodhouse's description of a radical-conservative divide in Milton studies remains broadly accurate. Thus Stephen Fallon has recently highlighted the interpretive conflict between those readers who emphasise Milton's "intellectual unconventionality and even heterodoxy," and those who portray the poet as a "spokesperson for orthodox Christianity."²

¹ A. S. P. Woodhouse, "Notes on Milton's Views on the Creation: The Initial Phases," *Philological Quarterly* 28:1 (1949), 211. Similarly, see R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Lucifer and Prometheus: A Study of Milton's Satan* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), 1-2, who humorously contrasts radical portrayals of Milton as a "dashing Satanist" with conservative portrayals of "the conventional poet who would not say anything unless seventeen people had said it before."

² Stephen M. Fallon, "Paradise Lost in Intellectual History," in *A Companion to Milton*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 329.

This conflict between radical and conservative readings of Milton is exhibited in a striking way in the continuing debate over Milton's Arianism,³ with some scholars arguing that Milton's view of the Trinity "is in agreement with the creedal statement of ... Nicene orthodoxy,"⁴ and others arguing that the heretical Milton "rejected the orthodox dogma of the Trinity."⁵ The same radical-conservative conflict is partly responsible for the fervour with which Milton's authorship of the *De Doctrina Christiana* has recently been contested on the one hand and defended on the other.⁶ In

³ The Arianism of *Paradise Lost* has been contested in various ways by William B. Hunter, C. A. Patrides and J. H. Adamson, *Bright Essence: Studies in Milton's Theology* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1971); James H. Sims, "Paradise Lost: 'Arian Document' or Christian Poem?" *Études Anglaises* 20 (1967), 337-47; Stella P. Revard, "The Dramatic Function of the Son in *Paradise Lost*: A Commentary on Milton's 'Trinitarianism,'" *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 66 (1967), 45-58; and most recently Michael Lieb, "Milton and 'Arianism,'" *Religion and Literature* 32:2 (2000), 197-220. The poem's Arianism has been affirmed and defended by Maurice Kelley, *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's De Doctrina Christiana as a Gloss Upon Paradise Lost* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941); idem, "Milton's Arianism Again Considered," *Harvard Theological Review* 54 (1961), 195-205; idem, "Milton and the Trinity," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 33:4 (1970), 315-20; Barbara K. Lewalski, *Milton's Brief Epic: The Genre, Meaning, and Art of Paradise Regained* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1966), 133-63; Michael Bauman, *Milton's Arianism* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1987); and most recently, John P. Rumrich, "Milton's Arianism: Why It Matters," in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 75-92; and Larry R. Isitt, *All the Names in Heaven: A Reference Guide to Milton's Supernatural Names and Epic Similes* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002).

⁴ William B. Hunter, "Further Definitions: Milton's Theological Vocabulary," in *Bright Essence*, 25.

⁵ Kelley, "Milton and the Trinity," 316.

⁶ The most important studies which contest the treatise's Miltonic authorship include William B. Hunter, "The Provenance of the *Christian Doctrine*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 32:1 (1992), 129-42; idem, "The Provenance of the *Christian Doctrine*: Addenda From the Bishop of Salisbury," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 33:1 (1993), 191-207; idem, *Visitation Unimplor'd: Milton and the Authorship of De Doctrina Christiana* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998); Paul R. Sellin, "John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *De Doctrina Christiana* on Predestination," *Milton Studies* 34 (1996), 45-60; idem, "Further Responses," *Milton Quarterly* 33:2 (1999), 38-51; and Michael Lieb, "*De Doctrina Christiana* and the Question of Authorship," *Milton Studies* 41 (2002), 171-230. Defences of the work's Miltonic authorship include Christopher Hill, "Professor William B. Hunter, Bishop Burgess, and John Milton," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 34:1 (1994), 165-88; Barbara K.

contesting Milton's authorship of the treatise, William Hunter's underlying conservative intention is expressed in his description of a theologically innocuous, "Anglican communicant" Milton, whose radicalism extended "only to church governance, not doctrine,"⁷ and who should therefore be associated with what Hunter calls "the great traditions of Christianity."⁸ Advocates of Milton's authorship, on the other hand, speak of his "heretical" and "idiosyncratic" beliefs,⁹ and complain of "the persistent desire to present Milton as an orthodox Christian."¹⁰

This continuing conflict between orthodox and heretical readings of Milton's theology constitutes the background to the present study. I was prompted to undertake this study when I became fascinated by the way in which the thought-world of *Paradise Lost* seemed to accommodate both theologically orthodox elements on the one hand, and idiosyncratic, heterodox elements on the other. I wondered then whether the sharp division between radical and conservative interpretations of *Paradise Lost* had in fact been fostered by the nature of the poem's theology itself. I wondered, in other words, whether this theology was altogether more complex, more variegated and

Lewalski, "Milton and *De Doctrina Christiana*: Evidences of Authorship," *Milton Studies* 36 (1998) 203-28; and Stephen M. Fallon, "Milton's Arminianism and the Authorship of *De Doctrina Christiana*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 41:2 (1999), 103-27. There have been some attempts to mediate the controversy, especially Fiona J. Tweedie, David I. Holmes and Thomas N. Corns, "The Provenance of *De Doctrina Christiana*, Attributed to John Milton: A Statistical Investigation," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 13:2 (1998), 77-87; and the extensive report by the international research group, co-ordinated by Thomas Corns: Gordon Campbell, Thomas N. Corns, John K. Hale, David I. Holmes and Fiona J. Tweedie, "The Provenance of *De Doctrina Christiana*," *Milton Quarterly* 31:3 (1997), 67-117. But these mediating attempts have drawn some criticism from defenders of Miltonic authorship: see especially John P. Rumrich, "Stylometry and the Provenance of *De Doctrina Christiana*," in *Milton and the Terms of Liberty*, ed. Graham Parry and Joad Raymond (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), 125-36.

⁷ Hunter, *Visitation Unimplor'd*, 16.

⁸ Hunter, *Visitation Unimplor'd*, 8.

⁹ Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich, "Introduction: Heretical Milton," in *Milton and Heresy*, 1.

¹⁰ Dobranski and Rumrich, "Introduction: Heretical Milton," 12.

more elusive than either straightforwardly orthodox or straightforwardly heretical readings have tended to suggest.

This study is therefore especially interested in identifying points of both continuity and discontinuity between *Paradise Lost*'s theology and its post-Reformation theological milieu. This study does not simply highlight the most daring and heretical aspects of the poem's theology,¹¹ nor does it play down these aspects in order to highlight the more orthodox features.¹² Both of these approaches suffer from the shared assumption that the essential character of *Paradise Lost*'s theology can be decided in advance, whether from a reading of the *De Doctrina Christiana* or from some other construction of Miltonic thought. Having thus already decided that *Paradise Lost* is essentially orthodox or heterodox, one need only highlight those features of the poem which most clearly illustrate this basic theological character.¹³ In contrast, the assumption controlling the present study is that the theology of *Paradise Lost* should be encountered on its own terms, using the post-Reformation theological milieu (including the *De Doctrina*) as an interpretive aid, but disallowing any commitment to a pre-conceived construction of either a radical or a conservative "Milton." Further, this study assumes that the theology of *Paradise Lost* is interesting for its own sake: it is intrinsically interesting, regardless of how conservative or how radical it might be. This

¹¹ For a notable early example of this radical approach, see Denis Saurat, *Milton, Man and Thinker* (London: J. M. Dent, 1944), 91: Saurat seeks "to study what there is of lasting originality in Milton's thought, and ... to disentangle from theological rubbish the permanent and human interest of that thought."

¹² For a notable early example of this conservative approach, see C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 82: "*Paradise Lost* is ... Catholic in the sense of basing its poetry on conceptions that have been held 'always and everywhere and by all.' This Catholic quality is so predominant that it is the first impression any unbiased reader would receive."

¹³ Thus Stanley E. Fish, *How Milton Works* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 18, rightly notes that some arguments for or against the authorship of the *De Doctrina Christiana* tend to rest "on a conclusion already reached about the kind of person and thinker Milton already is."

does not of course mean that it is unimportant whether or to what extent the poem's theology is in fact orthodox or heterodox. On the contrary, it is precisely the points of continuity and discontinuity with the major traditions of the seventeenth century which reveal most about the character of *Paradise Lost's* theology. Both the continuities and the discontinuities are intrinsically interesting; and both are equally important for a full appreciation of the poem.

In this study I am not therefore simply offering a kind of interpretive *via media* which seeks—by conceding too much to both sides and thereby satisfying neither—to reconcile conservative and radical approaches to Milton's theology. Instead, I wish to uncover the richness and complexity of *Paradise Lost's* theology by analysing the ways in which the poem draws on and appropriates orthodox and heterodox traditions alike. The poem's theology as a whole resists, I argue, simple categorisation as either basically orthodox or basically heretical. The important interpretive question, rather, is that of continuity and discontinuity: to what extent do the various aspects of the poem's theology exhibit continuity or discontinuity with post-Reformation theological discourses?

II. Continuities and Discontinuities

The emphasis in this study on identifying continuities and discontinuities is indebted to broader developments within recent post-Reformation theological scholarship, especially to the very extensive revisionist studies of the American scholar Richard A. Muller, which have focused consistently on the question of theological continuity and

discontinuity in medieval, Reformation and post-Reformation thought.¹⁴ Muller's work, which to date has been curiously neglected in studies of Milton's theology,¹⁵ has amply demonstrated how illuminating the continuity-discontinuity question is, and has illustrated the ways in which this question proves crucial for an understanding of the character of a theological thinker or movement. The approach of Muller and his school,¹⁶ and the large body of their recent scholarship on post-Reformation thought, offer fresh and exciting opportunities to engage with Milton's theological context in a more nuanced and sophisticated way than was possible in the past.

The present study, then, with its grounding in the post-Reformation theological context and its attention to continuities and discontinuities, seeks to allow *Paradise Lost*'s theology to emerge on its own terms, so that its own distinctive contours, emphases and tensions are brought clearly into view. By highlighting the poem's continuities with its theological context, I seek to offer fresh insights into the theological

¹⁴ See especially Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986); idem, *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); idem, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); idem, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); and idem, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003). For an early but still useful summary of Muller's revisionist approach, see Martin I. Klauber, "Continuity and Discontinuity in Post-Reformation Reformed Theology: An Evaluation of the Muller Thesis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33:4 (1990), 467-75.

¹⁵ As far as I can tell, the only exception to this puzzling neglect is Victoria Silver, *Imperfect Sense: The Predicament of Milton's Irony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), who recognises Muller's scholarship but does not engage with it in any detail. For his part, on the other hand, Muller has not been inattentive to Milton studies: see for example his interaction with Milton scholarship and with the *De Doctrina*, in *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:24-25, 97-99, 210-11.

¹⁶ Muller's approach has been taken up and developed in different directions by scholars such as Eef Dekker, Willem van Asselt, Lyle Bierma, Antonie Vos, Carl Trueman and Martin Klauber.

traditions with which Milton has engaged, and into the distinctive ways in which Milton has appropriated these traditions. It is only against the backdrop of such theological continuities that the genuinely innovative features of *Paradise Lost*'s theology can be identified and appreciated.¹⁷ And such original aspects of the poem, I will argue, offer revealing glimpses of some of the poet's most profound theological concerns and commitments.

Because this approach demands a close and detailed reading of *Paradise Lost*, an interaction with the large body of Milton scholarship and post-Reformation scholarship, and an extensive engagement with primary theological sources, the scope of the present study has necessarily been restricted to one central aspect of the poem's theology: its theology of freedom. In the opinion of virtually all Milton scholars, the concept of freedom stands at the very heart of *Paradise Lost*'s thought-world. But although much has been said about the importance of free will in *Paradise Lost*, there remains a need for a new, specifically theological and contextual study of this dimension of the poem.

¹⁷ On this methodological point, see Carl R. Trueman, "Puritan Theology As Historical Event: A Linguistic Approach to the Ecumenical Context," in *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, ed. Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 256, who, discussing Puritan theology, notes that only a deep awareness of "the continuities between Puritanism and the wider intellectual context" can enable us "to see where, if at all, Puritan theology makes a distinctive contribution." In the same way, a lack of attention to the continuities between *Paradise Lost*'s theology and its intellectual milieu has often led readers to misconstrue the poem's points of theological originality. See also the comments of J. Martin Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 2.

III. Dead Ideas

When in 1900 Sir Walter Raleigh famously described *Paradise Lost* as “a monument to dead ideas,”¹⁸ he was at least right to see the great gulf that exists between Milton’s intellectual environment and that of more recent times. Some critics have tried to overcome this gulf by playing down or ignoring the “dead ideas” of *Paradise Lost*, and by focusing instead on those aspects of the poem which seem closest to modern intellectual interests. Thus Denis Saurat, for instance, has attempted to find in Milton’s poetry “a permanent [philosophical] interest, outside the religious and political squabbles of his time”;¹⁹ and, in response to Raleigh, Michael Wilding protests that “Milton the radical, Milton the pacifist—*that* Milton would have something to say to us today.”²⁰ Saurat and Wilding may well be right, of course, to think that such elements of Milton’s thought are of contemporary interest. But the question remains whether such a philosophically or politically interesting Milton can be fully appreciated if the “dead ideas” which inspired his thought are simply set aside.

Even if for no other reason, the fact that *Paradise Lost* can be described as “a monument to dead ideas” makes a theological study of the poem necessary. The description of Milton’s ideas as “dead” need not be taken as a prejudgment of these ideas, but only as an indication of the historical distance that separates Milton’s intellectual milieu from the present. The present study of freedom in *Paradise Lost*

¹⁸ Walter Raleigh, *Milton* (London, 1900), 88.

¹⁹ Saurat, *Milton, Man and Thinker*, xi.

²⁰ Michael Wilding, *Dragons Teeth: Literature in the English Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 249. In a contrasting manner, Roland M. Frye, *God, Man, and Satan: Patterns of Christian Thought and Life in Paradise Lost, Pilgrim’s Progress, and the Great Theologians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), argues that, seen in existentialist terms, the theology of *Paradise Lost* itself is “meaningful to twentieth-century man” (17).

aims not to revive these “dead ideas”—not, that is, in Wilding’s words, to prove that they still “have something to say to us today”—but only to make the thought-world of *Paradise Lost*, and especially the poem’s view of freedom, more intelligible, and thereby to enable a better appreciation of the poem on its own terms. As William Riley Parker has said:

there is one vast gap between Milton’s basic ideas and those predominant in our own world; we shall never understand [Milton] by ignoring the gap and focusing our attention upon his “modern” views of censorship or divorce or education or politics. Milton’s conception of human freedom was bound up inextricably with religion.²¹

Parker is not here suggesting that Milton’s religious ideas are more interesting than his “modern” social and political views. Rather, his point is that an understanding of the former is a prerequisite to a full appreciation of the latter.

Similarly, the present study, with its closely focused theological reading of *Paradise Lost*, seeks only to complement, not to challenge, the various recent political, historical, philosophical and ideological approaches to Milton’s thought, all of which have deepened our ability to read and to understand his poetry. While adopting a theological approach to *Paradise Lost*, I recognise that it is often “impossible to say decisively” that Milton’s poetic language “says only this or that.”²² It is neither necessary nor advisable to attempt systematically to pin the language of *Paradise Lost* down to a single determinant meaning. On the contrary, as perceptive critics like John Rumrich and Victoria Silver have recently argued, *Paradise Lost* embodies poetic indeterminacy to such an extent that the text itself will always resist the imposition of

²¹ William Riley Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 1:vi.

²² J. Hillis Miller, “How Deconstruction Works,” *The New York Times Magazine* 9 (February 1986), 25.

static, determinant interpretive grids.²³ In the words of Diane Kelsey McColley, Milton's poetry "is too open and subtle to become trapped in an ideology and [it] springs away from categorical cages."²⁴ The present study, then, has no intention of constructing another such "cage," but only of offering a contextual, theological interpretation of *Paradise Lost* which can complement, and perhaps also enrich, other readings. Indeed, although the present study assumes that Milton's theology is interesting for its own sake, I hope nevertheless that it will invite further reflection on the social, political and ideological implications of Milton's view of freedom, even though such reflection is necessarily beyond its own scope.

IV. Poetic Theology

In interpreting *Paradise Lost* within the context of post-Reformation theology, and in offering a specifically theological reading of this work, I am of course aware that *Paradise Lost* is a poem and must be read as such. As the Protestant theologian Augustus H. Strong has said, Milton is "a didactic poet" with a definite theological aim.²⁵ Such a statement is no longer controversial; few critics today would agree with Edwin Greenlaw's argument of early last century that *Paradise Lost* is concerned only with "moral allegory" rather than "poetical theology."²⁶ Indeed, it is now widely

²³ See John P. Rumrich, *Milton Unbound: Controversy and Reinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Victoria Silver, *Imperfect Sense*.

²⁴ Diane Kelsey McColley, "'All in All': The Individuality of Creatures in *Paradise Lost*," in *All in All: Unity, Diversity, and the Miltonic Perspective*, ed. Charles W. Durham and Kristin A. Pruitt (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1999), 34. McColley is referring here to poststructuralist readings of *Paradise Lost*, but her caution applies equally to any interpretive approach to the poem.

²⁵ Augustus H. Strong, *The Great Poets and Their Theology* (Philadelphia, 1897), 253-55.

²⁶ Edwin Greenlaw, "A Better Teacher Than Aquinas," *Studies in Philology* 14 (1917), 199.

recognised not only that *Paradise Lost* is a distinctively theological poem, but also that “Milton wrote his ... theology most forcefully in his poetry.”²⁷ This does not mean, however, that Milton’s poetry can be read like “a doctrinal treatise,” using the interpretive categories of theological prose²⁸—a mistake into which even the most learned and judicious theological readings of Milton have sometimes fallen.

In my analysis of *Paradise Lost*’s theology, I therefore seek as far as possible to avoid not only the Scylla of insufficient attention to theological context, but also the Charybdis of insufficient sensitivity to the work as poetry. In keeping with this aim, my usual method throughout this study is to perform close readings of specific passages of *Paradise Lost* in order to elucidate the poem’s theological content, and to indicate the ways in which the poetic language itself contributes to the expression of theological themes. Further, the basic structure of this study is shaped not by the theological concept of freedom systematically considered, but by the narrative structure of *Paradise Lost* itself. Thus I attempt not to impose a set of preconceived theological questions on to the epic, but instead to extract from the whole epic narrative the basic shape and structure of its theological portrayal of freedom.

This study begins, then, with a survey of existing discussions of the theology of freedom in Milton studies (Chapter 1), and with a brief overview of the historical development of the theology of freedom from the fourth century through to the post-Reformation era (Chapter 2), before turning to the portrayal of freedom in *Paradise Lost*. In the first two books of *Paradise Lost*, an anti-Calvinist view of freedom is immediately but subtly asserted by placing parodic, quasi-Calvinist sentiments in the

²⁷ Regina M. Schwartz, “Milton on the Bible,” in *A Companion to Milton*, 37. Milton himself claimed that poetry is a more powerful didactic medium than prose: thus in *Areopagitica* he states that Spenser is “a better teacher” than Thomas Aquinas (*CPW* 2:516).

²⁸ As observed by Philip Dixon, “*Nice and Hot Disputes*”: *The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 24.

mouth of the arch-heretic, Satan (Chapter 3). But in the heavenly colloquy, God corrects the Satanic theology of the first two books by articulating both the universality of predestining grace and the decisive autonomy of human freedom (Chapter 4). Chapter 5 explores the poem's depiction of the contingent freedom of God, and the grounding of creaturely freedom in the deeper reality of this divine freedom. The contingent freedom of creatures comes to light most vividly in *Paradise Lost's* portrayal of the fall of Adam and Eve (Chapter 6). The poem depicts human nature as universally enslaved through the fall, but also as universally liberated through the operation of prevenient grace. The final chapter of this study (Chapter 7) thus highlights the poem's pronounced universalism of grace, and its emphasis on the decisive role of the freed human will in obtaining salvation.

CHAPTER ONE

Scholarship on Milton and Freedom

“**N**o man who knows ought, can be so stupid to deny that all men naturally were borne free.” This was Milton’s characteristically uncompromising judgment in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*.¹ Milton’s lifelong dedication to the cause of human freedom is well documented. According to the early biographer John Toland (1698), Milton “look’d upon true and absolute Freedom to be the greatest Happiness of this Life, whether to Societies or single Persons,” and for that reason he “thought Constraint of any sort to be the utmost Misery.” Toland relates that Milton himself would tell his friends “that he had constantly imploy’d his Strength and Faculties in the defence of Liberty, and in a direct opposition to Slavery.”² If one were to seek for any intellectual conviction or principle that underlies the whole diverse

¹ *CPW* 3:198.

² John Toland, *The Life of John Milton*; in *The Early Lives of Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire (London: Constable, 1932), 194.

scope of Milton's works, both poetry and prose, then Toland's "true and absolute Freedom" would surely be the most likely candidate. As G. A. Wood has said, regardless of the important ways in which Milton's thought changed and developed over time, "[i]t is the love of Liberty that gives consistency and unity to his life and to his teaching."³ And according to Sir Herbert Grierson, Milton's entire corpus "begins and ends in the idea of liberty and its correlative duty"—that is, in freedom and responsibility.⁴ Stephen Fallon notes that Milton's "unshakable conviction of the freedom of the will" was asserted "[f]rom the very beginning" of his literary career,⁵ and, according to Sharon Achinstein, "from his earliest prose polemic to his last poems," Milton's polemical sights were consistently trained on "[c]ompulsion, specifically as it thwarted freedom of the will."⁶ In sum, then, as Susanne Woods observes, "Milton's own lifelong interest in liberty" remains a point of agreement among Milton scholars, with disagreements arising only over the precise nature of his understanding of liberty.⁷ In this chapter I will provide a brief survey of the existing scholarship on Milton's theology of freedom in order to situate my own study within this broader context of Milton scholarship.

³ G. A. Wood, "The Miltonic Ideal," in *Historical Essays by Members of the Owens College, Manchester*, ed. T. F. Tout and James Tait (London, 1902), 361.

⁴ Herbert J. C. Grierson, "Milton," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, 13 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908-26), 8:647.

⁵ Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 97.

⁶ Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 123.

⁷ Susanne Woods, "Choice and Election in *Samson Agonistes*," in *Milton and the Grounds of Contention*, ed. Mark R. Kelley, Michael Lieb and John T. Shawcross (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 178.

I. Recent Approaches to Freedom

Several recent works of Milton criticism have placed pronounced emphasis on the indeterminacy that characterises Milton's poetry. Stanley Fish emphasises the movement and development which the poetry calls forth from its readers,⁸ and Kathleen Swaim describes Milton's "essentially unstable" view of truth, and the "fluidity" which is "always encouraging and rewarding the individual's growth."⁹ In her reader-response interpretation of *Samson Agonistes*, Susanne Woods similarly contrasts the "[s]uperficial freedom" of release from slavery with the "freedom of choice that Samson achieves over the course of the play," and argues that the reader "accompanies Samson" on his internal journey from helplessness to renewed agency.¹⁰ The play thus involves the reader in Samson's developing freedom, and thereby "invites and empowers the reader's own exercise of choice and of freedom."¹¹ From a different perspective, John Rumrich argues that "Milton was a poet of indeterminacy who found ways to incorporate the uncertain and the evolving" into his poetry, and Rumrich thus attributes to Milton the development of "a poetics of *becoming*."¹² Similarly, in her study of irony, Victoria Silver describes the world of *Paradise Lost* as "a religious event" rather than "an entity"; it is "something that happens," the landscapes of which "are not places but pliant and occasionally precipitous fields of

⁸ Stanley E. Fish, *How Milton Works* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁹ Kathleen M. Swaim, "Myself a True Poem: Early Milton and the (Re)Formation of the Subject," *Milton Studies* 38 (2000), 91.

¹⁰ Woods, "Choice and Election in *Samson Agonistes*," 184-85.

¹¹ Woods, "Choice and Election in *Samson Agonistes*," 179.

¹² John P. Rumrich, *Milton Unbound: Controversy and Reinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 24.

meaning and experience.”¹³ In this way, Silver suggests, *Paradise Lost* “enacts the Arminian realm of liberty and election from which deity withholds its active will.”¹⁴

Other critics, however, have argued that Milton does not portray freedom simply as sheer indeterminacy. In virtually all Milton’s works, Mary Norton observes, “an individual’s liberty and choice are not synonymous with license to live independent of the divine order and natural laws.”¹⁵ Norton speaks of “conscience” as the “intrinsic force for structure and order” in Milton’s “chaotic, nonlinear moral system”;¹⁶ and conscience, paradoxically, is both independent and deterministic, in as much as “it is both free and bound to God.”¹⁷ This paradox is also articulated in Kathryn Bevis’s concise statement of Milton’s view of freedom: “Milton’s conception of freedom” involves “a crucial paradox,” namely, that human beings come to true freedom “only by faith in, and obedience to, the Christian God.”¹⁸ This “uniquely Christian” paradox can, according to Bevis, therefore be described as “freedom within obedience”;¹⁹ or, in the words of Philip Drew, Milton “defines freedom as a kind of responsibility or burden.”²⁰ Indeed, according to Albert Labriola and others, the central theme of *Paradise Lost* is not even freedom as such, but obedience.²¹

¹³ Victoria Silver, *Imperfect Sense: The Predicament of Milton’s Irony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 286.

¹⁴ Silver, *Imperfect Sense*, 286.

¹⁵ Mary F. Norton, “The Geometry of Choice: Chaos Theory and *Areopagitica*,” in “*All in All*”: *Unity, Diversity, and the Miltonic Perspective*, ed. Charles W. Durham and Kristin A. Pruitt (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1999), 233.

¹⁶ Norton, “The Geometry of Choice,” 239.

¹⁷ Norton, “The Geometry of Choice,” 240.

¹⁸ Kathryn Bevis, *Milton: A Beginner’s Guide* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003), 54.

¹⁹ Bevis, *Milton*, 54.

²⁰ Philip Drew, *The Meaning of Freedom* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1982), 122.

²¹ Albert C. Labriola, “‘All in All’ and ‘All in One’: Obedience and Disobedience in *Paradise Lost*,” in *All in All*, 39-47. For an important early statement of the centrality of obedience in the poem, see John

Further, several recent studies have sought especially to demonstrate the complementarity between political and theological interpretations of Milton's view of freedom. Christophe Tournu, for example, attempts a detailed integration of the theological and political aspects of freedom in Milton's thought.²² Tournu explores the concept of freedom throughout the body of Milton's prose works, positioning Milton's thought in the tension between Puritanism, with its emphasis on human misery, and humanism, with its emphasis on human grandeur. Exploring Milton's attempt to reconcile this fundamental anthropological tension, Tournu concludes that Milton is "a humanist puritan,"²³ whose confidence rests not in the fallen and misguided majority of human beings, but in the free, regenerate minority.²⁴ Another notable attempt to reconcile Milton's views of political and theological freedom is Steven Jablonski's.²⁵ Drawing on Isaiah Berlin's influential distinction between negative and positive liberty, Jablonski argues that the Arminianism of *Paradise Lost* involves both a (negative) freedom from coercion, and a (positive) freedom to obey rational law. On the basis of this reading of the poem's two forms of freedom, Jablonski seeks to resolve the paradox that, as an Arminian, Milton is "a professed enemy of earthly kings and a proponent of liberty," who in *Paradise Lost* nevertheless represents God as a monarch

S. Diekhoff, *Milton's Paradise Lost: A Commentary on the Argument* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946).

²² Christophe Tournu, "John Milton, Dieu et la Liberté," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 82:1 (2002), 33-59.

²³ Tournu, "John Milton, Dieu et la Liberté," 57. See also idem, *Théologie et Politique dans l'œuvre en Prose de John Milton* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2000), 27.

²⁴ Tournu, "John Milton, Dieu et la Liberté," 57-58.

²⁵ Steven Jablonski, "'Freely We Serve': *Paradise Lost* and the Paradoxes of Political Liberty," in *Arenas of Conflict: Milton and the Unfettered Mind*, ed. Kristin A. Pruitt and Charles W. Durham (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1997), 107-19.

and Satan as an advocate of liberty.²⁶ As such studies indicate, there is no longer any need for readings of Milton to pit theological and political freedoms against one another.²⁷

But while theological freedom can be closely related to political freedom in Milton's prose and poetry, and while Milton's theological account of freedom cannot be fully appreciated without reference to its political dimensions, his theology of freedom is nevertheless not simply reducible to social or political ideas of liberty. Indeed, several scholars have even suggested that Milton's deepest commitment to freedom may be more theological than political in character. William Riley Parker, for instance, argues that central to Milton's prose writings, with their vigorous advocacy of social, political and ecclesiastical reforms, was the belief that "external liberty (freedom from political or ecclesiastical tyranny) was a natural product of inner liberty in a people (virtue achieved through rational choosing and obedience to God)."²⁸ And according to Wayne Cristaudo and Peter Poiana, Milton's deep concern with freedom is theologically grounded: "Milton's love of liberty and hatred of monarchical tyranny flows directly from his spiritual fundamentals," so that it would be "a great mistake to project purely political motives onto Milton."²⁹ Similarly, Ashraf Rushdy suggests that

²⁶ Jablonski, "Freely We Serve," 107. This monarchical paradox is taken up in a new way in Michael Bryson's provocative study, *The Tyranny of Heaven: Milton's Rejection of God as King* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), which argues that the portrayal of God in *Paradise Lost* is itself part of Milton's critique of all—even divine—kings.

²⁷ See also David Loewenstein, *Representing Revolution in Milton and His Contemporaries: Religion, Politics, and Polemics in Radical Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3-6. For an integration of theological and philosophical views of freedom under the broader rubric of "humanism," see Harold Skulsky, *Milton and the Death of Man: Humanism on Trial in Paradise Lost* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000).

²⁸ William Riley Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 1:592-93.

²⁹ Wayne Cristaudo and Peter Poiana, *Great Ideas in the Western Literary Canon* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2003), 133-34.

religious or spiritual liberty was for Milton “the most important possession of a culture,” while political liberty “was always but an effect of that prior spiritual freedom.”³⁰

II. The Contexts of Milton’s Theology

Studies of Milton’s theology have engaged with a rich range of theological contexts. Some scholars have ambitiously attempted to ground Milton’s theology within a more or less homogeneous “Christian” or “Catholic” tradition. Douglas Bush, for instance, has described *Paradise Lost* as “simply a poem of traditional Christianity, Catholic as well as Protestant.”³¹ Miriam Joseph has similarly argued that *Paradise Lost* embodies “theological doctrines in conformity with the Catholic Church,”³² while C. S. Lewis has claimed that the “Catholic” poem³³ presents “the great central tradition” of Christianity.³⁴ Most notably, C. A. Patrides has sought to position Milton’s theology within a synthesis of the entire history of Christian thought.³⁵

In more focused studies, Ron Featheringill has examined Milton’s theology in relation to the classical epic worldview,³⁶ while writers like Golda Werman,³⁷ Jason

³⁰ Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, *The Empty Garden: The Subject of Late Milton* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 76.

³¹ Douglas Bush, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 401-2.

³² Miriam Joseph, “Orthodoxy in *Paradise Lost*,” *Laval théologique et philosophique* 8 (1952), 249.

³³ C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 82.

³⁴ Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, 92. See also E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1943), 20-21.

³⁵ C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966). The principal figures in Patrides’s account of the “Christian tradition” are Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Donne.

³⁶ Ron Featheringill, *The Tension Between Divine Will and Human Free Will in Milton and the Classical Epic Tradition* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990).

³⁷ Golda Werman, *Milton and Midrash* (Washington: Catholic University Press of America, 1995).

Rosenblatt³⁸ and Jeffrey Shoulson³⁹ have explored Milton's thought against the background of Jewish theology. Others have turned to patristic theology for the background to Milton's thought. Peter Fiore has explored the parallels between Miltonic and Augustinian thought,⁴⁰ and Harry Robins has employed the thought of Origen as "a gloss" on Milton's theology.⁴¹ According to Robins, Milton's thought "looked backward" to antiquity, and his theological views "were those of the Christian writers before the Council of Nicea."⁴² William Hunter, J. H. Adamson and Patrides have also attempted to link Milton's theology to pre-Nicene thought,⁴³ and, while contesting their findings, Michael Bauman has demonstrated the close parallels between Milton's thought and the Arianism of the Nicene period.⁴⁴

Comparatively few studies have explored the medieval background to Milton's thought, although those that have include Peter Gregory Angelo's Thomist reading of *Paradise Lost*,⁴⁵ J. Martin Evans's discussion of the medieval interpretation of the fall-story,⁴⁶ Patrides's account of the poem's view of history,⁴⁷ and the collection of essays

³⁸ Jason P. Rosenblatt, *Torah and Law in Paradise Lost* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

³⁹ Jeffrey S. Shoulson, *Milton and the Rabbis: Hebraism, Hellenism, and Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

⁴⁰ Peter A. Fiore, *Milton and Augustine: Patterns of Augustinian Thought in Paradise Lost* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981).

⁴¹ Harry F. Robins, *If This Be Heresy: A Study of Milton and Origen* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 1-2.

⁴² Robins, *If This Be Heresy*, 176-77.

⁴³ William B. Hunter, C. A. Patrides and J. H. Adamson, *Bright Essence: Studies in Milton's Theology* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1971).

⁴⁴ Michael Bauman, *Milton's Arianism* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1987).

⁴⁵ Peter Gregory Angelo, *Fall to Glory: Theological Reflections on Milton's Epics* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987).

⁴⁶ J. Martin Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 168-91.

⁴⁷ C. A. Patrides, *The Grand Design of God: The Literary Form of the Christian View of History* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 28-46, outlines the development of the idea of history in medieval thought; and later in the same study Patrides describes *Paradise Lost* as "the most successful

edited by John Mulryan, which engages with various aspects of the medieval background.⁴⁸ Reformation theology, particularly that of Luther and Calvin, has been related to Milton's thought in the studies of A. G. George,⁴⁹ William Halewood,⁵⁰ Timothy O'Keeffe,⁵¹ and George Musacchio,⁵² and most notably in the theologically sophisticated work of Georgia Christopher⁵³ and in the recent studies of Victoria Silver⁵⁴ and Juliet Cummins.⁵⁵

Studies of Milton's theology have also focused on a diverse range of post-Reformation theological traditions. Paul Sellin has discussed Amyraldian theology in relation to the *De Doctrina Christiana*,⁵⁶ while George Conklin,⁵⁷ Nathaniel Henry,⁵⁸

attempt in poetry to fuse the essential aspects of the Christian view of history into a magnificent whole" (86).

⁴⁸ John Mulryan, ed., *Milton and the Middle Ages* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1982).

⁴⁹ A. G. George, *Milton and the Nature of Man: A Descriptive Study of Paradise Lost in Terms of the Concept of Man as the Image of God* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1974), 42-53. George argues that the poem's view of prelapsarian bliss is "essentially ... Lutheran" (46).

⁵⁰ William H. Halewood, *The Poetry of Grace: Reformation Themes and Structures in English Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 140-75.

⁵¹ Timothy J. O'Keeffe, *Milton and the Pauline Tradition: A Study of Theme and Symbolism* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982).

⁵² George Musacchio, *Milton's Adam and Eve: Fallible Perfection* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

⁵³ Georgia Christopher, *Milton and the Science of the Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

⁵⁴ Silver, *Imperfect Sense*.

⁵⁵ Juliet L. Cummins, "The Metaphysics of Authorship in Paradise Lost" (Ph.D. diss., University of Sydney, 2000).

⁵⁶ Paul R. Sellin, "If Not Milton, Who Did Write the *De Doctrina Christiana*? The Amyraldian Connection," in *Living Texts: Interpreting Milton*, ed. Kristen A. Pruitt and Charles W. Durham (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2000), 237-63.

⁵⁷ George Newton Conklin, *Biblical Criticism and Heresy in Milton* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1949).

⁵⁸ Nathaniel H. Henry, *The True Wayfaring Christian: Studies in Milton's Puritanism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 67-92.

and Michael Lieb⁵⁹ have explored the Socinian tradition as a background to Milton's thought. Maurice Kelley's extensive annotations to the Yale edition of the *De Doctrina Christiana* still constitute one of the most detailed engagements with Reformed orthodoxy in Milton scholarship, and these annotations demonstrate the extent to which the *De Doctrina*, for all its heterodoxies, remains an artifact of Reformed theological discourse. As William Hunter has noted, "there can be no question" that Milton "was intimately familiar with the Calvinist tradition";⁶⁰ and according to Roland Frye, the theology of Reformed orthodoxy "forms the general background for Milton's work."⁶¹ Kelley has engaged closely with the theology of the Reformed orthodox divine Johannes Wollebius,⁶² who, along with William Ames, is known to have been regarded by Milton as one of the "ablest of Divines."⁶³ Following Kelley, John Steadman⁶⁴ and William Hunter⁶⁵ have continued the examination of Wollebius's relation to Milton's

⁵⁹ Michael Lieb, "Milton and the Socinian Heresy," in *Milton and the Grounds of Contention*, ed. Mark R. Kelley, Michael Lieb and John T. Shawcross (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 234-83.

⁶⁰ William B. Hunter, "The Theological Context of Milton's *Christian Doctrine*," in *Achievements of the Left Hand: Essays on the Prose of John Milton*, ed. Michael Lieb and John T. Shawcross (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974), 272. Some early studies even argued that Milton's mature theology was essentially Calvinistic. See especially A. D. Barber, "The Religious Life and Opinions of John Milton: Part I," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 63 (1859), 557-603; idem, "The Religious Life and Opinions of John Milton: Part II," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 64 (1860), 1-42; and Joseph Moody McDill, "Milton and the Pattern of Calvinism" (Ph.D. diss., Vanerbilt University, 1938). Arthur Sewell, *A Study in Milton's Christian Doctrine* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), also argued that Milton's theology remained deeply influenced by Calvinism.

⁶¹ Roland M. Frye, *God, Man, and Satan: Patterns of Christian Thought and Life in Paradise Lost, Pilgrim's Progress, and the Great Theologians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 39.

⁶² Maurice Kelley, "Milton's Debt to Wolleb's *Compendium Theologiae Christianae*," *PMLA* 50 (1935), 156-65.

⁶³ Edward Phillips, *The Life of Mr. John Milton*; in *The Early Lives of Milton*, 61.

⁶⁴ John M. Steadman, "Milton and Wolleb Again," *Harvard Theological Review* 53 (1960), 155-56.

⁶⁵ William B. Hunter, *Visitation Unimplor'd: Milton and the Authorship of De Doctrina Christiana* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 24-30.

thought. John King has explored the anti-Catholic context of *Paradise Lost*,⁶⁶ while the Puritan theological context has been engaged with in different ways by A. S. P. Woodhouse,⁶⁷ Arthur Barker,⁶⁸ Boyd Berry,⁶⁹ Christopher Kendrick⁷⁰ and, most notably, in the influential and idiosyncratic study of Christopher Hill, which attempts to locate Milton's thought within the theologies of the radical Puritan sects.⁷¹

While some studies have misunderstood or caricatured post-Reformation theology,⁷² the engagement with the post-Reformation context has become increasingly sophisticated since the publication of Dennis Danielson's pioneering study, *Milton's Good God* (1982),⁷³ a work which engages extensively with seventeenth-century sources and which highlights the complexity both of the post-Reformation context and of Milton's own theology of freedom. Following and building on Danielson's close

⁶⁶ John N. King, *Milton and Religious Controversy: Satire and Polemic in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁶⁷ A. S. P. Woodhouse, "Milton, Puritanism, and Liberty," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 4 (1935), 483-513.

⁶⁸ Arthur E. Barker, *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1942).

⁶⁹ Boyd M. Berry, *Process of Speech: Puritan Religious Writing and Paradise Lost* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

⁷⁰ Christopher Kendrick, *Milton: A Study in Ideology and Form* (New York: Methuen, 1986).

⁷¹ Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London: Faber, 1977).

⁷² Reformed orthodoxy has especially been subjected to caricature. For example, Denis Saurat, *Milton, Man and Thinker* (London: J. M. Dent, 1944), 103, blithely asserts that "free will has no place in Calvinism"; Andrew Milner, *John Milton and the English Revolution: A Study in the Sociology of Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 99, contrasts "Calvinistic determinism" with the idea of "man as rational agent"; Werman, *Milton and Midrash*, 133, suggests that the Protestant view of grace requires "that God be everything, and that man be nothing"; Michael Hollington and Lawrence Wilkinson, eds., *John Milton: Paradise Lost Books XI-XII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 113, claim that Calvinism involved a "scorn of good works"; and even David Loewenstein, *Milton: Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 28, suggests that Milton's notion "that human beings act freely" is "not at all compatible with seventeenth-century Calvinist theology."

⁷³ Dennis R. Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

attention to the Arminian context, many recent studies have continued to explore the relationship between Arminianism and Milton's thought. A nuanced understanding of Arminian theology is evident in the recent work of Barbara Lewalski,⁷⁴ Thomas Corns⁷⁵ and John Shawcross,⁷⁶ and especially in the theological scholarship of Stephen Fallon.⁷⁷

Further, some studies have explored Milton's theology within modern theological contexts. Michael Lieb, for instance, has employed the theology of Rudolf Otto as an interpretive aid to *Paradise Lost*,⁷⁸ and John Tanner⁷⁹ and Catherine Bates⁸⁰ have related *Paradise Lost* to the thought of the Danish philosopher-theologian Søren Kierkegaard. Anthony Yu has noted parallels between Milton's theology and that of twentieth-century theologians like Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer,⁸¹ and Roland Frye has also interpreted Milton through the lens of modern writers like Barth, Paul

⁷⁴ Barbara K. Lewalski, "Milton and *De Doctrina Christiana*: Evidences of Authorship," *Milton Studies* 36 (1998), 216-21; and idem, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 420-25, 432-33, 474-75.

⁷⁵ Thomas N. Corns, *Regaining Paradise Lost* (London: Longman, 1994), 78-86.

⁷⁶ John T. Shawcross, *John Milton: The Self and the World* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 128-41; and idem, *The Arms of The Family: The Significance of John Milton's Relatives and Associates* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 170-74.

⁷⁷ Stephen M. Fallon, "Milton's Arminianism and the Authorship of *De Doctrina Christiana*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 41:2 (1999), 103-27; and idem, "'Elect Above the Rest': Theology As Self-Representation in Milton," in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 93-116.

⁷⁸ Michael Lieb, *Poetics of the Holy: A Reading of Paradise Lost* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

⁷⁹ John S. Tanner, *Anxiety in Eden: A Kierkegaardian Reading of Paradise Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁸⁰ Catherine Bates, "No Sin But Irony: Kierkegaard and Milton's Satan," *Literature and Theology* 11:1 (1997), 1-26.

⁸¹ Anthony C. Yu, "Life in the Garden: Freedom and the Image of God in *Paradise Lost*," *Journal of Religion* 60:3 (1980), 247-71.

Tillich and Emil Brunner.⁸² In elucidating Milton's theodicy Danielson has drawn on theological thinkers as diverse as Nicholai Berdyaev, John Hick and Alvin Plantinga,⁸³ while, more recently, Joan Bennett has read Milton from the perspective of liberation theology.⁸⁴

The present study of freedom in *Paradise Lost* engages in some way with most of the theological contexts mentioned above. I seek mainly to locate the poem's theology within its post-Reformation context, with particular attention to Reformed orthodoxy and Arminianism. But post-Reformation theology is itself located against the complex background of patristic, medieval and Reformation thought; and for a twenty-first century writer it is also inevitably located retrospectively against the background of modern theological discourse. For this reason, throughout this study I interact with these diverse patristic, medieval, Reformation and modern theological contexts, while maintaining a sustained focus on the post-Reformation theological context. It is therefore necessary, before turning to *Paradise Lost* itself, to offer a brief historical account of the theology of freedom, in order to give a broad indication of the diverse theological contexts within which my reading of the poem is situated.

⁸² Frye, *God, Man, and Satan*.

⁸³ Danielson, *Milton's Good God*.

⁸⁴ Joan S. Bennett, "Asserting Eternal Providence: John Milton Through the Window of Liberation Theology," in *Milton and Heresy*, 219-43.

CHAPTER TWO

The Theology of Freedom: A Short History

The history of the theology of freedom presented in this chapter is necessarily selective. I will include discussions of several of the thinkers and movements which contributed most distinctively and most influentially to the developing shape of the discussion of freedom in Western theology.

My account begins with Augustine, not because the theological discussion of freedom began with him, but because Augustine is the decisive thinker who processed existing theological insights and creatively systematised the Christian ideas of grace and freedom in a way that established the fundamental terms of debate for the ensuing course of Western theology. Turning next to one of Augustine's most influential disciples, Anselm of Canterbury, I discuss his distinctive approach to the harmonisation of divine freedom and human freedom, as well as his account of the nature of freedom, which attempted in part to revise the Augustinian view. Next I discuss the three

dominant late medieval doctors, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. These three thinkers and their respective schools operated with very diverse metaphysical and epistemological assumptions, and some of their most significant points of difference centred on their understanding of divine and human freedom. The treatment of the idea of freedom by these medieval doctors exceeded in philosophical precision and sophistication the theologising both of their predecessors and of their Reformation and post-Reformation successors.

The Reformation thought of Luther placed utmost emphasis on the relationship between freedom and salvation, while the theology of Calvin was influential in its assertion of the sovereign freedom of God in predestination. The academic theology of post-Reformation Reformed orthodoxy combined the reformers' soteriological approach to freedom with a more scholastic and philosophical form of analysis. Following Calvin, this Reformed scholasticism strongly affirmed the freedom of God, especially in relation to the decree of predestination, and it also placed significant restrictions on the scope of fallen human freedom. Reacting against the perceived imbalances of Reformed orthodoxy, Arminianism and Amyraldism sought to redefine the ideas of grace, predestination and freedom in ways that allowed the significance of human choice to emerge more clearly. After discussing these major post-Reformation traditions, I turn finally to the *De Doctrina Christiana*, a treatise which draws on various theological traditions in order to develop its own distinctive account of freedom, an account which places profound emphasis on the decisive role of human freedom.

I. Augustine¹

Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430) developed a fully systematised account of freedom, the influence of which remains unsurpassed in the development of Western theology. Augustine's theology of freedom was worked out in the context of a sustained polemic against the British monk Pelagius, who had taught that human beings possess the free will (*liberum arbitrium*) and ability to keep God's commandments without the need of any special divine aid, and that the human will has no necessary inclination to evil, since Adam's fall has not effected any intrinsic corruption of human nature. Pelagius thus claimed that, while the ability to obey was from God, both the will to obey and the act of obedience were from human nature itself.²

Augustine systematically counters this Pelagian understanding of freedom. On the basis of a literal reading of the Genesis fall-story, he argues that Adam and Eve were created with the natural endowments of reason and free will.³ Their freedom consisted not in the fact that they were "unable to sin" (*non posse peccare*), but in the twofold fact that they were "able to sin" (*posse peccare*) and "able not to sin" (*posse non peccare*).⁴ In addition, God gave Adam and Eve the supernatural gifts of immortality and integrity, which preserved them both from death and from a tendency towards

¹ Part of this account of Augustine's thought has been expanded from the summary of Augustine in my article on "the Fall," forthcoming in *A Milton Encyclopedia*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (New Haven: Yale University Press).

² On Pelagius and the Pelagian controversy, see B. B. Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), 289-400; John Ferguson, *Pelagius* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1956); Gerald Bonner, "Augustine and Pelagianism," *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992), 33-51; and idem, "Augustine and Pelagianism," *Augustinian Studies* 24 (1993), 27-49.

³ Augustine, *De correptione et gratia*, 28; citations are from the Latin text in *PL* 44, and the translation in *NPNF* 5.

⁴ Augustine, *De correptione et gratia*, 29-33.

concupiscence. In this state, the first human beings thus enjoyed holiness and the freedom to choose between good and evil. By obeying God and by eating of the Tree of Life they could progressively attain to a state of incorporeal, heavenly perfection.

The corollary to Augustine's emphasis on the happiness of humanity's original condition is an emphasis on the calamity of the fall and the misery of its consequences. When Adam and Eve used their freedom to eat the forbidden fruit, their supernatural gifts were lost and their natural capacity to make free choices was radically perverted. By this misuse of freedom, the human will became inclined to concupiscence (*concupiscentia*)⁵ and thus enslaved to evil: "it was by the bad use of his free will (*libero arbitrio male utens*) that man destroyed both it and himself."⁶ As a consequence, human nature has forfeited the ability not to sin, and is left only with a miserable inability not to sin: "when man by his own free will sinned, sin was victorious over him and the freedom of his will was lost."⁷ In the fallen state, all movements of the will, all choices, are necessarily sinful. This is not, according to Augustine, because human nature has lost the freedom of spontaneous and unconstrained choice:⁸ this kind of "free

⁵ See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 364-65: "In Augustine's vocabulary concupiscence stands, in a general way, for every inclination making man turn from God to find satisfaction in material things which are intrinsically evanescent"—the most common form of which is sexual desire.

⁶ Augustine, *Enchiridion de fide, spe et charitate*, 30; citations are from the Latin text in *PL* 40, and the translation in *NPNF* 3.

⁷ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 30.

⁸ Augustine, *De spiritu et littera*, 58; citations are from the Latin text in *PL* 44, and the translation in *NPNF* 5.

will” remains as an essential aspect of human nature,⁹ but all true “freedom” (*libertas*)—freedom, that is, to choose the right—is gone.¹⁰

Human nature has therefore subjected itself to a state of volitional slavery.¹¹ Further, Augustine argues that all human beings were present in Adam:¹² “we were all in that one man”¹³ and so have inherited original sin, which includes both the guilt (*reatus*) and the corruption (*corruptio*) of human nature. Thus “from the bad use of [Adam’s] free will (*a liberi arbitrii malo usu*),” all human beings have become enslaved and condemned.¹⁴ With their freedom thus vitiated even from birth, all people remain volitionally powerless to help themselves.

It was on the basis of this austere vision of human corruption and enslavement that Augustine developed his theology of grace and predestination.¹⁵ God has,

⁹ Augustine, *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali contra Pelagium, ad Albinam, Pinianum, et Melaniam*, 1.18; citations are from the Latin text in *PL* 44, and the translation in *NPNF* 5.

¹⁰ Augustine, *In evangelium Ioannis tractatus*, 5.1; citations are from the Latin text in *PL* 35, and the translation in *NPNF* 7. On the crucial distinction between *liberum arbitrium* and *libertas*, Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 365-66, comments: “By this, [Augustine] means, not that our wills are in the grip of any physical or metaphysical determinism, but rather that, our choice remaining free, we spontaneously, as a matter of psychological fact, opt for perverse courses.”

¹¹ J. B. Mozley, *A Treatise on the Augustinian Doctrine of Predestination* (New York, 1878), 125, suggests that the theological idea of the will’s enslavement originates with Augustine.

¹² Augustine was not consistent in his explanations of the presence of humanity in Adam. For the variety of his explanations, see Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine*, 402. On the development of Augustine’s theory of original sin, see Serge Lancel, *St Augustine*, trans. Antonia Nevill (London: SCM, 2002), 339-42.

¹³ Augustine, *De civitate Dei contra paganos*, 13.14; citations are from the Latin text in *PL* 41, and the translation in *NPNF* 2.

¹⁴ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 13.14.

¹⁵ On Augustine’s theology of predestination, see James Wetzel, “Predestination, Pelagianism, and Foreknowledge,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 49-58. See also the comment of G. P. Fisher, *History of Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh, 1896), 191: “From the sinfulness and impotency of all men, Augustine deduced the doctrine of unconditional predestination.” Largely due to Augustine,

Augustine argues, eternally decided to save a fixed number of people from the condemned mass (*massa perditionis*) of humanity, on the basis of his sheer mercy,¹⁶ and without any regard to foreseen faith or merit.¹⁷ These elect individuals receive not only the gift of grace, but also the free gift of faith. Even the faith by which grace is received is thus a gift,¹⁸ for any desire for grace must already be due to the operation of prevenient grace. Far from compelling or vitiating the human will, the “internal, secret, wonderful and ineffable power (*interna et occulta, mirabili ac ineffabili potestate*)” of grace frees the will from its slavery to sin, creating “good dispositions” and thus enabling it spontaneously to choose the good.¹⁹ Grace changes the will’s inclination, and so renders it free to move in the right direction—free to obey.²⁰

This Augustinian understanding of freedom provided the basic framework within which the theology of freedom continued to evolve in medieval Europe.

II. Anselm of Canterbury

Writing in the late eleventh century, Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) took up the theological problem of freedom as defined by Augustine, and developed it creatively, focusing particularly on the relationship between divine freedom and human freedom.

this connection between the doctrine of sin and the doctrine of predestination has been repeated throughout the subsequent history of Christian thought.

¹⁶ Augustine, *De praedestinatione sanctorum ad Prosperum et Hilarium*, 11; citations are from the Latin text in *PL* 44, and the translation in *NPNF* 5.

¹⁷ Augustine, *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, 34-38.

¹⁸ Augustine, *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, 3.

¹⁹ Augustine, *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali*, 1.25.

²⁰ Augustine, *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, 31; citations are from the Latin text in *PL* 44, and the translation in *NPNF* 5. See Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 368: “Man’s free will is most completely itself when it is in most complete subjection to God, for true liberty consists in Christ’s service.”

Using philosophical argumentation, Anselm set out to prove the compatibility of divine foreknowledge, predestination and grace with human freedom.²¹ Positing the harmony between these divine and human realities,²² Anselm searches for “agreements at every level” between these “apparently disparate principles.”²³ According to Anselm, foreknowledge does not entail a necessitation of human choice, since God foreknows the freedom of free choices: “whether you sin or do not sin, it will not be by necessity, because God foreknows that whatever you do will be done without necessity (*sine necessitate*).”²⁴ To strengthen his denial of necessity, Anselm distinguishes between subsequent necessity, in which “a thing that is to occur (*futura*) will occur necessarily,” and antecedent necessity, in which “an event will occur because it must necessarily occur.”²⁵ The former kind of necessity is really nothing more than certainty (e.g. tomorrow’s revolt will certainly occur because it is foreknown); while the latter is a strict and proper necessity (e.g. tomorrow’s sunrise is not merely certain, but intrinsically necessary).²⁶ Although whatever is going to happen in the future will certainly happen in as much as it has been foreknown,²⁷ the divine foreknowledge does not impose any necessity on future events. In fact, God foreknows that some things will occur “by necessity” and that other things will occur “through the free choice of

²¹ This is the main argument of his treatise *De concordia praescientiae et praedestinationis et gratiae dei cum libero arbitrio*; citations are from the Latin text in *Opera omnia*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1938-61), 2:243-88; and the translation in Anselm, *Trinity, Incarnation, and Redemption: Theological Treatises*, ed. and trans. J. Hopkins and H. Richardson (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 152-99. For a summary of the treatise’s argument, see G. R. Evans, *Anselm* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 89-95.

²² See Anselm, *De concordia*, 1.1; 1.7; 2.1; 3.1.

²³ G. R. Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 93.

²⁴ Anselm, *De concordia*, 1.1.

²⁵ Anselm, *De concordia*, 1.3.

²⁶ The examples are from Anselm, *De concordia*, 1.3.

²⁷ Anselm, *De concordia*, 1.2.

rational creatures.”²⁸ He foreknows things, in other words, according to their own proper natures—necessary events are foreknown as necessary, and free events as free—and foreknowledge itself does not in any way influence the proper nature of an event.²⁹

Anselm’s demonstration of the harmony between predestination and freedom follows the same lines. There is “no contradiction in saying that some things are predestined to occur through free choice,”³⁰ for God predestines a free agent precisely by “leaving the will to its own power.”³¹ Thus the one who acts does so by “will alone” (*sola voluntate*) and not by any necessity.³²

In discussing the compatibility of divine grace and human freedom, Anselm argues that the frequently posited dichotomy between salvation by “grace alone” (*sola gratia*) and by “free choice alone” (*solum liberum arbitrium*) is misleading.³³ Far from being incompatible, grace and freedom must “work together for the justification and salvation of man.”³⁴ Nevertheless, Anselm does not propose a symmetrical synergism, in which part of salvation is attributed to grace and part to human choice. Rather, he grounds the human power of choice itself in divine grace, so that salvation is achieved primarily through grace alone, and secondarily through the human will alone. All those who are born in original sin are “not able” to accept the saving word of God “unless grace directs their wills”; but the individuals who consequently reject the word of God are still rightly to be blamed for their rejection, since their lack of ability is itself the

²⁸ Anselm, *De concordia*, 1.3.

²⁹ See G. R. Evans, *Anselm and a New Generation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 129-30.

³⁰ Anselm, *De concordia*, 2.3.

³¹ Anselm, *De concordia*, 2.3.

³² Anselm, *De concordia*, 2.3.

³³ Anselm, *De concordia*, 3.5.

³⁴ Anselm, *De concordia*, 3.5.

result of their own free choice.³⁵ On the other hand, “when God gives the ability to will” to some people, this ability is to be attributed entirely to grace, even though these people in fact attain salvation through the exercise of their own wills.³⁶

In all this Anselm was a creative but faithful disciple of Augustine. In his technical account of the nature of human freedom, however, Anselm takes issue with the Augustinian definition of freedom as “the ability to sin or not to sin (*potentiam peccandi et non peccandi*).”³⁷ For Anselm, freedom must be defined as the power to choose the good, the ability to preserve a “rectitude of will” (*rectitudinem voluntatis*),³⁸ since “nothing is more free than a right will.”³⁹ The freedom of choice lies in the will’s “ability *not* to sin and *not* to serve sin.”⁴⁰ Freedom is, in other words, “indistinguishable from obedience.”⁴¹ For this reason, it is clear that the will which is not able to sin—the will of God himself, for instance—is “more free than the will which can desert its rectitude.”⁴² In the beginning, Anselm argues, Adam possessed the ability to enslave himself and to become unfree; paradoxically, Adam’s choice to relinquish his freedom was itself a free choice, even though his freedom did not consist in the ability to sin.⁴³ Adam simply possessed the ability to preserve rectitude of will, but was also able to turn away from this rectitude. In his primal act of transgression, Adam was therefore

³⁵ Anselm, *De concordia*, 3.7.

³⁶ Anselm, *De concordia*, 3.5.

³⁷ Anselm, *De libertate arbitrii*, 1; citations are from Anselm, *Opera omnia*, 1:201-26; and the translation in Anselm, *Truth, Freedom, and Evil: Three Philosophical Dialogues*, ed. and trans. J. Hopkins and H. Richardson (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 121-44.

³⁸ Anselm, *De libertate arbitrii*, 3.

³⁹ Anselm, *De libertate arbitrii*, 9.

⁴⁰ Anselm, *De libertate arbitrii*, 2; emphases added.

⁴¹ R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer: A Study in Monastic Life and Thought, 1059-c.1130* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 105.

⁴² Anselm, *De libertate arbitrii*, 1.

⁴³ Anselm, *De libertate arbitrii*, 2.

“like a man who freely chooses to become another’s slave; he made his choice freely, but in abdicating his freedom he did not act like a free man.”⁴⁴ Through this original abdication of freedom, all human beings have become “the servants of sin.”⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Anselm argues, the fall into servitude has not brought about a loss of free will. Since freedom consists of an *ability* to preserve rectitude, the fallen will—even the will of Satan—remains free, for it always retains this inherent ability, even when it has become a mere formal possibility which can no longer be actualised.⁴⁶ Even “in the absence of rectitude,” then, nothing prevents a human being from possessing “the *ability* to preserve rectitude”⁴⁷—and freedom is nothing other than this ability.

This subtle definition of freedom allows Anselm, more than Augustine, to depict freedom as an unqualifiedly good gift from God, a gift which was not already tainted from the outset by the dark possibility of the fall. Further, Anselm’s account of freedom clarifies the sense in which God is more free than all other beings. God alone possesses an uncreated, unoriginated (*a se*) freedom,⁴⁸ an immutable and eternal freedom to preserve his own perfect rectitude. At the same time, Anselm preserves the most important feature of Augustine’s view: fallen human beings who have become enslaved to sin can never autonomously regain their rectitude, for they can no longer exercise their true freedom; they can thus be turned away from their slavery “only by another.”⁴⁹ The rectitude that is necessary for salvation can be received as a free gift “only by the grace of God,” although it must subsequently be preserved “by free

⁴⁴ Armand A. Maurer, *Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1962), 57.

⁴⁵ Anselm, *De libertate arbitrii*, 2.

⁴⁶ Anselm, *De libertate arbitrii*, 3-4; 10-12.

⁴⁷ Anselm, *De libertate arbitrii*, 4; emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Anselm, *De libertate arbitrii*, 14.

⁴⁹ Anselm, *De libertate arbitrii*, 11.

will.”⁵⁰ In this way, “grace works harmoniously with free choice for the salvation of man.”⁵¹

III. Thomas Aquinas

The thirteenth-century Dominican Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-74) was the greatest of the late medieval doctors, and like Anselm he was above all a disciple of Augustinian theology. Partly through his creative use of the conceptual forms of Aristotelian thought, Thomas was able to explore the psychological aspects of freedom in a more sophisticated way than his predecessors had done, and also to develop a highly refined synthesis between divine freedom and human freedom.⁵²

Following the intellectualism of Aristotle,⁵³ Thomas teaches that the will follows the dictates of reason, and that reason is of the very essence of freedom.⁵⁴ This means that freedom cannot be defined as a mere spontaneous determination of the will,⁵⁵ or as the mere absence of coercion.⁵⁶ Freedom lies not in the will as such, but in

⁵⁰ Anselm, *De concordia*, 3.3.

⁵¹ Anselm, *De concordia*, 3.3; see Evans, *Anselm*, 92.

⁵² For a detailed study of Thomas’s view of freedom, see Bernard Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. J. P. Burns (New York: Herder, 1971).

⁵³ Aristotle, however, never spoke explicitly of free will; his concern was with the socio-political dimensions of freedom. It was only in early Christian theology that the freedom of the individual human agent became an important problem in its own right: see Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. A. H. C. Downes (London: Sheed & Ward, 1950), 306-8.

⁵⁴ On Thomas’s view of free will, see, among many other studies, Robert P. Sullivan, “Natural Necessitation of the Human Will,” *The Thomist* 14 (1951), 351-99, 490-528; and James Petrik, “Freedom as Self-Determination in the *Summa Theologiae*,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 27:1 (1989), 87-100.

⁵⁵ Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.83.1; citations are from the Latin text in *Summa Theologiae*, 60 vols. (London: Blackfriars, 1964-76); and the translation in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947-48).

the intellect's clear perception of the good, and in its judgment between different objects: "wherever there is intellect (*intellectus*), there is free will (*liberum arbitrium*)."⁵⁷ According to Thomas, the intellect necessarily tends towards the good; and to know the good is necessarily to choose it. The good, "as soon as known, must also be willed."⁵⁸ Although it is therefore an exaggeration to describe the Thomist will merely as "a blind power,"⁵⁹ it is true that the Thomist will can only follow the judgment of the intellect. Thomas's argument is that "will is definable in terms of tending to ... the good as perceived," and, further, that a perception of the good always entails a volitional attraction to the good.⁶⁰ Thomas even affirms that every inclination of the will is to some good, although the primacy of the intellect means that an object of volition need not be "good in very truth," but only that it be "apprehended as good" by the intellect (*apprehendatur in ratione boni*).⁶¹ Thus the unfreedom of fallen humanity, for instance, lies not so much in the will itself, but in the intellect. Through sin, the intellect has become darkened by ignorance and clouded by passions, so that its judgment of the good is often mistaken. Even in such cases of mistaken judgment, however, the will acts according to its nature, choosing what the intellect deems to be good.

⁵⁶ For Thomas, the absence of coercion from willing is simply self-evident, since it is the nature of the will to choose voluntarily without coercion. See Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.82.1: "necessity of coercion is altogether repugnant to the will," since "it is impossible for a thing to be [both] absolutely coerced ... and voluntary"; that is to say, a coerced will would no longer be a will.

⁵⁷ Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.59.3.

⁵⁸ Étienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. G. A. Elrington (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 120.

⁵⁹ This term is suggested by John A. Driscoll, "On Human Acts," an essay printed in the English edition of the *Summa Theologica*, 3:3204.

⁶⁰ Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 142.

⁶¹ Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae.8.1.

According to Thomas, the will of God, like the human will, necessarily knows and therefore chooses the good. God, however, chooses his own goodness, and the perfection of this goodness means that God has no need to will anything outside himself.⁶² Nevertheless, precisely because of the divine goodness, there is also in God “an infinitely powerful tendency to diffuse and communicate Himself outside Himself,”⁶³ although this tendency does not necessitate God’s creative act. God may choose between opposite possible ways of actualising his goodness, and he can therefore choose to create or not to create any given possibility, just as “we ourselves ... can will to sit down, and not will to sit down.”⁶⁴ Nor, on the other hand, can creation be necessitated by anything outside God, since God is himself the cause of everything else,⁶⁵ and since all other things are willed ultimately for the end of the divine goodness.⁶⁶ Creation can therefore be ascribed only to a free and contingent choice of God, which as such is “nothing but a free gift and nothing even remotely resembling a necessity.”⁶⁷ In short, then, “if we were to ask for God’s reason in creating, all that could be said is that it lies in his goodness.”⁶⁸ The existence of anything at all, and more concretely the existence of this particular world, is thus in Thomas’s theology “an instance of what we are talking about when we say that God is loving.”⁶⁹

According to Thomas, God’s creation of all that exists also implies his providential control over everything outside himself.⁷⁰ God’s providence is his causal

⁶² Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.19.2.

⁶³ Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 141.

⁶⁴ Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.19.10.

⁶⁵ Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 145-46.

⁶⁶ Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.19.2.

⁶⁷ Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 142.

⁶⁸ Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 149.

⁶⁹ Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 149.

⁷⁰ Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.22.1.

ordering of each thing towards its given end.⁷¹ The natural necessity by which the will wills happiness as its final end is thus grounded in God as the first cause (*prima causa*) of the will's nature, and as the one who providentially orders the will towards its proper end. The divine causality has effected the initial movement of will, so that in this fundamental respect the will is determined and not autonomous.⁷² Nevertheless, this causation does not compromise the freedom of the human will or imply that God is the efficient cause of all creaturely acts. Rather, by "the abundance of his goodness" (*abundantiam suae bonitatis*) he allows "the dignity of causality" to be imparted "even to creatures."⁷³ There is therefore a synthesis between the divine movement of the human will and the freedom of that will, for God moves the will only according to its own proper nature, which consists in an indeterminate freedom of choice.⁷⁴ "The divine will extends not only to the doing of something by the thing which he moves, but also to its being done in a way that is fitting to the nature (*congruit naturae*) of that thing."⁷⁵ And "just as by moving natural causes [God] does not prevent their acts being natural, so by moving voluntary causes he does not deprive their actions of being voluntary: but rather is he the cause of this very thing in them."⁷⁶ In this way God wills that the human will should function *as* a will—as an indeterminate, contingent potency by which the soul directs itself freely towards the good.⁷⁷ More radically and more effectively than

⁷¹ Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.22.2.

⁷² Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae.9.6.

⁷³ Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.22.3.

⁷⁴ Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae.10.4; see Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 300.

⁷⁵ Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae.10.4.

⁷⁶ Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.83.1.

⁷⁷ See the remark of Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 175: "In [Thomas's] view we are not free *in spite of* God, but *because of* God.... In other words, human freedom is compatible with providence because only by virtue of providence is there such a thing as human freedom."

his predecessors, Thomas thus synthesised the dual realities of divine will and human will, grounding human freedom in the primal free will of God.

IV. John Duns Scotus

Seeking to provide an alternative to Thomist theology, John Duns Scotus (1265/6-1308) developed an anti-Aristotelian theology of freedom grounded in the idea of God's sheer freedom, and centred on a concept of radical contingency.⁷⁸

Scotus's highest concern was the freedom of God, and he affirmed as a consequence the contingent freedom of all creaturely being. By contingency, Scotus means "anything the opposite of which might have occurred."⁷⁹ According to Scotus, creaturely freedom is grounded in the contingency of the divine creative act. Because God might have acted differently, all his actual works are contingent,⁸⁰ and there is no intrinsic reason why created things should be as they are.⁸¹ The nature of creatures thus depends not on any necessity, but on the gracious choice of God—that is, on the will

⁷⁸ Josef Pieper, *Scholasticism: Personalities and Problems of Medieval Philosophy*, trans. R. Winston and C. Winston (London: Faber, 1960), 138-39, describes "freedom" as the single "battle-cry of Duns Scotus," in opposition to Aristotelian necessitarianism.

⁷⁹ By contingency, Scotus simply means "something whose opposite could have occurred at the time this actually did": cited in James F. Ross and Todd Bates, "Duns Scotus on Natural Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, ed. Thomas Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 221.

⁸⁰ See Pieper, *Scholasticism*, 140.

⁸¹ See Efreem Bettoni, *Duns Scotus: The Basic Principles of His Philosophy*, trans. Bernardino M. Bonansea (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 153: "In showing how created beings proceed from God, Duns Scotus' main preoccupation is to emphasise both God's freedom and the radical contingency of things."

with which God freely loves and chooses the existence of the creature.⁸² Further, Scotus maintains both the divine causation and the volitional contingency of human freedom. Since the human will is a creature, it is causally related to its creator; but God has a causal relationship only to the faculty of the human will as such, not to any specific act of that will. Thus “while God causes any given human will, God does not cause the willing of that will.”⁸³ The only efficient cause of an act of human will is therefore the will itself.

Opposing Thomas’s Aristotelian view of the primacy of the intellect, Scotus affirmed a thoroughgoing voluntarism, maintaining the primacy of the will both in human nature and in the nature of God.⁸⁴ At least in this respect, Scotus was a closer follower of Augustine than Thomas had been. Whereas for Thomas the will is determined by the intellect’s perception of the good, Scotus claims that perception of the good is a condition, but not a cause, of choice. The will is entirely self-caused: although the act of the intellect precedes the act of willing, it is not the intellect but only the will that determines its own willing. For Scotus, then, “the principal efficient cause of the volitional act is the will itself, while the act of the intellect is only a necessary condition ... or, at most, a partial cause of it.”⁸⁵ The will is always free from any external determination, so that freedom is “wholly centred in the radical indetermination of the will,

⁸² See Bettoni, *Duns Scotus*, 158-59; and Scotus, *Ordinatio*, 4.46.1; in *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, ed. and trans. Allan B. Wolter (Washington: Catholic University Press of America, 1986).

⁸³ Calvin G. Normore, “Duns Scotus’s Modal Theory,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, 144.

⁸⁴ In this paragraph I have closely followed the discussion of Bettoni, *Duns Scotus*, 81-86. On the primacy of the will in Scotus’s thought, see also Bernardino M. Bonansea, “Duns Scotus’ Voluntarism,” in *John Duns Scotus, 1265-1965*, ed. John K. Ryan and Bernardino M. Bonansea (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1965), 83-121.

⁸⁵ Bettoni, *Duns Scotus*, 83.

whose unforeseeable decisions spring from within.”⁸⁶ According to Scotus freedom therefore consists not in the power for rectitude as Anselm had argued, but in the “self-determining power for opposites.”⁸⁷ The will is free in so far as it can choose between alternative possibilities.

Analysing the will of God, Scotus emphasises three main features of freedom: neutrality, contingency and spontaneity.⁸⁸ First, the power to choose between alternative possibilities (*potestas ad opposita*) is neutral to the possibilities, so that nothing in the will itself determines its choice. Second, at the moment of choice the will remains able to choose the opposite, so that the opposite of any given choice remains possible and every actual choice remains contingent. It is always possible for the divine will “to will the opposite of the thing willed”;⁸⁹ its choice is never determined by the object of choice.⁹⁰ Third, a choice arises only from the ability to choose and is not caused by anything outside the will (including the intellect), so that all choices are purely spontaneous.

Scotus’s twin emphases on divine freedom and the primacy of the will form the basis of his ethical thought. The will of God alone “is the rule and ground (*regula et origo*) of justice,”⁹¹ and obedience to God is right not by virtue of anything intrinsic in

⁸⁶ Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, 310.

⁸⁷ Marilyn McCord Adams, “Ockham on Will, Nature, and Morality,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. Paul Vincent Spade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 252-54.

⁸⁸ Here I closely follow the summary of the three “focal features” of Scotus’s view of freedom in James F. Ross and Todd Bates, “Duns Scotus on Natural Theology,” 220-22.

⁸⁹ Bettoni, *Duns Scotus*, 158.

⁹⁰ See Scotus, *Ordinatio*, 1.39.1; in Richard N. Bosley and Martin Tweedale, eds., *Basic Issues in Medieval Philosophy: Selected Readings Presenting the Interactive Discourses Among the Major Figures* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1997).

⁹¹ Scotus, *Opera omnia*, ed. Luke Wadding, 26 vols. (Paris, 1891-95), 24:205.

certain acts, but purely by virtue of the divine command.⁹² Similarly, Scotus's theology of predestination⁹³ is grounded in his voluntaristic understanding of divine freedom.⁹⁴ He argues not only that the divine decree is contingent, but also that God's freedom to act in the present is not circumscribed by any decree in the eternal past, since predestination is not an act of the past but a present act "in the *now* of eternity,"⁹⁵ and therefore an act which is always free. Scotus also brings his voluntarism to bear on the traditional problem of the divine foreknowledge of future contingents. He admits that foreknowledge, as an act of the divine intellect, entails the certainty of foreseen events. But this certainty is not causally related to the future, for only the divine will, not the divine intellect, causes things to be.⁹⁶ Thus the future remains contingent in spite of God's foreknowledge.

Scotus's highly influential reformulation of the medieval problem of the relationship between faith (*fides*) and reason (*ratio*) similarly rests on his understanding of the freedom of God. While Anselm had sought rationally to prove the mysteries of faith, for Scotus the freedom of God means that things need not be as they are, and that they might have been and might still be other than they are. Thus it follows that human reason cannot search out the mysteries of divine freedom—these mysteries can only be

⁹² Scotus's voluntaristic basis of ethics has, however, often been misunderstood to mean that the basis of ethics is purely arbitrary. For a careful correction of this misunderstanding, see Bettoni, *Duns Scotus*, 160-82.

⁹³ For an overview of the fourteenth-century discussion of predestination, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971-89), 4:28-36.

⁹⁴ Scotus, *Opera omnia*, 10:699, claims that differences of opinion regarding predestination are permissible as long as the doctrine of predestination maintains the freedom of God.

⁹⁵ Scotus, *Opera omnia*, 10:680-81.

⁹⁶ Scotus, *Opera omnia*, 26:200. See Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 4:29-30.

disclosed by revelation and accepted by faith.⁹⁷ At this point, Scotus's profound emphasis on freedom undermined the very basis of theological necessitarianism and rationalism alike. This aspect of his thought would later be developed even more radically by William of Ockham.

V. William of Ockham

With his wholesale repudiation of metaphysics, the fourteenth-century theologian William of Ockham (c.1285-c.1349) departed sharply from both the Platonic realism of Duns Scotus and the Aristotelian realism of Thomas Aquinas,⁹⁸ offering instead one of the most creative accounts of freedom in the history of Christian thought.

Ockham asserted the primacy of the will more radically than Scotus had done, even affirming the will's freedom to choose against reason. According to Ockham, the perceptions of the intellect are determined by their object, so that there is no freedom in intellection as such. According to this theory of knowledge, to affirm with Thomas that the will is governed by the intellect would be to eliminate freedom altogether.⁹⁹ For Ockham, freedom of will is the will's power to choose for or against the dictates of the intellect.¹⁰⁰ Freedom thus consists in a neutral and indifferent (*indifferens*) potency of the will to act or not act under any given set of circumstances. Thus while Thomas had

⁹⁷ See Pieper, *Scholasticism*, 140-43.

⁹⁸ For Ockham's repudiation of realism, see for instance Ockham, *Scriptum in librum primum sententiarum ordinatio*, ed. Girard J. Itzkorn (St Bonaventure: St Bonaventure University, 1979), 1.2.6.

⁹⁹ See Eleonore Stump, "The Mechanisms of Cognition: Ockham on Mediating Species," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, 168-203.

¹⁰⁰ Since Ockham's view of freedom is so commonly criticised for threatening ethical responsibility, it is ironic that he denies the primacy of reason precisely on ethical grounds: if a choice is determined by the dictates of reason, then the will is passive and, consequently, not ethically responsible. See Adams, "Ockham on Will, Nature, and Morality," 254-55.

claimed that the will is necessarily inclined towards the goal of happiness, according to Ockham the will is formally indifferent even in this respect. It remains “free to will or not to will happiness, the last end.”¹⁰¹ Ockham does not deny that the will is subject to certain dispositions and habits;¹⁰² the will is strongly inclined, for instance, not to will an object that will result in pain or death. Nevertheless, by its very nature the will remains free in face of all such inclinations. It always retains the power to choose against even the strongest habit.¹⁰³

For Ockham, the idea of the will’s freedom from subjection to reason leads to the doctrine of the will’s “liberty of indifference” (*libertas indifferentiae*).¹⁰⁴ Deeply influenced by Scotus’s view of self-determining contingent freedom, Ockham affirms that, in spite of the judgment of reason and the influence of various habits and inclinations, the will by its own intrinsic liberty and without any determination can choose either of two contrary possibilities.¹⁰⁵ He defines freedom as “the power by which I can indifferently and contingently posit diverse things, in such a way that I am both able to cause and able not to cause the same effect.”¹⁰⁶ The ability to choose is thus intrinsically neutral and indifferent with respect to the object of choice;¹⁰⁷ in any choice, the

¹⁰¹ Frederick C. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 9 vols. (Westminster: Newman Press, 1946-74), 3:102.

¹⁰² On Ockham’s view of habits and inclinations, see Gordon Leff, *William of Ockham: The Metamorphosis of Scholastic Discourse* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), 553-60.

¹⁰³ Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, 3:102-3.

¹⁰⁴ See for instance Ockham, *Scriptum in librum primum sententiarum ordinatio*, 1.1.6.

¹⁰⁵ William of Ockham, *Quaestiones in librum quartum sententiarum*, ed. R. Wood and G. Gál (St Bonaventure: St Bonaventure University, 1984), 4.16.

¹⁰⁶ Ockham, *Quodlibeta septem*, 1.16; from the text in *Quodlibetal Questions*, trans. A. J. Freddoso and F. E. Kelley, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

¹⁰⁷ See Adams, “Ockham on Will, Nature, and Morality,” 255-56.

will possesses the “capacity for ... the opposite.”¹⁰⁸ In contrast to both Platonic and Aristotelian theories of volition, Ockham insists that even the supreme good (*summum bonum*), when presented to the will by the intellect, may be rejected by a free act of will. On the other hand, Ockham also repudiates the Thomist notion that the will chooses an evil object only because reason mistakenly discerns some good in the object. Ethical responsibility, according to Ockham, depends on the fact that evil is willed *as* evil, not merely under the guise of good.¹⁰⁹

Scotus’s view of the freedom of God becomes in Ockham’s thought a fundamental controlling principle. Criticising Scotus for placing too much emphasis on reason and too little emphasis on God’s freedom and absolute power (*potentia absoluta*), Ockham argues that divine freedom is to be understood essentially “as unlimited freedom in the exercise of power.”¹¹⁰ Thus in response to the scholastic question whether God could have redeemed the human race by any means apart from the incarnation, Ockham insists, in contrast to Anselm, that God could just as properly have chosen to redeem humanity by becoming a stone, a tree or an ass.¹¹¹

Emphasising further the divine freedom, Ockham maintains that, by virtue of the ontological dependence of human beings on their creator, the human will is obligated to obey the moral dictates of the divine will. While Thomas had regarded morality as intrinsic to human acts and had viewed the divine commands as expressions of the divine nature and of natural order, Ockham, like Scotus, grounds morality solely in the divine will. In this view, an act is evil only because it is forbidden by God, not

¹⁰⁸ William of Ockham, *Predestination, God’s Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents*, ed. and trans. Marilyn McCord Adams and Norman Kretzmann (New York: Appleton, 1969), 86.

¹⁰⁹ See Adams, “Ockham on Will, Nature, and Morality,” 257-62.

¹¹⁰ Pieper, *Scholasticism*, 148. See also the remark of Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, 3:95, that Ockham’s thought is “pervaded” by the concept of “the divine omnipotence and liberty.”

¹¹¹ See Pieper, *Scholasticism*, 148.

because of anything intrinsic in the act or in the divine nature. In Ockham's thought, the freedom of God therefore stands even above good and evil. Although God has in fact forbidden acts such as adultery, theft and hatred of God, these same acts would be meritorious if God were to command rather than forbid them¹¹²—and the freedom of God means that God could in fact do this without contradicting his own nature. Thus every particular divine command is morally contingent. The only moral necessity is the obligation of the human will to obey the absolute authority of the divine will.¹¹³

Ockham's thoroughgoing emphasis on the freedom of God led, in the nominalist tradition that followed him, to the concept of "an unknowable and absolutely free God,"¹¹⁴ a rationally unpredictable deity who could no longer be submitted to theological and philosophical analysis. The influence of the Ockhamist theology of freedom was thus to a significant extent responsible for the collapse of the medieval synthesis.¹¹⁵

VI. Martin Luther

In the early sixteenth century, under the influence of Augustine, the German theologian Martin Luther (1483-1546) opposed the theological trends of the Ockhamist *via moderna*¹¹⁶ and radically reformulated the ideas of human freedom and divine grace. In

¹¹² Ockham, *Quaestiones in librum quartum sententiarum*, 2.19; see Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, 3:104-5.

¹¹³ See Leff, *William of Ockham*, 480.

¹¹⁴ David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (London: Longman, 1962), 329.

¹¹⁵ On the influence of Ockham's thought, see Gordon Leff, *The Dissolution of the Medieval Outlook: An Essay on Intellectual and Spiritual Change in the Fourteenth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

¹¹⁶ Luther denounced Ockhamist scholasticism, but he continued nevertheless to be influenced by his Ockhamist background. On this complex aspect of Luther's thought, see B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and*

contrast to medieval thinkers' speculative, psychological and metaphysical approaches to freedom, Luther's approach to theology of freedom was pastorally and soteriologically oriented.¹¹⁷ The human will interested Luther only in so far as it related to God, grace and salvation—that is, it interested him to the extent that it shed light on what he regarded as the central and all-embracing doctrine of justification (*iustificatio*).¹¹⁸

Luther's view of the human will is most fully developed in his *De servo arbitrio* (1525),¹¹⁹ written in polemic against the *De libero arbitrio* (1524) of Erasmus of Rotterdam.¹²⁰ Luther readily acknowledges that free will is “the most excellent thing in men”;¹²¹ but the universal corruption of sin means that even in the best people free will “neither possesses nor is capable of anything, and does not even know what is righteous

Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 43-56. For a general discussion of the medieval background to Luther's thought, see Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 7-92.

¹¹⁷ See Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, ed. A. B. Bruce, 7 vols. (London, 1896-99), 7:203, who notes that Luther's formulations of predestination and freedom are rooted in “the fundamental fact of Christian experience,” and that in these formulations Luther “clearly and distinctly discarded metaphysic and psychology as the basis on which Christian knowledge is to be built up.”

¹¹⁸ In this connection, the advice of Einar Billing, *Our Calling*, trans. Conrad Bergendoff (Rock Island: Augustana, 1950), 7, is pertinent: “never believe that you have a correct understanding of a thought of Luther until you have succeeded in reducing it to a simple corollary of the forgiveness of sins,” or, in other words, of justification.

¹¹⁹ Citations are from the translation in Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (St Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1958-86), vol. 33; and the Latin text in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 66 vols. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1883-1987), 18:600-787. I will provide references only to the English edition, since this text includes references to the Weimar edition.

¹²⁰ A translation of the work is in Desiderius Erasmus, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 86 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974-93), vol. 76. For a summary of Erasmus's view of freedom, see Giulio D'Onofrio, ed., *History of Theology*, vol. 3, trans. M. J. O'Connell (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 359-62.

¹²¹ Luther, *Works*, 33:249.

in the sight of God.”¹²² Because of Adam’s fall, the human will has been left “with an inability to do anything except sin and be damned.”¹²³ Human nature has become “misdirected”—inclined away from God and towards evil—so that the will cannot “do” or even “attempt” what is good.¹²⁴ Even those who obey God’s law outwardly do not keep it inwardly, so that all the most “splendid, holy, and exalted” of human works “are nothing else than damnable.”¹²⁵ In short, the human will is “not free, nor is it under its own control”;¹²⁶ it is “nothing but a slave of sin, death, and Satan, not doing and not able to do . . . anything but evil.”¹²⁷ Luther sums all this up in the statement that “free will is nothing.”¹²⁸

This severe view of the human will’s unfreedom¹²⁹ may appear to approach a metaphysical and psychological determinism, in which the will’s power of choice is simply negated;¹³⁰ but in asserting the enslavement of the will (*servo arbitrio*), Luther

¹²² Luther, *Works*, 33:249. On Luther’s view of the enslaved will, see Carl R. Trueman, *Luther’s Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers, 1525-1556* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 67-72.

¹²³ Luther, *Works*, 33:272.

¹²⁴ Luther, *Works*, 33:255.

¹²⁵ Luther, *Works*, 33:260.

¹²⁶ Luther, *Works*, 33:238.

¹²⁷ Luther, *Works*, 33:275.

¹²⁸ Luther, *Works*, 33:109.

¹²⁹ In this summary, I cannot give an account of Luther’s corresponding theology of Christian liberty, which was, paradoxically, tied inseparably to his understanding of the enslaved will. On this aspect of Luther’s thought, see Eberhard Jüngel, *The Freedom of a Christian: Luther’s Significance For Contemporary Theology*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988). On the paradoxical relationship between enslavement and Christian liberty in Luther’s thought, see Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 211: “no other theologian—we may go even further and say no other thinker—has spoken in such compelling terms of the freedom of man on the one hand, and with such terrifying force of the bondage of man on the other.”

¹³⁰ See, for instance, the judgment of Markus Wriedt, “Luther’s Theology,” trans. Katharina Gustavs, in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 111, that Luther “almost falls prey to determinism” in his polemic against

is interested only in the human will as it stands before God (*coram Deo*),¹³¹ not in any psychological faculty of will *qua* will. Thus he does not deny the will's power of spontaneous, alternative choice in relation to "moral and civil" matters,¹³² or in relation to the sphere of ordinary psychological decisions.¹³³ In Luther's words: "We are not disputing about nature but about grace, and we are not asking what we are on earth, but what we are in heaven before God (*coram Deo*).... What we are asking is whether [man] has free will in relation to God."¹³⁴ And "in relation to God, or in matters pertaining to salvation or damnation, a man has no free will."¹³⁵ Before God and in relation to God, the human will has no freedom. It is enslaved by its own inclination to sin, and is therefore incapable of turning to God for salvation.

This relationship between human freedom and divine grace is central to Luther's theology of the enslaved will. According to Luther, the proclamation of "the help of grace" necessarily entails a simultaneous proclamation of "the impotence of

Erasmus. More decidedly, Reinhold Seeberg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines*, trans. C. E. Hay, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958-61), 2:244, argues that, in spite of Luther's attempt to limit the *servum arbitrium* to a spiritual enslavement which corresponds to regenerative grace, Luther's view is unintentionally "enlarged to a metaphysical determinism."

¹³¹ On Luther's important concept of the "coram-relationship," see Ebeling, *Luther*, 193-201.

¹³² Luther, *Works*, 33:270.

¹³³ See E. Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1953), 274-75: "Luther does not deny at all what most people nowadays mean when they speak about Free Will. In the first place he goes a great deal further than many modern philosophers and psychologists in the room he leaves for psychological freedom.... Moreover, [he] concedes not only psychological but ethical freedom.... He is concerned to make it clear that however bound and paralysed the will of man may be, men do not cease to be men." The distinction between freedom in spiritual matters and in ordinary civil matters was refined in Lutheran orthodoxy: see the discussion and citations in Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. C. A. Hay and H. E. Jacobs (Minneapolis, 1899), 263-68.

¹³⁴ Luther, *Works*, 33:284-85. For a discussion of this passage, see Ebeling, *Luther*, 218-19.

¹³⁵ Luther, *Works*, 33:70.

free will.”¹³⁶ The will’s “impotence” is, in other words, asserted only in order to magnify humanity’s need for grace and the freedom of that grace.¹³⁷ Luther thus writes that he is “contending against free will on behalf of the grace of God.”¹³⁸ Because human beings lack any ability to help themselves, because not even the law of God can help them, “[t]here is need of another light to reveal the remedy. This is the voice of the gospel, revealing Christ as the deliverer.”¹³⁹ For Luther, those who think that they can contribute “even the least thing” to their own salvation through the exercise of free will cannot receive the grace of God: “no man can be thoroughly humbled until he knows that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, devices, endeavours, will and works, and depends entirely on the choice, will and work of another, namely, of God alone.”¹⁴⁰ And since God alone brings salvation by his own free will, divine grace is, according to Luther, predestinating grace. In the work of salvation, God is utterly free, so that “free will” is properly “a divine term, and can be properly applied to none but the Divine Majesty alone.”¹⁴¹ The fundamental orientation of Luther’s theology of

¹³⁶ Luther, *Works*, 33:244-45.

¹³⁷ See Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, 278: “Luther’s motive here is religious, to safeguard the freedom of the Grace of God, and to strike at the nerve of all self-righteousness.” On Luther’s view of human passivity in the reception of grace, see McGrath, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross*, 130.

¹³⁸ Luther, *Works*, 33:102. See also Luther’s argument in *Works*, 33:244-45, that the proclamation of “the help of grace” necessarily entails the simultaneous proclamation of “the impotence of free choice.”

¹³⁹ Luther, *Works*, 33:262. See Luther’s summary of his whole argument in *Works*, 33:293: “To sum up: If we believe that Christ has redeemed men by his blood, we are bound to confess that the whole man was lost; otherwise, we should make Christ either superfluous or the redeemer of only the lowest part of man, which would be blasphemy and sacrilege.”

¹⁴⁰ Luther, *Works*, 33:62.

¹⁴¹ Luther, *Works*, 33:68. As Rupp, *The Righteousness of God*, 276, notes, Luther’s insistence that freedom belongs above all to God is indebted partly to the influence of Ockhamist nominalism.

freedom and predestining grace is thus not metaphysical, but soteriological: salvation comes from God alone.¹⁴²

VII. John Calvin

The reforming insights of Luther were taken up and developed by the French theologian John Calvin (1509-64), whose thought would prove to be a decisive influence on the future shape of Protestant theology.

Adopting a traditional faculty psychology, Calvin regards the human soul as comprising both intellect (*intellectus*) and will (*voluntas*).¹⁴³ Like Luther, Calvin highlights the corrupting power of original sin, arguing that “everything which is in man, from the intellect to the will,” is “utterly devoid of goodness.”¹⁴⁴ The intellect has been “immersed in darkness,” and the will has become “so enslaved by depraved lusts as to be incapable of one righteous desire.”¹⁴⁵ Since no part of the soul remains exempt from

¹⁴² See von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 7:201-4. On Luther’s theology of predestination, see also Lowell C. Green, “Luther’s Understanding of the Freedom of God and the Salvation of Man: His Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:4,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 87 (1996), 57-73.

¹⁴³ The question whether Calvin was, like Thomas Aquinas, an intellectualist, or, like Scotus, a voluntarist, has provoked considerable debate. See for instance the discussion of Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 159-73. Recent studies have tended to emphasise the inconsistency of Calvin’s views on the relationship between intellect and will: see especially Dewey J. Hoitenga, *John Calvin and the Will: A Critique and Corrective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997). Although this debate carries significant implications for the way in which Calvin’s understanding of freedom as a whole is understood, it is nevertheless important not to distort the basically soteriological character of Calvin’s thought by too intensive a philosophical analysis.

¹⁴⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.8; citations are from the Latin text in *Institutio christianae religionis* (Geneva, 1563); and the translation in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

¹⁴⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.12.

sin, whatever proceeds from human nature can only be sinful.¹⁴⁶ Good works, therefore, are impossible for the human will to perform:¹⁴⁷ the will is “bound with the closest chains” of sin.¹⁴⁸

In what sense, then, may the will be described as “free”? Calvin cites with approval the medieval distinction between three kinds of freedom: “first, from necessity (*a necessitate*); second, from sin (*a peccato*); and third, from misery (*a miseria*): the first is naturally so inherent in man, that he cannot possibly be deprived of it; while through sin the other two have been lost.”¹⁴⁹ Thus according to Calvin, only a freedom from necessity remains to fallen humanity: “man is said to have free will not because he has a free choice between good and evil, but only because he acts voluntarily, and not by compulsion (*coactione*).”¹⁵⁰ The freedom of the fallen will, in other words, amounts to nothing more than the fact “that man is not forced to be the servant of sin,” but is instead “a voluntary slave” whose will is firmly “bound” by an inclination towards sin.¹⁵¹ Except through regeneration, “the will of man is not free, in as much as it is subject to lusts which chain and master it.”¹⁵² It “cannot make a movement towards goodness, far less steadily pursue it.”¹⁵³ Indeed, Calvin emphasises

¹⁴⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.9.

¹⁴⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.6.

¹⁴⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.27.

¹⁴⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.5. Calvin takes the distinction from Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae* (Rome: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1971-81), 2.25.

¹⁵⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.7. As Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth, 1956), 86, notes, Calvin seeks to remove “[e]very fatalistic feature” from his theology of the human condition under sin.

¹⁵¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.7.

¹⁵² Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.8. Here Calvin is summarising the position of Augustine, but simultaneously stating his own view.

¹⁵³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.5.

the will's enslavement to such an extent that he advises the total abolition of the term "free will" from theological discourse.¹⁵⁴

Calvin's view of the enslavement of the will is, like Luther's, primarily oriented to soteriology. In depriving humanity of every glimmer of self-confidence,¹⁵⁵ Calvin is able to assert the total sovereignty of the grace of God.¹⁵⁶ It is "the Lord" who "supplies us with what is lacking."¹⁵⁷ When the will lies chained by its own evil inclinations, God produces a "conversion in the will": his grace excites "a desire, a love, and a study of righteousness" in the human heart, thus "turning, training, and guiding our hearts unto righteousness."¹⁵⁸ The fallen and enslaved will is thus liberated by grace, and "converted solely by the Lord's power (*sola Domini virtute converti*)."¹⁵⁹ Further, Calvin insists that the liberating action of grace on the will is fully effective. God does not move the will in such a way that the recipient of grace is left with "the choice to obey or resist"; rather, grace "affects us efficaciously."¹⁶⁰ According to Calvin, this does not mean that the human will is simply inactive, or that it is constrained or compelled by the power of grace, but rather that "we proceed voluntarily, and are inclined to follow the movement of grace," since grace itself has produced a new inclination in the will.¹⁶¹ Conversion thus consists in an irresistible work of grace that produces a voluntary

¹⁵⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.8. Luther, *Works*, 33:70, had already suggested, although less emphatically, that "to let this term go altogether" would be "the safest and most God-fearing thing to do."

¹⁵⁵ For an explicit statement to this effect, see Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.10.

¹⁵⁶ See Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.6: "If any, even the minutest, ability were in ourselves, there would also be some merit." But, on the contrary: "The whole is of God."

¹⁵⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.6.

¹⁵⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.6.

¹⁵⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.7.

¹⁶⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.10.

¹⁶¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.11. On the will's active involvement in the renewal of human nature, see Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theatre of His Glory: Nature and Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 101-3.

response from the liberated human will. Following conversion, the entire Christian life is characterised by a liberty in which the believer “cheerfully and alertly” chooses to obey God.¹⁶²

Closely related to Calvin’s view of the will’s enslavement and subsequent liberation is his theology of predestination. Here too, Calvin is motivated by the priority of grace,¹⁶³ seeking “to make it appear that our salvation flows entirely from the good mercy of God.”¹⁶⁴ The substance of Calvin’s predestinarian theology is that “God saves whom he wills of his mere good pleasure (*Deum mero beneplacito*) and does not pay a debt, a debt which never can be due.”¹⁶⁵ God cannot be in debt to human beings, since in its corrupted and enslaved state humanity can do nothing to merit the divine favour. In bestowing grace, God thus remains utterly free and therefore utterly gracious. And in eternally decreeing to be gracious, God “considered nothing external to himself”,¹⁶⁶ he did not ground his decision in any foreseen faith or merit, but only on his own “sovereign pleasure.”¹⁶⁷ This strong accent on God’s free choice as the ultimate ground of human salvation is, however, counterbalanced in Calvin’s thought by the idea of reprobation (*reprobatio*), according to which some members of the human race have been “preordained . . . to eternal damnation.”¹⁶⁸ Again, Calvin can appeal here only to the freedom of God’s will: “if we cannot assign any reason for [God’s] bestowing

¹⁶² Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.5.

¹⁶³ This fact radically qualifies the claims that Calvin’s view of predestination is simply a form of causal determinism. On this point, see Charles Partee, “Calvin and Determinism,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 5:2 (1975), 123-28. For arguments that Calvin’s theology is deterministic, see Seeberg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines*, 2:405-8; and C. J. Kinlaw, “Determinism and the Hiddenness of God in Calvin’s Theology,” *Religious Studies* 24:4 (1988), 497-510.

¹⁶⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.21.1.

¹⁶⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.21.1.

¹⁶⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.22.3.

¹⁶⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.22.6.

¹⁶⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.21.5.

mercy on his people, but just that it so pleases him, neither can we have any reason for his reprobating others but his will.”¹⁶⁹

The theology of Calvin, which so strikingly posited an eternally active divine freedom as the backdrop to the temporal sphere of human choice, was to exert profound influence on Continental and British theological thought for the next 150 years.

VIII. Reformed Orthodoxy

The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw the dramatic evolution of Protestant theology in England and Europe.¹⁷⁰ The theology of the Calvinist Reformation gave way to what is usually termed Reformed “orthodoxy” or “scholasticism.”¹⁷¹ This was no longer a theology of reform, but of establishment.¹⁷² The period of Reformed orthodoxy extended roughly from the late sixteenth to the end of the seventeenth century, a period which witnessed the development both in England¹⁷³ and on

¹⁶⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.22.11. But, as Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 167, points out, God’s will in Calvin’s theology “is not ... capricious; it is His righteous will.”

¹⁷⁰ For a reliable summary of the social factors which contributed to the rise of Reformed scholasticism, see Philip Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 298-300.

¹⁷¹ The designation of this as the period of orthodoxy is conventional, and the validity of the term “orthodoxy” has been established by recent studies. See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1:27-84; and Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed*, 298.

¹⁷² So Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:60: “Protestant theology is no longer, in the [early orthodox] period, reforming a church—it is establishing and protecting the church.” On the development of Reformed orthodoxy, see also Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 176-92

¹⁷³ In a survey of English Civil War historiography, Margo Todd, Introduction to *Reformation to Revolution: Politics and Religion in Early Modern England*, ed. Margo Todd (London: Routledge, 1995), 3, describes a growing recognition of the religious and theological consensus in seventeenth-century England: “While earlier scholars looked at the minority on the radical fringes ..., the focus

the continent of “a single but variegated Reformed tradition, bounded by a series of fairly uniform confessional concerns.”¹⁷⁴ While early Reformation theology had been mainly oriented towards preaching, pastoral concerns and personal faith, the growing institutionalisation of Protestantism entailed the development of Protestant theology into a formal academic discipline that could be taught and studied in the universities.¹⁷⁵ The increasing sophistication of philosophy and logic in the university curriculum around the beginning of the seventeenth century¹⁷⁶ also led to more systematic and philosophical approaches to theology,¹⁷⁷ while the humanist advances in philology,

now is on the vast majority of the religious population occupying the middle of the road, struggling to cope both with changes imposed from above and with the demands of radical reformers on the one hand and reactionaries on the other.” And as historians like Nicholas Tyacke, Patrick Collinson and Peter Lake have argued, this basic religious consensus was one of Calvinist orthodoxy. See, for example, Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, c.1590-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987); Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society, 1559-1625* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982); and Peter Lake, “Calvinism and the English Church 1570-1635,” *Past and Present* 114 (1987), 32-76.

¹⁷⁴ Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7-8. This is, Muller notes, “a major methodological point that influences the historiography of the movement of Reformed thought” (8). Further, Muller notes that Reformed orthodoxy was international in character, involving an “intellectual commerce” between British and European theologians, to such a extent that the period’s British theology cannot be understood in isolation from Continental thought, and Continental theology cannot be understood apart from British influences (41). On the international character of orthodoxy, see also Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, trans. Darrell L. Guder, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981-83), 1:114-15; and Patrick Collinson, “England and International Calvinism, 1558-1640,” in *International Calvinism, 1541-1715*, ed. Menna Prestwich (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 217.

¹⁷⁵ See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:60. On the relationship between Protestant scholastic theology and the historical development of the European university, see Antonie Vos, “Scholasticism and Reformation,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, ed. Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 99-119.

¹⁷⁶ See William T. Costello, *The Scholastic Curriculum at Early Seventeenth-Century Cambridge* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958).

¹⁷⁷ See Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed*, 298-300; and Richard A. Muller, “The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism: A Review and Definition,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 62-63.

lexicography and textual criticism led to a more refined and scholarly engagement with the biblical texts.¹⁷⁸ Thus the “hortatory” and “discursive” style of Reformation theology gave way to a more scholastic, “dialectical” form of theological reflection.¹⁷⁹ Further, as the Roman church developed its increasingly sophisticated counter-Reformation polemics,¹⁸⁰ Protestant writers responded by refining and systematising their theology, bringing to their aid the conceptuality of late medieval scholasticism¹⁸¹ and attempting to demonstrate the catholicity of Protestant dogma by engaging deeply with patristic and medieval traditions.¹⁸² In general, the differences between Reformation and post-Reformation thought are, however, more formal than material: the theology of the Reformation was adapted by later generations of thinkers in response to the intellectual demands imposed by a changing social and religious milieu.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸ See Muller, “The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism,” 63; and idem, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2.

¹⁷⁹ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:61.

¹⁸⁰ The most important work of Roman polemics was Robert Bellarmine, *Disputationes de controversiis christianae fidei, adversus hujus temporis haereticos*, 4 vols. (Rome, 1586-93). Bellarmine’s polemic was so powerful that around two hundred printed reactions and counter-reactions appeared, and some Protestant universities established chairs devoted to answering Bellarmine. See Eef Dekker, “An Ecumenical Debate Between Reformation and Counter-Reformation? Bellarmine and Ames on *liberum arbitrium*,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 142-43.

¹⁸¹ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:63-64.

¹⁸² Muller, “The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism,” 63.

¹⁸³ The nineteenth-century thesis that Protestant orthodoxy developed due to an increasing focus on “central dogmas” (justification in Lutheran theology, and predestination in Reformed theology), although still sometimes rehearsed, has been discredited by the recent scholarship of Richard Muller and his school. See especially Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology From Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986); idem, “The Myth of ‘Decretal Theology,’” *Calvin Theological Journal* 30:1 (1995), 159-67; and idem, *After Calvin*, 63-102.

The Reformed orthodox account of the fall of humanity sharply contrasts the perfect freedom of the prelapsarian state with the corruption and enslavement brought about by sin. The Reformed writers view human freedom not as an Ockhamist liberty of indifference, in which the will is equally capable of choosing either of two alternative possibilities, but rather as a positive ability spontaneously to choose the good.¹⁸⁴ Reformed theologians thus argue that Adam's and Eve's prelapsarian freedom did not consist in an indifferent ability to sin or not to sin, since a will that was equally capable of good and evil would have already been an evil will.¹⁸⁵ An indifference between good and evil can only be "a flaw in the creature" and even the "origin of sin."¹⁸⁶ Thus according to Reformed orthodoxy, the prelapsarian will was "directed and naturally inclined to God and goodness,"¹⁸⁷ and it possessed no "irregular bias or inclination" towards anything except goodness.¹⁸⁸ But in spite of the will's upright perfection, it was also "subject unto change"¹⁸⁹ and "moveable to evil" by "man himself."¹⁹⁰ Thus the Reformed writers argue not that Adam became sinful when he ate the forbidden fruit, but that he was "a sinner before he did the eating,"¹⁹¹ since before

¹⁸⁴ See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:447. On the Reformed conception of positive freedom, see G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, trans. Dirk W. Jellema (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 310-48.

¹⁸⁵ Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1964), 41. Stating the Reformed position, Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, 332, writes that "we can hardly describe true freedom in terms of standing at a crossroad; it means, rather, walking along one road"; indeed, the possibility of "an arbitrary choice" of evil instead of good would be "a perversion of true creaturely freedom" (335).

¹⁸⁶ Johann Heinrich Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae* (Zurich, 1700), 6.99; cited in Heppe, 243.

¹⁸⁷ Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*, 41.

¹⁸⁸ Thomas Boston, *Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, 2 vols. (Aberdeen, 1853), 1:182.

¹⁸⁹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 4.2; in Schaff, 3:611.

¹⁹⁰ Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*, 44.

¹⁹¹ William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, ed. and trans. John D. Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 1.11.6.

outwardly transgressing he had already inclined his own will towards evil. And this self-determination towards evil was not so much an exercise of human freedom as an abdication of it.

When Adam sinned, he relinquished his true freedom. Through the abuse of his freedom he “wilfully subjected himself to sin,”¹⁹² bringing on himself “blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment.”¹⁹³ Deriving their corruption from Adam through original sin (*peccatum originale*), all human beings are now “incapable of all saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage to sin.”¹⁹⁴ In Reformed orthodoxy the human will is thus characterised by both an “aversion to good”¹⁹⁵ and a “woeful bent towards sin,”¹⁹⁶ so that the power to perform good works is in a “bondage” that leaves freedom “remote and dead.”¹⁹⁷ Because the will is thus enslaved, those who are converted by grace cannot ascribe any merit to their own free will, but only to the freely-acting God who “gives them faith and repentance, and rescues them from the power of darkness.”¹⁹⁸ God softens the heart, quickens the will and infuses it with new qualities so that it becomes a good will, liberated from its enslavement to evil desires.¹⁹⁹ And Reformed orthodox writers insist that the fallen will’s enslavement is so great that this liberating work of grace is nothing less than

¹⁹² *Confessio Belgica*, 14; in Schaff, 3:398.

¹⁹³ *Canones synodi Dordrechtanae*, 3/4.1; in Schaff, 3:564.

¹⁹⁴ *Canones synodi Dordrechtanae*, 3/4.3; in Schaff, 3:564.

¹⁹⁵ Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*, 99.

¹⁹⁶ Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*, 102.

¹⁹⁷ Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, 1.12.44.

¹⁹⁸ *Canones synodi Dordrechtanae*, 3/4.10; in Schaff, 3:566.

¹⁹⁹ *Canones synodi Dordrechtanae*, 3/4.11; in Schaff, 3:566.

“miraculous and supernaturall”.²⁰⁰ it is as powerful as “creation or the resurrection of the dead.”²⁰¹

While Reformed orthodoxy does not understand human freedom in terms of indifference between alternative possibilities, it nevertheless views the freedom of God as including a contingent liberty of indifference. In this respect, as in many others, Reformed orthodox theology exhibits deep continuity with Scotist thought.²⁰² Reformed writers argue that God might have chosen not to will what he has actually willed; in particular, he might have chosen to abstain from creating the world.²⁰³ God in fact “wills all things such that he is able not to will them,”²⁰⁴ and, having willed them, they exist always as things which “he might not have willed.”²⁰⁵ This “indifference of the divine will” is, indeed, “the greatest proof of his perfection who, as an independent being, needs nothing out of himself.”²⁰⁶ The will of God is thus contingent,²⁰⁷ and there is “no necessary connection” between the divine nature and the acts of the divine will.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁰ William Perkins, *The workes of that famous and worthie minister of Christ, in the Universitie of Cambridge, M. W. Perkins*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1612-19), 1:79.

²⁰¹ *Canones synodi Dordrechtanae*, 3/4.12; in Schaff, 3:567.

²⁰² On the influence of Scotist thought on the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God, see Andreas J. Beck, “Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676): Basic Features of His Doctrine of God,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 205-26.

²⁰³ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992-97), 3.14.6.

²⁰⁴ Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.14.5. See the valuable historical discussion in Stephen M. Fallon, “‘To Act or Not’: Milton’s Conception of Divine Freedom,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49:3 (1988), 425-53.

²⁰⁵ Leonhardus Rijssen, *Francisci Turretini compendium theologiae didactico-elencticae ex theologorum nostrorum institutionibus auctum et illustratum* (Amsterdam, 1695), 3.28; cited in Heppe, 84.

²⁰⁶ Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.14.7.

²⁰⁷ See Richard Baxter, *The divine life in three treatises* (London, 1664), 131.

²⁰⁸ Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, 1.7.36.

This emphasis on divine freedom is particularly pronounced in the Reformed orthodox conception of a free and eternal absolute decree (*decretum absolutum*) which stands behind all temporal events. The decree of God is “an internal act of the divine will, by which God determines, from eternity, freely, with absolute certainty, those matters which shall happen in time.”²⁰⁹ The decreeing will of God “is most free, completely and absolutely free, depending on nothing else.”²¹⁰ This eternal decree is completely effectual in bringing about all things: God “hath most certainly decreed every thing and action, whether past, present, or to come.”²¹¹ God’s will cannot be thwarted or frustrated, for “if [God] should properly will anything and not attain it he would not be wholly perfect.”²¹² But while the will of God is always effectual, it is not always an efficient or immediate cause of temporal events.²¹³ In particular, Reformed writers insist that the divine will is only the permissive cause, never the efficient cause, of evil. Both good and evil “result from the decree and will of God; the former by efficient, the latter by permissive decree.”²¹⁴ Thus the decree and will of God “are in no sense the cause of evil or sin, even though whatever God has decreed necessarily happens.”²¹⁵

In its account of the divine decree, Reformed orthodoxy is especially concerned with the predestination of human beings to salvation. Following Calvin, Reformed theology divides the human race into the two classes of elect (*electi*) and reprobate (*reprobi*): “some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others

²⁰⁹ Johannes Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae*; in *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. John W. Beardslee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 1.3.3.

²¹⁰ Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, 1.7.35.

²¹¹ Perkins, *Workes*, 1:15.

²¹² Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, 1.7.48.

²¹³ Turretin, *Institutes*, 3.14.16.

²¹⁴ Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae*, 1.3.3.

²¹⁵ Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae*, 1.3.3.

foreordained to everlasting death.”²¹⁶ This double predestination (*praedestinatio gemina*) serves the ultimate goal of God’s glory, the “manifesting of the praise and excellency of [his] glorious grace” in the election of some,²¹⁷ and the “manifestation of his justice” in the rejection of the rest.²¹⁸ Further, God’s predestinating decision is based solely on his “absolutely free will,” and not on any foreseen merit or demerit in his creatures.²¹⁹ Indeed, for the Reformed writers “there is no cause of God’s will”,²²⁰ or rather, the sole cause is “the good pleasure of God” (*benepiacitum Dei*),²²¹ that is, the will of God itself. There can thus be “no cause, or condition, or reason . . . in man, upon the consideration of which God chose this rather than another one.”²²² Here Reformed orthodox theology seeks, as Calvin had done, to highlight the gratuitous character of grace—“the freedom and glory of sovereign grace”²²³—by removing any hint of creaturely influence from the will of God. If God’s decisions were logically subsequent to the decisions of human beings, then the will of God would be “mutable and dependent upon the act of the creature”,²²⁴ and it is “absurd for the creator to depend upon the creature, God upon man and the will of God (the first cause of all things) upon the things themselves.”²²⁵

²¹⁶ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3.3; in Schaff, 3:608-9.

²¹⁷ Perkins, *Workes*, 1:289.

²¹⁸ Perkins, *Workes*, 1:293.

²¹⁹ Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae*, 1.4.2.

²²⁰ Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, 1.7.39-40.

²²¹ *Canones synodi Dordrechtanae*, 1.10; in Schaff, 3:554.

²²² Turretin, *Institutes*, 4.11.9.

²²³ Boston, *Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, 1:311.

²²⁴ Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, 1.7.43.

²²⁵ Turretin, *Institutes*, 4.3.4. See also Amandus Polanus, *Syntagma theologiae christianae* (Geneva, 1617), 4.6.

Within Reformed orthodoxy there was, however, division over the question of the object of predestination (*obiectum praedestinationis*).²²⁶ According to the infralapsarian view, God's decree to create humanity and permit the fall logically precedes the decree to elect and reprobate, so that the object of predestination is "man created and fallen" (*homo creatus et lapsus*).²²⁷ In contrast, according to the supralapsarians the decree to create and permit the fall logically follows the decree to elect and reprobate, so that the object of predestination is "man creatable and lapsible" (*homo creabilis et labilis*).²²⁸ The supralapsarian view thus represents a more severe form of Reformed theology, in which God is portrayed as creating certain human beings for the specific purpose of reprobating and destroying them. Still, in both the supra- and infralapsarian views, the accent on divine freedom is pronounced. The controversy illustrates the way Reformed orthodox theologians employed scholastic and abstract reasoning in their attempts to define precisely the free decision of God which stands ineluctably behind all human history.

²²⁶ On this subtle and complex controversy, see the discussion of Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-77), 2/2, 127-45; and the accounts of William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1862), 358-71; and Heppel, 157-62.

²²⁷ For a detailed presentation and defence of the infralapsarian position, see Turretin, *Institutes*, 4.9.1-31.

²²⁸ By far the most elaborate presentation of supralapsarianism is the massive work of William Twisse, *Riches of Gods love unto the vessells of mercy, consistent with his absolute hatred or reprobation of the vessells of wrath*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1653).

IX. Arminianism

Reacting against the Reformed orthodox views of grace, predestination and freedom, the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) developed a highly influential reformulation of Protestant theology.²²⁹

In the late sixteenth century, Arminius, who had studied under Calvin's disciple Theodore Beza, was asked to refute a polemical treatise which had been penned against Beza's strict supralapsarianism. But instead of refuting this anti-Calvinist treatise, Arminius articulated his own distinctive view of grace and predestination, and in doing so he entered into sharp conflict with the Reformed orthodox establishment.²³⁰

Arminius's appointment to the chair of theology at Leiden in 1603 initiated one of the most heated and far-reaching theological controversies of the post-Reformation era, with Arminius's followers pitted against the Reformed orthodox theologians. In response to this socially and politically intense theological controversy, the Dutch state called the international Synod of Dort in 1618-19; the Synod condemned Arminianism

²²⁹ For biographical details, see the authoritative study of Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (1971; Grand Rapids: Asbury, 1985). In a personal recollection, Sir Henry Wotton, *Reliquiae Wottonianae, or, A collection of lives, letters, poems; with characters of sundry personages* (London, 1672), 27, describes Arminius as "a man of most rare Learning, and I knew him to be of a most strict life, and of a most meek spirit."

²³⁰ Older scholarship used to rehearse the legend that Arminius was at first "a zealous Calvinist." For examples, see Augustus Neander, *Lectures on the History of Christian Dogmas*, trans. J. E. Ryland, 2 vols. (London, 1858), 2:677-78; and A. W. Harrison, *The Beginnings of Arminianism to the Synod of Dort* (London, University of London Press, 1926), 24-26. The story seems to have originated in the biographical account of Arminius's personal acquaintance, Petrus Bertius, *The life and death of James Arminius and Simon Episcopius, professors of divinity in the University of Leyden in Holland* (London, 1672), 13-14, which describes Arminius being "overcome by the truth" through "the guidance of the holy Ghost," only after a wearying and painful struggle. It is, however, historically more likely that Arminius had never been a convinced Calvinist.

and affirmed a strictly Reformed theology of predestination, grace and freedom.²³¹ The temporary suppression of Arminian theology in The Netherlands coincided, however, with the growing influence of Arminianism elsewhere in Europe and in England.²³²

Formally, Arminian theology remains close to Reformed orthodoxy; but materially, it makes a decisive break with the orthodox conceptions of freedom and grace. Following orthodoxy, Arminius divides human history into separate “states”: the state of innocence; the state of corruption; and the state of renewed righteousness.²³³ In the state of innocence, human nature was characterised by a clear intellect and a holy will which was nevertheless mutable, being able by a “spontaneous as well as free motion” to turn away from God.²³⁴ By freely turning away from the “Chief Good” towards an “inferior good,” human nature enslaved itself.²³⁵ In this state of corruption,

²³¹ The articles of the Arminian Remonstrance, entitled *Articuli Arminiani sive remonstrantia*, are reproduced in Schaff, 3:545-49; and the orthodox canons, entitled *Canones synodi Dordrechtanae*, are reproduced in Schaff, 3:550-97.

²³² This account of theological Arminianism is not concerned with the English Laudian movement. In his important study, Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, describes Laudianism as “Arminian.” Tyacke uses the term not theologically, but as a label for a particular ecclesiastical approach. Other studies have, however, confused these two quite separate uses of the term “Arminian,” thus mistakenly assuming certain connections between ecclesiastical Laudianism and theological Arminianism. In such cases, the designation of the Laudians as “Arminian” would be misleading, since these churchmen in general, and certainly Archbishop Laud himself, were concerned not with the theology of grace but with liturgical and ecclesiastical reform. On this confusion of terms, see Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed*, 386. If the Laudians shared any specific theological commitment, it is probably the notion of natural law, as has been argued by Iain M. MacKenzie, *God’s Order and Natural Law: The Works of the Laudian Divines* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002). In the present study, “Arminian” is used only as a theological term, without any reference to Laudianism or other forms of incipient Anglo-Catholicism.

²³³ Jacobus Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols, 3 vols. (1825-75; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 2:191. For a Reformed orthodox account of these “states,” see Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*; and see also the brief account in Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 62-66.

²³⁴ Arminius, *Works*, 2:191-92.

²³⁵ Arminius, *Works*, 2:192.

then, the “free will of man” is “not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent, and weakened; but it is also imprisoned (*captivatum*), destroyed, and lost.”²³⁶ With Reformed orthodoxy, Arminianism affirms that the will is enslaved to such an extent that it cannot do anything spiritually good.²³⁷ “Man ... in the state of apostasy and sin, can of and by himself neither think, will nor do anything that is truly good.”²³⁸ Arminius writes that the fallen intellect is “dark” and “destitute”; the fallen will “loves” evil but “hates and has an aversion to that which is truly good”; and the entire soul is characterised by “utter weakness” (*impotentia*).²³⁹ In short, the fallen human being is “under the power of sin and Satan, reduced to the condition of a slave.”²⁴⁰

Arminian theology therefore insists on the necessity of grace. A person must be “regenerated and renovated in understanding, inclination, or will, and in all his powers” in order to “understand, think, will and effect what is truly good.”²⁴¹ The grace of God excites “new affections, inclinations and motions” in the human heart; it generates “new powers” to enable the will to choose the good.²⁴² Grace applies a “gentle persuasion adapted to move the will,”²⁴³ and thus “bends the will” towards the good.²⁴⁴ By the grace of God the human will is in this way “liberated” from its former captivity.²⁴⁵ According to Arminianism, grace is therefore “the beginning, continuance and

²³⁶ Arminius, *Works*, 2:192.

²³⁷ On the similarities between the Arminian and Reformed views of the fallen will, see Karl Barth, *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, ed. and trans. Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 218-19.

²³⁸ *Articuli Arminiani sive remonstrantia*, 3; in Schaff, 3:546-47.

²³⁹ Arminius, *Works*, 2:192-94.

²⁴⁰ Arminius, *Works*, 2:194.

²⁴¹ *Articuli Arminiani*, 3; in Schaff, 3:546-47.

²⁴² Arminius, *Works*, 2:194.

²⁴³ Arminius, *Works*, 3:454.

²⁴⁴ Arminius, *Works*, 2:700.

²⁴⁵ Arminius, *Works*, 2:194.

accomplishment of all good,²⁴⁶ so that “without this preceding, or preventing, exciting, following and co-operating Grace,” no one can “think, will, or perform any thing that is savingly good.”²⁴⁷

Having gone this far with Reformed orthodoxy, Arminian theology nevertheless argues that “the mode of the operation of this grace” is “not irresistible.”²⁴⁸ In spite of the power of divine grace, the human will is able to “despise and reject the Grace of God, and resist the operation of it,”²⁴⁹ through “the wickedness and hardness of the human heart.”²⁵⁰ While according to Reformed orthodoxy regenerating grace is given only to the elect, Arminian theology asserts that such grace “is granted even to those who do not comply.”²⁵¹ This grace is therefore “sufficient grace” (*gratia sufficiens*), but not “efficacious grace” (*gratia efficax*).²⁵² Sufficient grace makes regeneration possible, but not yet actual; it is “sufficient to beget Faith,”²⁵³ but it “does not always obtain its effect.”²⁵⁴ Those who obtain salvation “freely yield their assent to grace”—they can, of course, yield this assent only because they have been “previously excited, impelled, drawn and assisted by grace”—but “in the very moment in which they actually assent,

²⁴⁶ *Articuli Arminiani*, 4; in Schaff, 3:547.

²⁴⁷ Simon Episcopius, *The confession or declaration of the ministers or pastors which in the United Provinces are called Remonstrants, concerning the chief points of Christian religion* (London, 1676), 204.

²⁴⁸ *Articuli Arminiani*, 4; in Schaff, 3:547.

²⁴⁹ Episcopius, *The confession or declaration*, 205.

²⁵⁰ Arminius, *Works*, 2:397.

²⁵¹ Arminius, *Works*, 2:721.

²⁵² Arminius, *Works*, 2:721-22. For an illuminating study of sufficient grace in later Arminian theology, see Herbert Boyd McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001).

²⁵³ Episcopius, *The confession or declaration*, 207.

²⁵⁴ Arminius, *Works*, 2:722.

they possess the capability of not assenting.”²⁵⁵ The point is a subtle one, but it is at the heart of the Arminian critique of Reformed orthodoxy. According to Arminianism the fallen will remains free in one decisive respect. Enabled by grace, it retains the power either to choose or to reject the offer of salvation. Grace itself does not secure the conversion of any specific individual; it makes conversion possible, but ultimately it is the human will which casts the deciding vote.²⁵⁶

The Arminian theology of predestination similarly gives greater prominence to the role of human choice, without departing from the basic conceptual categories of Reformed orthodox doctrine.²⁵⁷ Following Reformed orthodoxy, Arminianism views predestination as “an eternal and immutable decree” which God has “determined” from “before the foundation of the world.”²⁵⁸ The cause of this decree is simply the “good pleasure of God.”²⁵⁹ Further, Arminianism also affirms reprobation as the logical

²⁵⁵ Arminius, *Works*, 2:722. See also Arminius’s statement in *Works*, 2:721: “All unregenerate persons have freedom of will, and a capability of resisting the Holy Spirit, of rejecting the proffered grace of God ..., and of not opening to Him who knocks at the door of the heart: and these things they can actually do, without any difference of *the Elect* and of *the Reprobate*.”

²⁵⁶ Arminius teaches that the fallen will, unaided by grace, possesses a negative ability (the power to reject grace), but that it lacks any positive ability (the power to accept grace). Without the prior assistance of prevenient grace, the fallen will is not capable of accepting grace; but the operation of prevenient grace also gives the will this positive ability. At issue here is not simply a precise understanding of the capacities of the fallen will, but the whole theological understanding of grace itself. From the Reformed perspective, Arminius’s position removes the *sola* from *sola gratia*, since grace becomes something which does not secure conversion purely by its own action.

²⁵⁷ For a study of Arminius’s view of predestination in relation to Reformed orthodox theology, see Richard A. Muller, “Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice: Arminius’s Gambit and the Reformed Response,” in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 2:251-78.

²⁵⁸ *Articuli Arminiani*, 1; in Schaff, 3:545.

²⁵⁹ Arminius, *Works*, 2:392.

“contrary” of election: “Election necessarily implies Reprobation.”²⁶⁰ In reprobation, God has “resolved from all eternity to condemn to eternal death unbelievers,”²⁶¹ and thus “to leave the contumacious and unbelieving under sin and wrath.”²⁶² The difference between Arminianism and Reformed theology on this point lies, then, not in the conception of predestination itself, but in the understanding of the ground (*fundamentum*) and object (*obiectum*) of predestination. In contrast to Reformed orthodoxy, Arminianism grounds both election and reprobation in the divine foreknowledge: God decrees “to receive into favour (*gratiam*) those who repent and believe,” but “to leave under sin and wrath those who are impenitent and unbelievers.”²⁶³ His decree to accept or reject these believers and unbelievers therefore “rests or depends on the prescience and foresight of God, by which he foreknew from all eternity” those people who would respond to grace, and those who would reject it.²⁶⁴ Predestination is in this way grounded in God’s foreknowledge of the human will’s response to grace. According to

²⁶⁰ Arminius, *Works*, 2:228; see also *Works*, 3:292. This feature of Arminian theology is often overlooked in the scholarly literature. Even a historian as accomplished as Nicholas Tyacke, “Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter-Revolution,” in *The Origins of the English Civil War*, ed. Conrad Russell (London: Macmillan, 1973), 119, can describe the “essence of Arminianism” in these terms: “Arminians rejected the teaching of Calvinism that the world was divided into elect and reprobate whom God had ... predestinated, the one to Heaven and the other to Hell.”

²⁶¹ Arminius, *Works*, 2:228.

²⁶² *Articuli Arminiani*, 1; in Schaff, 3:545.

²⁶³ Arminius, *Works*, 2:719.

²⁶⁴ Arminius, *Works*, 2:719. Further, Arminius’s theology of divine providence adopts the Molinist concept of middle knowledge (*scientia media*) in order to emphasise the contingent freedom of the foreknown acts of human will. See the discussion of providence in Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 235-68. Muller comments that “Arminius sought to remove the divine efficacy from those acts foreknown by God as genuine contingents” (236). Thus when God foresees a person’s response to grace (and on the basis of this foreknowledge predestines that person to salvation), he is not merely foreseeing an effect of his own providential work, but a genuinely contingent act of the human will.

Reformed orthodoxy, individuals believe because they have been predestined; according to Arminianism, they are predestined because they will believe.²⁶⁵ Thus in Arminianism, the object of predestination is neither creatable human beings (as in Reformed supralapsarianism), nor simply fallen human beings (as in Reformed infralapsarianism), but *believing* human beings. God has eternally decreed to save “believers,”²⁶⁶ that is, all those who in the future “shall believe” and who are thus foreseen to be believers.²⁶⁷ This view of foreseen faith (*praevisa fides*) illustrates the underlying concern of Arminianism to assign more importance to the choices of the human will, and to prevent the decisive role of human freedom being undermined or negated by the absolute and inscrutable will of God.

X. Amyraldism

Attempting to find a “middle position” between the entrenched positions of Reformed orthodoxy and Arminianism,²⁶⁸ a creative new theological account of grace and

²⁶⁵ This succinct expression was often used in theological debate. See already Augustine, *De predestinatione sanctorum*, 34: “God elected believers; but he chose them that they might be so, not because they were already so.” And according to the Reformed orthodox writer Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae*, 1.4.2: “a man is not elected because he believes; he believes because he is elect.” Similarly, see John Hales, *Golden remains of the ever memorable Mr. John Hales of Eton College* (London, 1659), 57. For a modern reformulation of this statement, see Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, 2:446: “God’s Yes ... does not find the responding Yes present in us but rather evokes it from us.”

²⁶⁶ Arminius, *Works*, 2:226.

²⁶⁷ *Articuli Arminiani*, 1; in Schaff, 3:545. See also Arminius, *Works*, 3:445-47.

²⁶⁸ Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, 2:428. Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology, 1640-1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 76, describes the Amyraldian theology as a return to the “original balanced theology of Calvin” in face of the “over-orthodox mentality” of the seventeenth century. This interpretation, most elaborately argued by Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in*

freedom was developed in the Academy of Saumur in seventeenth-century France.²⁶⁹ This theological tradition, usually referred to as Saumur theology or Amyraldism, originated in the thought of John Cameron (1579-1625), a Scotsman who taught theology at Saumur from 1618 to 1621,²⁷⁰ and it was then more fully and more influentially developed by Moïse Amyraut (1596-1664), a theologian at Saumur from 1626 until 1664.²⁷¹

Amyraldian theology's most distinctive contribution to post-Reformation theology was its theory of so-called "hypothetical universalism" (*l'universalisme hypothétique*). According to Amyraut, God has replaced the legal covenant of the Old Testament with a covenant of grace, in which God is supremely merciful (*souverainement miséricordieux*) by displaying "grace in favour of all people indifferently"

Seventeenth-Century France (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), fails to take account of the complex transition from Reformation to post-Reformation theology, and tends to view the Reformation as a theological golden age and Reformed orthodoxy as a simple lapse into arid scholasticism. Such an interpretation of Amyraldism is contested by G. Michael Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology From Calvin to the Consensus, 1536-1675* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 220. See also F. P. Van Stam, *The Controversy Over the Theology of Saumur, 1635-1650: Disrupting Debates Among the Huguenots in Complicated Circumstances* (Amsterdam and Maarsen: APA-Holland University Press, 1988), 426-39.

²⁶⁹ While Amyraldism offered genuinely original contributions to post-Reformation theology, its emphasis on universal grace was to a significant extent rooted in the theologies of Heinrich Bullinger and the Heidelberg School, and had clear parallels in the writings of prominent English divines like John Davenant (1572-1641), James Ussher (1581-1656) and Richard Baxter (1615-91).

²⁷⁰ See Gaston Bonet-Maury, "John Cameron: A Scottish Protestant Theologian in France," *The Scottish Historical Review* 7 (1910), 325-45.

²⁷¹ On Amyraut's life, see Roger Nicole, *Moïse Amyraut: A Bibliography With Special Reference to the Controversy on Universal Grace* (New York: Garland, 1981), 4-16; and François Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et prédication: L'Oeuvre d'Amyraut et la querelle de la grâce universelle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), 58-83.

through Christ.²⁷² Nevertheless, this covenant of grace does not convey salvation automatically, but only on the basis of the fulfilment of the condition of faith. According to Amyraut the grace of salvation is thus universal, but also conditional, and in that sense particular. It was this emphasis on universality that evoked especially bitter opposition from Reformed orthodoxy, leading to the *querelle de la grâce universelle* which continued until the end of the seventeenth century.

In face of Reformed orthodoxy's pronounced emphasis on particularism, the Amyraldian theology regards grace as both universal and particular. This soteriological dualism is especially expressed in the Amyraldian view of predestination.²⁷³ In contrast both to supralapsarianism, which placed the election and rejection of specific individuals at the head of the decree, and to infralapsarianism, which placed creation but not grace at the head of the decree, Amyraut's theology of predestination begins with God's general benevolence towards the whole human race.²⁷⁴ God foresaw that his gracious plan to perfect the human race would be ruined by the fall, and he thus ordained Christ to be the redeemer of the entire human race. All human beings are elected to partake of salvation through Christ on the condition that they exercise faith in Christ: "these words, *God wills the salvation of all men*, necessarily meet this limitation, *provided that they believe*.... This will to make the grace of salvation universal

²⁷² Moïse Amyraut, *Paraphrases sur les epistres de l'apostre s. Paul au Galates, Ephesiens, Philippiens, Colossiens, I Thessaloniens, II Thessaloniens* (Saumur, 1645), 151; cited in Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 152n98.

²⁷³ On Amyraut's doctrine of predestination, see especially Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et prédication*, 87-108; and Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 158-221.

²⁷⁴ Thus B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), 364, even describes the Amyraldians as "postredemptionists," and characterises the Amyraldian theology as essentially a third Reformed position alongside supra- and infralapsarianism. As Warfield notes, in Amyraldian theology "election succeeds, in the order of thought, not merely the decree of the fall but that of redemption as well."

and common to all men (*universelle et commune à tous les humains*) is conditional in such a way that without the accomplishment of the condition, it is entirely inefficacious.”²⁷⁵ In Amyraut’s view, then, everything depends on this condition: salvation “is destined equally for all” in so far as they are willing to receive it.²⁷⁶ And yet Amyraut agrees with the Reformed orthodox view of the spiritual enslavement of the fallen will. No fallen human being retains the ability to exercise faith, so that no one is in fact able to fulfil the condition of predestination to salvation.²⁷⁷

The Amyraldian theology therefore introduces a second decree of predestination. Foreseeing that no one could fulfil the necessary condition of predestination to salvation, God elected to grant the gift of faith to some particular human beings, thereby graciously enabling them to meet the condition of faith. There is thus both a general “predestination to salvation” and a particular “predestination to faith,”²⁷⁸ both a conditional decree and an absolute decree; or, in other words, both the universalism of Arminianism and the particularism of Reformed orthodoxy.²⁷⁹ In this way Amyraldism

²⁷⁵ Moïse Amyraut, *Brief traité de la predestination et de ses principales dependances* (Saumur, 1634), 89-90.

²⁷⁶ Amyraut, *Brief traité de la predestination*, 78.

²⁷⁷ J. A. Dorner, *History of Protestant Theology, Particularly in Germany*, trans. G. Robson and S. Taylor (Edinburgh, 1871), 2:26, thus points out that “no one can really be saved” by Amyraut’s formal universalism: “The difference between [Amyraut] and orthodox doctrine consists . . . only in the attempt to preserve the universality of a purpose of grace so far as God’s own nature is concerned, and thus to maintain that love is the very inmost power in God.”

²⁷⁸ Amyraut, *Brief traité de la predestination*, 163.

²⁷⁹ Jonathan H. Rainbow, *The Will of God and the Cross: An Historical and Theological Study of John Calvin’s Doctrine of Limited Redemption* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1990), 185, remarks that Amyraut’s “genius” was to formulate a “synthesis of particularism and universalism in the covenantal terminology” of Reformed orthodoxy.

maintains a sharp focus on the human role in salvation, as well as an emphasis on the ultimate impossibility of salvation apart from the gift of irresistible grace.²⁸⁰

Further, in contrast to the voluntarism of Reformed orthodoxy,²⁸¹ Amyraut develops a faculty psychology closer to that of Arminianism, regarding the intellect as “the governor” of the soul.²⁸² For Amyraut, “[t]he power of choice resides in the understanding, and whatever choice it makes the will must follow.”²⁸³ It is “natural” for the intellect both to perceive and “to love ardently” that which is true and good;²⁸⁴ as in Thomism, then, the intellect possesses a “natural and necessary” (*naturellement et necessairement*) tendency towards the supreme good.²⁸⁵ Original sin has not corrupted this tendency, but has only brought a “thick darkness” upon the intellect so that it fails rightly to perceive and approve of the good.²⁸⁶ As a result, the will is misled and it fails to choose what is good. Thus while Reformed orthodoxy affirmed the direct enslavement of the will, and consequently the need for the direct influence of miraculous

²⁸⁰ On the irresistibility of grace, see Amyraut, *Specimen animadversionum in exercitationes de gratia universali* (Saumur, 1648), 99: “Particular grace, when added to the common, will have such mighty strength, that there will be nothing in human corruption, nothing in the devil, nothing in the lure of sin, nothing, finally, in the devices of the world, whatever they may be, over which it will not triumph magnificently”; cited in Thomas, *Extent of the Atonement*, 206.

²⁸¹ Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 63-64, contrasts the Saumur view with the orthodox tendency to regard the intellect and the will as “autonomous” faculties; the proper contrast, however, is between the voluntarism of the orthodox and the intellectualism of the Saumur theologians. In neither view is there strictly an autonomy of both faculties.

²⁸² Moïse Amyraut, *Sermons sur divers textes de la sainte ecriture* (Saumur, 1653), 269; cited in Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 243n4.

²⁸³ Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 243.

²⁸⁴ Amyraut, *Brief traité de la predestination*, 157.

²⁸⁵ Amyraut, *Sermons sur divers textes*, 274; cited in Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, 245-46n17.

²⁸⁶ Amyraut, *Brief traité de la predestination*, 48, 98-99. See also John Cameron, *An examination of those plausible appearances which seeme most to commend the Romish Church, and to prejudice the Reformed* (Oxford, 1626), 4-5.

regenerative grace, in Amyraldism the will is enslaved only indirectly, in as much as it is governed by a fallen intellect.

This intellectualist account of human freedom, and of the effect of sin on freedom, forms the basis of Amyraut's theology of conversion. Cameron had taught that the will is converted indirectly, through the enlightenment and persuasion (*persuasio*) of the intellect by grace.²⁸⁷ Similarly, for Amyraut, the fallen will is always essentially free. Because of the darkening of the intellect it has lost its "moral" ability to choose the good; but its "natural" ability remains intact as an inherent aspect of human nature.²⁸⁸ Conversion, then, does not require any direct regeneration of the will, but only an enlightenment of the intellect, which in turn directs the will towards God. Thus even in conversion divine grace operates "according to the natural processes of human psychology."²⁸⁹

Amyraldism's insistence on the goodness of God, coupled with its emphasis on human freedom and integrity, resulted in a more circumscribed view of divine freedom than that of Reformed orthodoxy. While Reformed orthodoxy distinguished between the necessary justice by which God condemns sinners and the unecessitated mercy by which God saves sinners, Amyraldism sought to make goodness rather than justice the supreme divine attribute. Cameron thus argues that the exercise of mercy is even more

²⁸⁷ See Fisher, *History of Christian Doctrine*, 342. According to Walter Rex, *Essays on Pierre Bayle and Religious Controversy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), 134, "this particular psychology of the act of faith which places the entire responsibility for conversion upon ... the intellect seems to have been a major factor in the development of liberal Calvinist rationalism."

²⁸⁸ In the eighteenth century, the same distinction between "moral" and "natural" ability was taken up and developed by the American theologian Jonathan Edwards: see Jonathan Edwards, *A careful and strict enquiry into the modern prevailing notions of ... freedom of will* (London, 1762).

²⁸⁹ Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 198. See also the judgment of Seeberg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines*, 2:425, that Amyraut's intellectualist view of conversion sought to make the "process of conversion" "psychologically more intelligible."

necessary than the exercise of justice,²⁹⁰ and Amyraut asserts that all God's actions "operate in strict subordination to his character."²⁹¹ On account of his goodness, God "cannot but love" unfallen human beings; and he is "unable not to love" those who are fallen but repentant.²⁹² In Amyraldian theology, universal grace is therefore grounded in a moral necessity of the divine nature: God is gracious to all because he is by nature inclined to be gracious. Such a conception of the divine nature—the extreme antithesis of the unpredictable "absolute power" of Ockham's God—constitutes a bold attempt to integrate the universalism of Arminianism and the predestinarianism of Reformed orthodoxy, while excluding any possibility of divine arbitrariness.

XI. *De Doctrina Christiana*

The treatise now known as the *De Doctrina Christiana* was discovered, as a "complicated mess of manuscript"²⁹³ among Milton's state papers in 1823.²⁹⁴ The *De*

²⁹⁰ See Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 170, 174, 179-80.

²⁹¹ Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 198.

²⁹² Moïse Amyraut, *Mosis Amyraldi dissertationes theologicae quatuor* (Saumur, 1645), 30-31, 36-39; cited in Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 198.

²⁹³ Roy Flannagan, *John Milton: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 74. For a brief account of the manuscript and its history, see Thomas N. Corns, *John Milton: The Prose Works* (New York: Twayne, 1998), 136-39. The Columbia edition of Milton's works (*CM*) contains the *De Doctrina* in Latin text and an English translation by Charles R. Sumner; and the Yale edition of Milton's works (*CPW*) contains an English translation by John Carey with extensive annotations by Maurice Kelley. The treatise is currently being transcribed and translated for a new critical edition by John K. Hale at the University of Otago, New Zealand.

²⁹⁴ The treatise is generally thought to have been completed some time shortly before 1660. James Holly Hanford, "The Date of Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana*," *Studies in Philology* 17 (1920), 309-19, dates the composition of from 1655 to 1660. William Riley Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 2:1052, guesses that Milton composed the entire *De Doctrina* between May 1655 and May 1658. Although there is no substantive internal evidence for dating the treatise Parker points out that a comment on the former practice of bishops was "almost certainly dictated

Doctrina adopts a highly biblicist theological method, with the author seeking “to cram my pages even to overflowing (*ingerentibus redundare*), with quotations drawn from all parts of the Bible and to leave as little space as possible for my own words.”²⁹⁵ Indeed, the treatise fills its pages with over six thousand biblical quotations, making it more biblicist than perhaps any other work of post-Reformation theology.²⁹⁶ The treatise’s Miltonic authorship has been challenged in recent years,²⁹⁷ and in the present study of *Paradise Lost* I make no assumptions about the authorship of the treatise or about the correspondence between its theology and that of the poem.²⁹⁸ Nevertheless,

before 1660, when the bishops returned to power” (2:1057, referring to *CM* 17:416). But with the number of hands and stages of revision involved, the dating of one statement reveals little about the period of the whole work’s composition. For a discussion of the problems of dating the treatise, see Maurice Kelley, *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton’s De Doctrina Christiana as a Gloss Upon Paradise Lost* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 8-24.

²⁹⁵ *CPW* 6:122; *CM* 14:10. See David Masson, *The Life of John Milton: Narrated in Connexion With the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of His Time*, 7 vols. (Cambridge and London, 1859-94), 6:820-22.

²⁹⁶ For this point, see Michael Bauman, *A Scripture Index to John Milton’s De Doctrina Christiana* (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1989), 9. Bauman’s index lists some 9350 biblical citations in the *De Doctrina*: see 173-79. On biblical citation in the treatise, see also Regina M. Schwartz, “Citation, Authority, and *De Doctrina Christiana*,” in *Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton’s Prose*, ed. David Loewenstein and James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 227-40.

²⁹⁷ For a list of important scholarship in the authorship controversy, see my Introduction, note 6. For recent discussions of the controversy, see Christophe Tournu, *Théologie et politique dans l’œuvre en prose de John Milton* (Villeneuve-d’Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2000), 60-67; and John P. Rumrich, “The Provenance of *De Doctrina Christiana*: A View of the Present State of the Controversy,” in *Milton and the Grounds of Contention*, ed. Mark R. Kelley, Michael Lieb and John T. Shawcross (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 214-33.

²⁹⁸ Nevertheless, in exploring *Paradise Lost*’s theology I will interact frequently with the treatise, especially for illustrative purposes. The parallels which I will note between the treatise’s theology and the theology of the poem support the judgment of Stephen M. Fallon, “Milton’s Arminianism and the Authorship of *De Doctrina Christiana*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 41:2 (1999), 122, that, theologically, the two works “are uncannily close to each other.”

whatever its authorship, the treatise remains a highly significant feature of the theological context within which *Paradise Lost* must be situated.

The *De Doctrina* argues forcefully against the Reformed orthodox notion of an absolute decree.²⁹⁹ It is “beyond dispute” that God “has not absolutely decreed all things” but has rather decreed things “in a non-absolute (*non absoluta*) way.”³⁰⁰ This denial of the absoluteness of predestination is grounded in the treatise’s commitment to human freedom: if the decree were absolute, “we [should] have to jettison entirely all man’s freedom of action and all attempt or desire on his part to do right.”³⁰¹ According to the treatise, God “has not decreed that everything must happen inevitably”,³⁰² if he had done so, or if divine foreknowledge necessitated the future, God would be “the cause (*causam*) and author (*auctorem*) of sin.”³⁰³

In its account of predestination, the *De Doctrina*’s main emphasis is on the universality of grace. Predestination is defined as God’s mercy “ON THE HUMAN RACE,” given “BEFORE THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE WORLD,” when, foreseeing the fall, God planned to display his glorious mercy in Christ.³⁰⁴ The treatise adds, in continuity with Arminianism,³⁰⁵ that God predestined in Christ “THOSE WHO WOULD IN THE FUTURE

²⁹⁹ On the relationship between the treatise and the Reformed orthodox tradition, see William B. Hunter, “The Theological Context of Milton’s *Christian Doctrine*,” in *Achievements of the Left Hand: Essays on the Prose of John Milton*, ed. Michael Lieb and John T. Shawcross (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974), 269-87.

³⁰⁰ *CPW* 6:156; *CM* 14:68.

³⁰¹ *CPW* 6:157.

³⁰² *CPW* 6:164.

³⁰³ *CPW* 6:166; *CM* 14:88.

³⁰⁴ *CPW* 6:168. Here the treatise differentiates its position from that of Reformed orthodoxy, in which God predestines in order to display both his mercy and his justice.

³⁰⁵ There is a clear verbal parallel between the *De Doctrina*’s statement and Arminian formulations. See, for instance, *Articuli Arminiani*, 1; in Schaff, 3:545: God predestined to save “those who ... shall believe ... and shall persevere in this faith.”

BELIEVE AND CONTINUE IN THE FAITH.”³⁰⁶ But in contrast to Arminianism, the *De Doctrina* goes on to argue that God predestined the salvation of all human beings on the condition of faith and perseverance.³⁰⁷ Here the *De Doctrina*’s theology is closer to Amyraldism than to Arminianism: God’s decree is “not particular but only general.”³⁰⁸ “Peter is not predestined or elected as Peter, or John as John, but each only insofar as he believes and persists in his belief.”³⁰⁹ The “general decree of election” thus applies to any specific individual only in so far as that individual believes.³¹⁰

The *De Doctrina*’s most striking departure from the Reformed orthodox and Arminian views of predestination lies in its repudiation of the idea of reprobation.³¹¹ The logical deduction of reprobation from election, common to Reformed orthodoxy and Arminianism alike, is emphatically denied in the treatise.³¹² In Scripture, the term predestination refers “always to election alone.”³¹³ There is no decree of reprobation,³¹⁴

³⁰⁶ CPW 6:168.

³⁰⁷ Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 423, is one of the few scholars to observe that this account of general election differs significantly from Arminianism’s theology of particular election. Similarly, Richard Bradford, *The Complete Critical Guide to John Milton* (London: Routledge, 2001), 44, notes that the *De Doctrina* exhibits “parallels with Arminianism,” but “it goes much further” in its theology of predestination; and Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London: Faber, 1977), 276, suggests that the author of the treatise “knew Dutch Remonstrant theology but press[ed] a good deal further.”

³⁰⁸ CPW 6:176.

³⁰⁹ CPW 6:176.

³¹⁰ See Masson, *The Life of John Milton*, 6:823.

³¹¹ See Paul Chauvet, *La Religion de Milton* (Paris, 1909), 176-77; and Albert J. T. Eisenring, “Milton’s ‘*De Doctrina Christiana*’: An Historical Introduction and Critical Analysis” (Ph.D. diss., University of Fribourg, Switzerland, 1945), 144-48.

³¹² Although the *De Doctrina* is still often described simply as Arminian, Barbara K. Lewalski, “Milton and *De Doctrina Christiana*: Evidences of Authorship,” *Milton Studies* 36 (1998), 216-19, observes that the treatise departs from Arminius’s view of an absolute, double decree, and she rightly suggests that Milton argues “toward his own distinctive position.”

³¹³ CPW 6:169.

³¹⁴ CPW 6:168-75.

and reprobation “is no part of divine predestination,”³¹⁵ for God “desires the salvation of all (*omnium salutem*) and the death of none ... and has omitted nothing which might suffice for the salvation of all (*salutem omnium sufficeret*).”³¹⁶ Admittedly, certain people may be “predestined to destruction ... through their own fault and, in a sense, *per accidens*”;³¹⁷ but such reprobation is determined purely by the individual’s own sin, and it is therefore only a temporary and provisional reprobation, which can always be “rescinded by repentance.”³¹⁸ The treatise thus speaks of the “sufficient grace” which God “bestows on all”:³¹⁹ the only ones who are excluded from salvation are those who consistently “reject and despise the offer of grace sufficient for salvation, until it is too late.”³²⁰ While the election of grace rests solely on the divine will, “the cause of reprobation” must therefore be “man’s sin alone, not God’s will.”³²¹ Reprobation is grounded in the obstinacy of those who refuse God’s grace, “and so is not so much God’s decree as theirs, resulting from their refusal to repent while they have the opportunity.”³²²

Taking up the question of the “matter or object of predestination” (*materia seu obiectum praedestinationis*),³²³ the *De Doctrina* argues, against supralapsarianism,³²⁴

³¹⁵ CPW 6:173.

³¹⁶ CPW 6:174-75; CM 14:102.

³¹⁷ CPW 6:190.

³¹⁸ CPW 6:191-92.

³¹⁹ CPW 6:192-93; CM 14:146.

³²⁰ CPW 6:194. This point is so controversial and so important to the theology of the treatise that is repeated: “no one is excluded by a decree of God from the way of penitence and eternal salvation unless he has rejected and despised the offer of grace until it is too late.”

³²¹ CPW 6:195.

³²² CPW 6:195.

³²³ CM 14:100-1.

³²⁴ Paul R. Sellin, “John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and *De Doctrina Christiana* on Predestination,” *Milton Studies* 34 (1996), 45-60, has argued that in this section the *De Doctrina* presents an “outspokenly supralapsarian” position (51). His argument has been convincingly refuted by Lewalski, “Milton and

that the object of predestination is not creatable humanity (*homo creandus*) but humanity as a spontaneously fallen (*sponte lapsurus*) creature.³²⁵ The fall was foreseen by God but was in no sense decreed by God, so that “man could have avoided falling” if he pleased.³²⁶ Although all post-Reformation theologians agreed that hypothetically the first human beings could have avoided falling, the treatise offers an independent conclusion: predestination itself “was not an absolute decree (*decretum absolutum*) before the fall of man (*ante lapsum hominis*).”³²⁷ The divine decree is thus radically contingent on the free acts of human beings.

In its view of the fallen human will, the theology of the *De Doctrina* is close to Reformed orthodoxy. According to the treatise, original sin involves the “darkening of ... right reason” and the “extinction of righteousness and of the liberty to do good,” so that the human will suffers from a “slavish subjection to sin.”³²⁸ The treatise thus even speaks of “the death of the will.”³²⁹ Corresponding to this view of the enslavement of the will is a theology of universal grace, in which grace liberates the fallen will and enables it to turn to God in faith and repentance.³³⁰ God “gives us the power to act freely, which we have not been able to do since the fall unless called and restored”;³³¹ and through regeneration God “restores man’s natural faculties of faultless under-

De Doctrina Christiana,” 216-21; and Fallon, “Milton’s Arminianism and the Authorship of *De Doctrina Christiana*,” 116-22, 126n43.

³²⁵ *CM* 14:100.

³²⁶ *CPW* 6:174.

³²⁷ *CPW* 6:174.

³²⁸ *CPW* 6:395.

³²⁹ *CPW* 6:395.

³³⁰ See A. S. P. Woodhouse, *The Heavenly Muse: A Preface to Milton*, ed. Hugh MacCallum (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 131.

³³¹ *CPW* 6:457.

standing and of free will more completely than before.”³³² In regeneration, the will is thus restored “to its former liberty.”³³³ Here the *De Doctrina* presents a theology of universal and resistible prevenient grace. The minds and wills of all human beings are partially enlightened and liberated, making it possible for all people to obtain salvation.³³⁴ In regeneration, we are “given the ability to obtain salvation if we desire it”,³³⁵ for even in the work of salvation, “men ... always use their free will.”³³⁶

In the theology of the *De Doctrina*, salvation thus depends on the liberating grace of God, but also on the decisive act of the human will. Regeneration “is not the work of God alone.”³³⁷ The treatise even asserts that some people are “well or moderately disposed or affected” to salvation, and are thus “more suitable, and as it were, more properly disposed for the kingdom of God.”³³⁸ And in a flagrant departure from Reformed orthodox and Arminian theology alike, the treatise adds that “some cause ... should be sought in human nature itself why some men embrace and others reject this divine grace,”³³⁹ and, moreover, that “the gift of reason has been implanted in all, by which they may of themselves resist bad (*pravis*) desires, so that no one can complain of ... the depravity (*pravitatem*) of his own nature.”³⁴⁰

³³² CPW 6:461.

³³³ CPW 6:462.

³³⁴ On the treatise’s theology of universal and resistible grace, see Kelley, *This Great Argument*, 166; and Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton*, 433.

³³⁵ CPW 6:463.

³³⁶ CPW 6:189.

³³⁷ CPW 6:395.

³³⁸ CPW 6:185. The counter-Reformation theology of the Council of Trent similarly speaks of people being “disposed” to obtaining justification, while defining this disposing itself as a work of grace: see *Canones et decreta Concilii Tridentini*, 6.4; in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, 2 vols. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990).

³³⁹ CPW 6:186.

³⁴⁰ CM 14:130-31.

Underlying the theology of the *De Doctrina*, then, is a deep commitment to the idea of freedom. The treatise itself cannot accurately be said to belong to any specific theological tradition, but it draws eclectically on various concepts and traditions, and presses toward its own unique theological position.

The reading of *Paradise Lost* in the chapters that follow is situated within these complex and variegated historical contexts. The above account of the history of the theology of freedom has necessarily been summary and concise; and in engaging with the theology of *Paradise Lost* I will explore pertinent features of the poem's theological context in greater detail. Having set the stage for an engagement with *Paradise Lost's* theology, I will now seek to follow the complex portrayal of freedom as it unfolds throughout the poem's narrative.

CHAPTER THREE

The Satanic Theology of Freedom

It is fitting that an investigation of the theology of *Paradise Lost* should begin where the epic itself begins: in hell. As a stated attempt to justify the ways of God to men, *Paradise Lost* is prejudiced in God's favour from the outset; but the poem also allows the need for such a justification of God to emerge profoundly from the very start.

Readers of the poem first meet God not directly, but indirectly, through the medium of theology—that is, they get to know what God is like through hearing others speak about him. And in the poem's first two books, readers hear not the theologising of saints and angels, but the persuasive theological rhetoric of Satan and his fallen followers, all of whom can lay claim to first-hand knowledge of what God is like. Indeed, the strength of "Satanist" readings of *Paradise Lost* derives, in part, from the mere fact that Satan gets the first word in the poem.¹ "It is from Hell . . . that we get our first ideas about Heaven

¹ On Satanist readings of the poem, see R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Lucifer and Prometheus: A Study of Milton's Satan* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), 1-26; and Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*

in the poem.”² This does not of course mean, as Marjorie Hope Nicolson has rather mischievously suggested, that Satanist critics have never read beyond the epic’s first two books.³ Rather, such critics have been acutely sensitive to the fact that, from the mouths of fallen angels—Satanic theologians—*Paradise Lost* really does call into question the goodness of God, and only then does it attempt to justify it.⁴

Within the overall narrative structure of *Paradise Lost*, the first two books serve two basic purposes: they paint the pre-temporal backdrop to the fall of Adam and Eve; and they depict the complex reality of evil, a reality which is sometimes alluring, sometimes repulsive, but always intensely interesting. And within the structure of the poem’s theodicy, the most important function of Books 1 and 2 is to offer an uncompromising portrayal of the kind of God whom one might feel the need to justify. Such a need simply might not emerge if the poem were to start, as Genesis does, with an account of creation, or if it were to start, *in medias res*, in the prelapsarian paradise. Instead, readers of *Paradise Lost* immediately hear about God from the perspective of fallen angels. In this way, they encounter a God whose character is at once called into question, and whose goodness therefore cannot simply be taken for granted.⁵

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 64-76. See also John Carey, “Milton’s Satan,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. Dennis R. Danielson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 160-74.

² Michael Wilding, *Milton’s Paradise Lost* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1969), 44.

³ Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *John Milton: A Reader’s Guide to His Poetry* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1964), 186.

⁴ In this respect, there is truth in the pointed remark of Douglas Bush, *Paradise Lost in Our Time: Some Comments* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1957), 43: “A good many modern critics, in their comments on Milton’s Deity, only echo the most unreliable of theologians, Satan.”

⁵ John S. Diekhoff, *Milton’s Paradise Lost: A Commentary on the Argument* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), 82-83, thinks that the argument of *Paradise Lost* is “circular,” since the goodness of God is simply assumed at the outset, “not merely as an hypothesis to be tested, but as a premise on which to build an argument.” But this interpretation of the poem’s theodicy overlooks one of the

I. Satan as Heretic

It is uncontroversial to assume that Satan should not be trusted, and to assert that most readers of *Paradise Lost* will make this assumption, even if they have to be taught to make it through the recurring interposition of narratorial comment.⁶ But the fact that Satan should not be trusted when he speaks of God does not mean that his portrayal of God cannot be taken seriously, or that it should be regarded as merely comical or absurd. Satan is not an “ass”;⁷ and there is no need to perform, out of some quasi-religious anxiety, what William Empson called “the modern duty of catching Satan out wherever possible.”⁸

Satan’s portrayal of God in fact constitutes a highly important aspect of the theology of *Paradise Lost*.⁹ In a discussion of the Genesis fall-story, Karl Barth has facetiously but perceptively remarked that the serpent is the world’s first theologian: the serpent’s speech, beginning with the question, “Yea, hath God said . . .” is “the original” of “all bad theology.”¹⁰ The attribution of “bad theology” to Satan has been common in Christian tradition. Already in the early centuries of Christianity, as Neil Forsyth notes, Satan began to serve “a vital theological function”: “As the prince of error and the

basic narrative functions of the first two books: namely, not to assume the goodness of God, but to call it in question.

⁶ On the didactic role of narratorial interposition, see Stanley E. Fish, *Surprised By Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 1-56; and Anne Davidson Ferry, *Milton’s Epic Voice: The Narrator in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 44-66.

⁷ As suggested by S. Musgrove, “Is the Devil an Ass?” *Review of English Studies* 21 (1945), 302-15.

⁸ William Empson, *Milton’s God* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), 74.

⁹ In a different connection, Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, 17, rightly observes that Satan “has an extremely important role to play in the philosophical or theological structure of *Paradise Lost*.”

¹⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-77), 4/1, 420. The serpent’s speech is found in Genesis 3:1.

father of lies, he became the arch-heretic, the name under which rival teachers were denounced.”¹¹ Justin Martyr and Irenaeus attributed all heresies to Satanic influence,¹² while Tertullian ascribed heretical interpretations of Scripture to “the devil, of course, to whom pertain those wiles to pervert the truth.”¹³ Thus heretics were viewed as “apostates, following the one great and original Apostate,” Satan.¹⁴ According to Augustine, too, heresies within the church were inspired by the devil;¹⁵ and Luther regarded the temptation to heresy as central to Satan’s work.¹⁶ Such identifications of Satan as the instigator of theological error and controversy persisted also in the post-Reformation era, not least among English Protestants.¹⁷ Even into the eighteenth century, Satan was still being described by English writers as “the Arch-Heretic.”¹⁸ In an account of a seventeenth-century exorcism, Samuel Clarke describes the way the devil “quoted many scriptures out of the Old and New Testament, both in Hebrew and Greek, cavilled and played the critick, and backed his allegations with sayings out of the fathers.” In this account, Satan is portrayed as a subtle theologian, a master of

¹¹ Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 310. Forsyth points out that “[t]he association of Satan with heresy takes its cue from various New Testament texts” (311-14).

¹² Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 58; in *ANF* 1; and Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.21; in *ANF* 1. See also the discussion of Irenaeus in Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*, 334-35.

¹³ Tertullian, *De praescriptionibus adversus haereticos*, 40; in *PL* 2 and *ANF* 3. See also Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeam*, 1; in *PL* 2 and *ANF* 3.

¹⁴ Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, 45.

¹⁵ Augustine, *De civitate Dei contra paganos*, 18.51; in *PL* 41 and *NPNF* 2.

¹⁶ See the comment on Luther in Oldridge, “Protestant Conceptions of the Devil in Early Stuart England,” 234: “For Luther, Satan’s primary work in the world was to create illusions in the mind, ‘printing in the heart a false opinion of Christ and against Christ.’ It was his ceaseless mission to tempt people into heresy by infecting their minds with superstitious thoughts.”

¹⁷ See Michael P. Winship, *Making Heretics: Militant Protestantism and Free Grace in Massachusetts, 1636-1641* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 106-7.

¹⁸ John Taylor, *A narrative of Mr. Joseph Rawson’s case* (London, 1742), 74.

“sophistry.”¹⁹ In more academic seventeenth-century works, Archbishop Ussher speaks of “the Devils sophistry,”²⁰ while John Downham adduces the serpent’s “Equivocations and Sophisticall Elenches” as proof that Satan is “the father” of all subtle scholasticism²¹—he is, in other words, the first bad theologian, and the author of all ensuing bad theology.

Similarly, in *Paradise Lost*, Satan is the first theologian (____o_)—the first to speak words (____) concerning God (____). And as the first theologian, Satan is also the first heretic—the first to use bad theology as an instrument of blasphemy; or, as the narrative voice says, the “Artificer of fraud,” and “the first / That practis’d falshood under saintly shew” (4.121-22).²² When Satan speaks about God he does, of course,

¹⁹ Samuel Clarke, *A generall martyrologie ... whereunto are added, The lives of sundry modern divines* (London, 1651), 458-61.

²⁰ James Ussher, *A body of divinitie, or the summe and substance of Christian religion* (London, 1653), 130.

²¹ John Downham, *The summe of sacred divinitie first briefly and methodically propounded, and then more largely and cleerly handled and explained* (London, 1620), 235.

²² The fact that in *Paradise Lost* Satan is a heretical theologian has often been noted, although it has not yet been explored in detail. William B. Hunter, “The Heresies of Satan,” in *Th’ Upright Heart and Pure: Essays on John Milton Commemorating the Tercentenary of the Publication of Paradise Lost*, ed. Peter A. Fiore (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1967), 25-34, has interpreted Satan as an anti-trinitarian heretic; and Paul M. Zall, “Heresies, Milton’s,” in *A Milton Encyclopedia*, ed. William B. Hunter, 9 vols. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1978-83), 3:175, notes that Milton’s portrayal of Satan employs “heresies for dramatic purposes.” Alastair Fowler speaks of Satan’s “bad” theology (Fowler, 444); while Bush, *Paradise Lost in Our Time*, 43, speaks of Satan’s “unreliable” theology. In his recent study of Milton’s Satan, *The Satanic Epic*, Neil Forsyth describes Satan as “heretic and hater” (1), and argues that in *Paradise Lost* Satan is a dramatisation of the fact that Christianity is “a religion of controversy” in which fundamental doctrines arise “from the quarrel with ... heresy” (74). In a different, connection, Edward Le Comte, *Milton Re-Viewed: Ten Essays* (New York: Garland, 1991), ch. 3, has explored the portrayal of Satan as heretic in *Paradise Regained*. And while not specifically speaking of Satan as a heretic, Michael Bryson, *The Tyranny of Heaven: Milton’s Rejection of God as King* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), has raised the important question: “Why does Milton write his Satan to sound so much like Calvin?” (107). Bryson’s answer is that in *Paradise Lost* the political arguments of Protestant theologians are placed in the mouth of Satan

express himself in predominantly political terms; nevertheless, he also frequently employs the language of post-Reformation theological controversy, so that it is appropriate to regard Satan not only as a political orator but also as a theologian. Indeed, Satan's chronologically earliest public speeches are markedly theological in tone and content. He speaks of the "Decree" of God (5.774), the freedom of the angels (5.787-92), and the fact that "Orders and Degrees" among diverse beings cohere with the intrinsic "liberty" of those beings (5.792-93). And when Abdiel points out that God created the angels through the agency of the Son, Satan responds like a cunning scholastic theologian:

That we were formd then saist thou? and the work
Of secondarie hands, by task transferrd
From Father to his Son? strange point and new!
Doctrin which we would know whence learnt... (5.853-56)

Here Satan draws on the assumption, common in post-Reformation theology, that antiquity is a sign of truth and novelty a sign of error. In the words of John Cameron, "Antiquity ... is Divine and venerable; novelty, on the other side, damnable and devillish."²³ Ironically, Satan claims to be wary of unproven doctrinal innovations even while himself becoming the first theological innovator, the first heretic to deny traditional heavenly "Doctrin."

In exploring the theology of *Paradise Lost*, due attention must be given to the heretical "Doctrin" propounded by Satan and his fallen hosts. Nothing could be clearer

as an implicit critique of such "Protestant rhetoric" (101), and as a condemnation of "the image of God that such 'dancing divines' promulgate through their theological and political ideas" (110).

²³ John Cameron, *An examination of those plausible appearances which seeme most to commend the Romish Church, and to prejudice the Reformed* (Oxford, 1626), 58. This view of antiquity and novelty was most often invoked, as in the present instance, in Catholic-Protestant debate, with each party claiming its correspondence to Christian antiquity.

in the first two books than the fallen angels' preoccupation, even obsession, with God. Again and again, in different ways, the fallen angels theologise: they talk about God. In the discussion that follows, I will argue that in particular this "Satanic theology" takes the form of a parodic exaggeration of Calvinism, in which God appears as an ethically arbitrary tyrant whose absolute power undermines both his own goodness and the freedom of his creatures. The God of this Satanic theology, I will argue, is a projection of the Satanic consciousness, and as such he is virtually indistinguishable from the devil. This Satanic theology provides a heretical foil against which the epic then proceeds, from Book 3 onwards, to offer its own positive theological account of the goodness of God.²⁴

II. Divine Tyranny

Throughout the first two books of *Paradise Lost* the fallen angels repeatedly describe God's omnipotence as a morally indifferent exercise of power which amounts to a kind of demonic tyranny. This view of God parodies Calvinist theology, and presents a quasi-Calvinist Satanic theology in which creaturely freedom is negated and the divine goodness is undermined by absolute sovereignty.

²⁴ Arthur Sewell, *A Study in Milton's Christian Doctrine* (London, 1939), 134-40, argues that *Paradise Lost* presents a Calvinist view of divine sovereignty in Books 1 and 2, and a milder view throughout the remainder of the poem. Sewell sees this as evidence that Milton's theological thought had developed between the writing of the first two books and the rest of the epic. Although Sewell is right to notice the Calvinist portrayal of God in Books 1 and 2, his reading fails to take account of the fact that God himself does not enter the poem until Book 3, so that the reader first of all learns about God only from Satan and his followers. For this reason it is better to consider Books 1 and 2 as presenting Satan's Calvinism, rather than Milton's. The contrast between the theology of Books 1 and 2 and the theology of Book 3, then, is not a contrast between an earlier and later Milton, but between Satanic theology and heavenly theology, between error and truth.

In the early lines of Book 1, the narrative voice allows Satan's questioning of creaturely freedom and divine goodness to arise, by designating God only with titles such as "Monarchy" (1.42), "Almighty Power" (1.44), and "Eternal Justice" (1.70), and with adjectives like "Omnipotent" (1.49). These titles and descriptions cohere with the poem's account of God in Book 3 and elsewhere,²⁵ but the one-sided emphasis on such terms at the start of the narration, and the corresponding lack of any mention of divine "Grace" (3.142), "love" (3.267), or "goodness" (12.469), set the stage for the Satanic attempt to undermine God's goodness throughout the first major section of the epic.

The portrayal of God as an omnipotent tyrant begins almost as soon as the fallen angels begin to speak, in the opening moments of *Paradise Lost*. Breaking the "horrid silence" of hell (1.83), Satan acknowledges God's supreme power. God is the "Potent Victor" (1.95), "the Conquerour" (1.323) and "Monarch" (1.638), who by the "force" of his "dire Arms" (1.94) has triumphed over his rebellious subjects. Beelzebub, too, calls God "our Conquerour" (1.143), and "th' Omnipotent" (1.273). But the fallen angels acknowledge God's power only in order profoundly to undermine the divine goodness.²⁶ According to Satan, God is the "Potent Victor" who "in his rage" will "inflict" misery and ruin on his foes (1.95-96). Hell is thus described as a "dungeon" (2.317) in which God will hold his enemies "In strictest bondage" (2.321). God is full of "vengeful ire" (1.148), willing to grant his enemies continuing existence only in order to force them to bear greater suffering, and thus to satisfy his own lust for revenge:

²⁵ The most consistent title the Father in the poem is simply "th' Almighty." John Bradshaw, *A Concordance to the Poetical Works of John Milton* (New York, 1894), 9, lists 35 instances of "almighty," in most of which the term is used as a proper title for God.

²⁶ As Dennis R. Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 116, argues in a different connection, Satan reveals "only part of the truth," in order "to raise questions concerning the goodness of God."

But what if hee our Conquerour (whom I now
 Of force believe Almighty, since no less
 Then such could have orepow'rd such force as ours)
 Have left us this our spirit and strength intire
 Strongly to suffer and support our pains,
 That we may so suffice his vengeful ire. (1.143-48)

Indeed, God is said to experience a sadistic “excess of joy” in subduing and oppressing his enemies (1.123). He is “the Torturer” (2.64). Later, Belial parodies the theological idea of salvation by claiming that God’s “anger saves” his foes, only in order to extend their punishment and misery (2.158-59).²⁷

This God whom the fallen angels describe—a sadistic deity who takes joy in torturing his subjects—has been vigorously condemned by William Empson.²⁸ But as Michael Wilding has pointed out, the hell of *Paradise Lost* “is not well furnished with tortures”,²⁹ only from the mouths of the fallen angels themselves does the reader hear that God is a vengeful torturer. In fact, in contrast to traditional portrayals of hell,³⁰ the hell of *Paradise Lost* is characterised by silence and absence; Matthew Steggle has described this as “Milton’s almost unique presentation of hell.”³¹ One need only com-

²⁷ Similarly, commenting on Satan’s Mount Niphates speech, Keith W. F. Stavely, “Satan and Arminianism in *Paradise Lost*,” *Milton Studies* 25 (1989), 135, notes that Satan “deludes himself with the convenient fiction that God is a grim Calvinist ‘punisher’ who would never grant pardon even if Satan should be so untrue to himself as to beg for it.”

²⁸ Empson, *Milton’s God*.

²⁹ Wilding, *Milton’s Paradise Lost*, 40. Wilding observes that the poem’s emphasis “is not on God’s vengeance ... but on the goodness God will produce from evil.”

³⁰ For a characteristic example, see the Reformed orthodox portrayal of hell in Isaac Ambrose, *The compleat works of that eminent minister of God’s word, Mr. Isaac Ambrose* (London, 1701), 284, in which the writer depicts the “furious despair,” the “horror of mind,” the “tearing [of] hair and gnashing of teeth,” and the “wailing, weeping, roaring, yelling” of the damned—which tortures not only fill hell, but also overflow into “heaven and earth.”

³¹ Matthew Steggle, “*Paradise Lost* and the Acoustics of Hell,” *Early Modern Literary Studies* 7:1 (2001), 13 <<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/07-1/stegmil2.htm>>.

pare Milton's hell with the horrors that surround Lucifer in Dante's *Inferno*,³² or with the depictions of hell in English Renaissance tragedies, to realise how little the God of *Paradise Lost* is truly a "Torturer." In Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* (1592), for instance, an array of tortures is invoked in the portrayal of hell:

deepest hell,
Where bloody furies shakes their whips of steele,
And poor Ixion turns an endless wheele:
Where usurers are chok'd with melting gold,
And wantons are embrac'd with ugly snakes,
And murderers groan with never-killing wounds,
And perjur'd wights scalded in boiling lead,
And all foul sins with torments overwhelm'd.³³

If there is a God behind these hellish torments, he might justly be described as a torturer, for he has—rather intimately, one might say—designed specific tortures perfectly adapted to each individual sufferer. The Reformed orthodox theologian Ezekiel Hopkins similarly writes that "God doth use several Instruments of Torture in Hell";³⁴ while Isaac Ambrose speaks of hell's "torments ... past imagination."³⁵ But in contrast, within the silent void of hell in *Paradise Lost* the fallen angels are free to build a palace, to conduct parliamentary debate, and even to create music. Their hell is peculiarly characterised by a *lack* of torture.³⁶ Further, Satan himself acknowledges that

³² See Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, 34; in *The Divine Comedy*, ed. and trans. Charles S. Singleton, 6 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970-75), 1:360-69.

³³ Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, ed. Philip Edwards (London: Methuen, 1959), 1.1.64-71. In citing *The Spanish Tragedy* in this connection, I have followed Steggle, "*Paradise Lost* and the Acoustics of Hell," n9.

³⁴ Ezekiel Hopkins, *The works of the Right Reverend and learned Ezekiel Hopkins* (London, 1701), 406.

³⁵ Ambrose, *Compleat works*, 284.

³⁶ A. J. A. Waldock, "*Paradise Lost*" and *Its Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 92-96, has argued that this lack of torture is a flaw in *Paradise Lost*'s portrayal of hell. According to Waldock, Milton was trying "to accomplish two incompatible things at the same time": to present both a hell of torture, and a dramatically interesting hell (94). Waldock is right to observe that the punish-

the hell he inhabits is not so much a region created by God as a creation of his own “mind” (1.253-55). Hell is in fact Satan’s own self-confinement and self-torture, not merely a location in which he is subjected to divine tortures: “Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell” (4.75).³⁷ Wilding is right, then, to remark that the God of vengeance and torture is really “the God the devils ‘create’ for us in their comments.”³⁸

This God whom the fallen angels “create” is a grim parody of the Calvinist deity, an omnipotent being who arbitrarily exercises absolute power (*potentia absoluta*).³⁹ As the one who “holds the Tyranny of Heav’n” (1.124), God is “Heav’ns high Arbitrator,” reigning by sheer “strength” (2.359-60). Beelzebub’s description of God as “Arbitrator”⁴⁰ refers to God’s deciding victory in war but also, and more importantly, calls up the image of a Calvinistic God who ordains the fates of others “by the mere pleasure of his own will.”⁴¹ Earlier in the same speech, Beelzebub had spoken of the

ment of hell is “meagre,” that Books 1 and 2 show “how little the rebels are inconvenienced by their situation” (93), and, indeed, that “the chief un-hell-like characteristic of Milton’s Hell is simply the atmosphere of busy planning, of life nearly as lively as ever, of energies unquenched” (94). But Waldock’s argument that these characteristics conflict with the torturous hell that Milton was trying to create rests on the mistaken assumption that Milton wanted simply to portray the hell of traditional theology and of Dante’s *Inferno* (92-93), and that only such a hell could be “legitimate” in *Paradise Lost* (94). On the contrary, instead of contrasting the hell Milton *actually* created with the hell he allegedly *wanted* to create, it is more illuminating to contrast the hell the devils *actually* inhabit with the hell they *claim* to inhabit.

³⁷ Thus I think that Grant McColley, “*Paradise Lost*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 32:4 (1939), 206, is mistaken to view this self-hell concept simply as an intensification of Satan’s tortures. According to McColley, the fallen angels undergo “perpetual torture” because they “always carr[y] hell and its excruciating tortures within them.”

³⁸ Wilding, *Milton’s Paradise Lost*, 40.

³⁹ On the theological concept of absolute power, see Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (1983; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 30-56.

⁴⁰ For this distinction, see *OED* “arbitrator,” 1 and 3.

⁴¹ This formula was frequently used by Reformed orthodox writers. See for example Johannes Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae*; in *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. John W. Beardslee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 1.3.3; Lucas Trelcatius, *A briefe institution of the*

“arbitrary punishment / Inflicted” on God’s foes (2.334). God’s triumph over the rebel angels is not conceived of as ethically motivated, but as “arbitrary,” and in the same way God himself is regarded as nothing other than a supreme “Arbitrator” who inflicts his will on those who lack the power to resist. Reformed orthodoxy always faced the risk of portraying God in such terms of absolute power, a “power before whose completely inscrutable arbitrariness man has no choice but to bend.”⁴² Calvin had sought explicitly to distance his own theology from any notion of “arbitrary power”⁴³ which would suggest that God is “a tyrant” who “acts without a reason” and who resolves “to do what he pleases, not by justice, but through caprice.”⁴⁴ But such an arbitrary “tyrant” was exactly the God whom Arminian theologians claimed to find in Reformed orthodoxy. The charge of moral arbitrariness was consistently brought against the Reformed conception of divine sovereignty, in which God predestines all things on the sole basis of “his meere pleasure.”⁴⁵ While Reformed orthodox

common places of sacred divinitie (London, 1610), 82; and David Dickson, *Truths victory over error* (Edinburgh, 1684), 32-37.

⁴² G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, trans. Hugo Bekker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 53. The importance of the problem of arbitrariness in Reformed theology is indicated by the extent of Berkouwer’s discussion of it: the lengthiest chapter in this important study of the doctrine of election and its history is devoted to “Election and Arbitrariness” (53-101).

⁴³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (Edinburgh, 1849), 366. On Calvin’s view of *potentia absoluta*, see David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 40-52.

⁴⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, trans. William Pringle, 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1850), 2:152. Nevertheless, on Calvin’s position, see the comment of A. König, “Providence, Sin and Human Freedom: On Different Concepts of Human Freedom,” in *Freedom*, ed. A. van Egmond and D. van Keulen, *Studies in Reformed Theology 1* (Baarn: Callenbach, 1996), 183: “Calvin ... concedes that God is responsible for sin and evil, and only rejects that he is *indictable* or *blameable*, and what he offers as a solution to this problem is: we cannot understand it.”

⁴⁵ William Perkins, *The workes of that famous and worthie minister of Christ, in the Universitie of Cambridge, M. W. Perkins*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1612-19), 1:111.

theologians did not concede that their view entailed divine arbitrariness,⁴⁶ the God portrayed by Beelzebub fully fits the description of the God depicted in the rhetoric of seventeenth-century anti-Calvinist polemics.⁴⁷ He is a being of naked will, of ethically arbitrary power, the exercise of which constitutes a cosmic and all-inclusive “tyranny.”⁴⁸

The accusation that God’s exercise of power is ethically arbitrary is further advanced by Satan’s claim that God is himself directly responsible for the fall of the angels: God deceitfully “conceald” his true strength, and in this way “tempted our attempt, and wrought our fall” (1.641-42). As Stephen Fallon observes, Satan and his followers invoke “an infernal version of the Calvinist doctrine of absolute predestination, blaming God for their choices, and suggesting that the system was rigged. For the devils, God, like the Calvinist deity . . . is the author of sin.”⁴⁹ This deity of whom the fallen angels speak is thus both cause and punisher of sin; he rules by arbitrary omnipotence, like a Nietzschean tyrant whose ethically arbitrary “will to power” subdues and controls those who are weaker. Or, more precisely, he is a parodic,

⁴⁶ There were, however, isolated exceptions. For example, in discussing predestination, John Edwards, *Veritas redux: Evangelical truths restored*, 2 vols. (London, 1707), 1:177, writes: “It is from the mere Arbitrary Will of God that he chose those rather than these, and rejected these rather than those.”

⁴⁷ In this connection, the remark of David Loewenstein, *Milton: Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 29, is pertinent: the theodicy of *Paradise Lost* is Milton’s attempt “to differentiate his God from the Calvinist God of arbitrary power.”

⁴⁸ In modern theology, Karl Barth has argued that absolute power is by definition demonic power. See for example Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas and Thomas Wieser (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), 71: “God’s freedom is not merely unlimited possibility or formal majesty and omnipotence, that is to say empty, naked sovereignty. . . . God Himself, if conceived of as unconditioned power, would be a demon and as such His own prisoner.”

⁴⁹ Stephen M. Fallon, “*Paradise Lost* in Intellectual History,” in *A Companion to Milton*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 333.

Satanic version of the Calvinist God, standing in absolute control over his creatures, causing sin and then condemning the sinner.⁵⁰

Beelzebub further speculates whether God might have preserved the fallen angels' existence not simply as a means to torture, but also so that God's enemies might

do him mightier service as his thralls
By right of Warr, what e're his business be,
Here in the heart of Hell to work in Fire,
Or do his Errands in the gloomy Deep. (1.149-52)

It is strange that commentators like Verity, Hughes and Fowler should gloss these lines with a reference to the *De Doctrina Christiana*'s assertion that the evil angels are sometimes permitted "to carry out God's judgments"⁵¹—as though here the devils of *Paradise Lost* are offering a pious theological reflection on divine providence. Rather Beelzebub's speculation involves a characteristically perverse and Satanic portrayal of God. Beelzebub claims that hell is part of God's "Empire" (2.327); he portrays God as a distant monarch whose business occasionally requires the running of shady errands by sinister servants. In a similar way, employing typical Reformed orthodox rhetoric, Sin informs her offspring and its father, Satan, that they are "ordaind" God's "drudge[s]," and that they exist only "to execute / What e're his wrauth, which he calls Justice, bids" (2.732-33). According to Sin, the divine wrath is nothing other than an arbitrary exercise of superior power, which God euphemistically "calls Justice." Further, Sin emphasises the evil nature of God's will with her pun on "execute": God's darker

⁵⁰ That the God of Calvinism was the "cause of evil" (*causa mali*) or the "author of evil" (*auctor mali*) was one of the most persistent criticisms brought against Reformed orthodoxy. For a discussion of the Reformed response, see Heppe, 276-80.

⁵¹ Verity, 374; Hughes, 148; and Fowler, 53; citing *CPW* 6:348. Similarly, according to Downham, *The summe of sacred divinitie*, 103, God carries out his will "also in *Hell*: for even the *Devils* themselves, struggle they never so much, are forced to be subject to him, and to runne at his commandment."

subjects serve as his executioners, and in this way they execute his angry judgments. These accounts, in which evil characters claim to be slaves or servants of God's sovereign "Empire," are vivid theological expressions of the quasi-Calvinist Satanic theology. The deity of this Satanic theology thus parodies the God of Reformed orthodoxy who controls "[b]oth good and evil" alike.⁵² He is, in short, a distinctly devilish deity.

III. Fatalism

The Satanic theology of the fallen angels continues to find expression throughout the council of Pandemonium. Moloch's despairing view is, in the words of Belial, that "we are decreed, / Reserv'd and destind to Eternal woe" (2.160-61). Each of these verbs—most importantly, "decreed"—is drawn from the standard rhetoric of Reformed orthodox theology.⁵³ The particular kind of predestination to which Moloch refers is the Reformed orthodox decree of reprobation (*reprobatio*), according to which God "hath determined to reject certaine men unto eternall destruction, and miserie."⁵⁴ Disagreeing with Moloch, Belial does not attempt to refute Moloch's Calvinism, but only the

⁵² Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae*, 1.6.1. See also Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992-97), 1.7.1-35.

⁵³ On the term "decree," see the discussion and citations in Heppe, 133-49; and Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2/1, 519-22. The term was confessionally sanctioned in the Thirty-nine Articles, 17 (Schaff, 3:497); the Irish Articles of Religion, section entitled "Of God's Eternal Decree and Predestination" (Schaff, 3:528); and above all the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3 (Schaff, 3:608). Like the systematic theologies of Wollebius and most other Reformed orthodox writers, the *De Doctrina Christiana* includes an early chapter *de divino decreto* (CM 14:62).

⁵⁴ Perkins, *Workes*, 1:106.

despairing course of action which he proposes. Belial himself is no less a theological fatalist, when he claims:

Fate inevitable
Subdues us, and Omnipotent Decree,
The Victors will. (2.197-99)

Reformed orthodox theologians insisted that their predestinarianism did not amount to fatalism;⁵⁵ but Arminian writers consistently accused Reformed orthodoxy of an “iron” necessity,⁵⁶ an “absolute necessity,”⁵⁷ and a “fatal necessity.”⁵⁸ Thus in defence against such criticisms, the Reformed theologian Francis Turretin seeks to free “our doctrine” from “the calumnies” of those who “continually oppose to it the tables of the fates and the fatal and Stoical necessity of all things and events.”⁵⁹ In *Paradise Lost*, Belial’s expression draws on the admittedly distorted rhetoric of such Arminian criticisms; the ancient pagan concept of “Fate inevitable” and the Reformed concept of an “Omnipotent Decree” are linked and virtually equated. This theological fatalism is

⁵⁵ See for example Turretin, *Institutes*, 6.2.1-7; and, earlier, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 1.16.8. Calvin’s successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza, had leaned further towards necessitarianism: see Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 81, 87-89.

⁵⁶ Simon Episcopius, *The confession or declaration of the ministers or pastors which in the United Provinces are called Remonstrants, concerning the chief points of Christian religion* (London, 1676), 115-16.

⁵⁷ John Goodwin, *Confidence dismantled* (London, 1651), 10.

⁵⁸ John Sharp, *Fifteen sermons preached on several occasions* (London, 1701), 291. For the accusation of Stoic fatalism, see also Jacobus Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols, 3 vols. (1825-75; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 3:358-88.

⁵⁹ Turretin, *Institutes*, 6.2.1. Similarly, the Reformed theologian John Edwards, *Theologia reformata, or the body and substance of the Christian religion* (London, 1713), iv, insists that no Calvinists “hold that the Decrees lay any Force or Necessity on any Man.”

attributed, in typical Reformed language, to the divine “will.”⁶⁰ And like all the fallen angels, Belial understands this divine will purely in terms of power. As the stronger party, the “Victor,” God’s prerogative is to “Subdue” those who are weaker than himself. The “Decree” of his “will” is an exercise of sheer power.

During the consult, Moloch speaks of the “abhorred Deep” (2.87) of hell as “this dark opprobrious Den of shame, / The Prison of his Tyranny” (2.58-59). Moloch claims that hell is a confining prison, a sphere in which all freedom is negated. Further, like Beelzebub, who claims that the fallen angels are “determined” (2.330), Moloch speaks of the “compulsion” with which the rebelling spirits “sank thus low” into hell (2.80-81), so that they are now no more than slaves of divine wrath (2.90-92). Moloch’s reference to “compulsion” here is of special theological significance. The notion that creatures are forcibly compelled by the divine will constitutes the most extreme form of necessitarianism. Even some of the ancient fatalists insisted that the will is not compelled. Cicero affirmed the general control of fate, but nevertheless claimed that the free will is not subject to fate;⁶¹ and fundamental to the Stoic ethic was the conviction that the individual disposition and will remain free vis-à-vis the control of fate.⁶² Reformed orthodox theologians, always sensitive to accusations of fatalism, insisted that their understanding of the sovereignty of God did not entail a compulsion (*coactio*) of creaturely choice. Thus John Flavel writes that “Compulsion” is “none of God’s Way

⁶⁰ For a comparable Reformed orthodox reference to the divine “will,” see the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3.1 (Schaff, 3:608): “God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.”

⁶¹ Cicero, *De fato*, 17-18; in Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Oratore; De Fato; Paradoxa Stoicorum; De Partitione Oratoria* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942). Cicero opposes this view to the all-inclusive fatalism of Democritus, Heraclitus, Empedocles and Aristotle.

⁶² See F. H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* (New York: Norton, 1975), 28-68.

and Method,”⁶³ while John Owen insists that “no violence or compulsion is offered unto the will” of human beings.⁶⁴ When Moloch describes God as a tyrant who compels, constrains and enslaves those less powerful than himself, he therefore expresses a grotesquely parodied quasi-Calvinism—a theology in which creaturely freedom is utterly negated by the tyrannical rule of the divine will.

The idea of divine compulsion is also expressed by Mammon, who contemplates the Origenistic doctrine that God will provide grace even for the fallen angels:⁶⁵

Suppose he should relent
And publish Grace to all, on promise made
Of new Subjection; with what eyes could we
Stand in his presence humble, and receive
Strict Laws impos'd, to celebrate his Throne
With warbl'd Hymns, and to his Godhead sing
Forc't Halleluiah's (2.237-43)

Mammon thus decides that the “Hard liberty” of hell is to be preferred over the “easie yoke / Of servil Pomp” in heaven (2.255-57). Mammon’s radical misunderstanding (or deliberate perversion) of “Grace” is revealing. According to post-Reformation theology, divine grace effects a change of heart which allows the recipient of grace to come

⁶³ John Flavel, *The whole works of the Reverend Mr. John Flavel*, 2 vols. (London, 1701), 1:272.

⁶⁴ John Owen, *Pneumatologia: or, A discourse concerning the Holy Spirit*, 2 vols. (Glasgow, 1791), 1:493-94.

⁶⁵ See Origen, *De principiis*, 3.6.5; in *ANF* 4. See also the discussion of J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 473-74; and the detailed account of C. A. Patrides, “The Salvation of Satan,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28:4 (1967), 467-78. Stavelly, “Satan and Arminianism in *Paradise Lost*,” 125-39, argues that grace is in fact offered to and then rejected by Satan at several points in the poem. Satan thus inhabits “an Arminian universe” (136) in which he is free to accept or to refuse redeeming grace. Whether or not *Paradise Lost* does contain any such Origenistic-Arminian idea, Stavelly’s underlying thesis is certainly correct: the poem’s universe “is not Calvinistic with respect to Satan and Arminian with respect to everyone else” (125). But, more importantly, if the poem’s universe *seems* Calvinistic with respect to Satan, it is only because Satan himself is a quasi-Calvinist theologian.

“freely” to God, having been “made willing by his grace”;⁶⁶ but Mammon cannot think of grace except as a form of compulsion that brings about “Forc’t” worship—in other words, he cannot think of grace at all. Even in speculating about the possibility of divine grace, Mammon portrays God as an utterly ungracious tyrant who extracts worship from his subjects by force. This Satanic theology of compulsion attempts to undermine one of the central emphases of the theodicy of *Paradise Lost*: that God desires only willing worship and obedience, and that for this reason he grants his creatures freedom to obey or disobey, to worship or rebel. Mammon’s description of the “Forc’t Halleluiahs” is thus later corrected by the Son, who tells the Father that the saints will sing “Unfained *Halleluiahs* to thee” (6.744). This contrast between “Forc’t” and “Unfained” hallelujahs highlights the contrasts between the Satanic and the heavenly theologies of God and freedom. The fatalistic and tyrannical God of the Satanic theology stands in the sharpest possible contrast to the God whom heaven worships.

When the council of Pandemonium is dissolved and the fallen angels seek to “entertain / The irksom hours” (2.526-27) until Satan’s return, their sad entertainments express their acute sense of theological fatalism. Some sing, like ancient poets, of the grandeur and misery of the war in heaven, and “complain that Fate / Free Vertue should enthrall to Force or Chance” (2.550-51). According to this “partial” song (2.552),⁶⁷ fate has enslaved the freedom and virtue of the heroic angels, subjecting them to the divine power or merely to arbitrary chance. Other fallen angels, seeking to charm not the senses but the soul, resort to elevated theological discussion:

⁶⁶ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 10.1; in Schaff, 3:624. For a rhapsodic account of this view, see Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (s.l., 1797), 419-20.

⁶⁷ As Fowler notes, “partial” denotes both “polyphonic” and “prejudiced” (Fowler, 115); and also “incomplete” and “inconclusive,” as noted by Howard Schultz, *Milton and Forbidden Knowledge* (New York: MLA, 1955), 88.

and reasond high
Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate,
Fixt Fate, free Will, Foreknowledge absolute,
And found no end, in wandering mazes lost. (2.558-61)

Although this form of intellectual entertainment is condemned by the narrative voice as “Vain wisdom” and “false Philosophie” (2.565), it is a mistake to find here only a parody of classical philosophy.⁶⁸ This entertainment above all calls to mind the theological reasoning associated with Reformed orthodox scholasticism; it is a picture of devilish theologising, in which, as Verity points out, the narrative voice is “ridiculing the theological controversies” of the seventeenth century,⁶⁹ even making “a kind of labyrinth in the very words that describe it.”⁷⁰ These devilish theologians are therefore lost “in the labyrinth of their own language”;⁷¹ they “cannot get ... out of their textual Hell.”⁷² Most importantly, as Stephen Fallon observes, in this theologising “free will disappears into the tight knot it shares with fixed fate and absolute foreknowledge.”⁷³

Ironically, *Paradise Lost* is itself preoccupied with precisely the same theological topics; indeed, “[t]he first subject ... to which the Satanic philosophers turn is ‘Providence,’ the theme of *Paradise Lost*.”⁷⁴ It is therefore not so much the subject-matter which makes this theologising distinctively Satanic, but rather the form of theologising: the “high” reasoning of the devils leads them into endless subtleties and

⁶⁸ For example, Bush’s annotation observes only that this intellectual entertainment refers to the “metaphysical and ethical philosophies of the Greeks and Romans” (Bush, 244).

⁶⁹ Verity, 413. Werblowsky, *Lucifer and Prometheus*, 87, shrewdly notes that the devils are “discussing, in fact, the agenda of the Westminster Assembly.”

⁷⁰ Joseph Addison, *The Tatler* (Glasgow, 1754), 72.

⁷¹ Wilding, *Milton’s Paradise Lost*, 37.

⁷² Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, 272.

⁷³ Fallon, “*Paradise Lost* in Intellectual History,” 334.

⁷⁴ Dennis H. Burden, *The Logical Epic: A Study of the Argument of Paradise Lost* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 60.

aimless labyrinths. The barb of this parody is thus directed against the scholastic form of theological inquiry, and especially against the scholasticism of those Reformed orthodox theologians who so closely scrutinised the concepts of providence, foreknowledge and free will.⁷⁵ These Reformed theologians were regularly criticised by their opponents for “wandering” too deeply into the inscrutable “mazes” of the divine counsel. The foreword to one Arminian work speaks of the “prickly Disputations” and “obscure intricacies” involved in the Calvinist-Arminian controversy,⁷⁶ while a moderate Lutheran like Martin Chemnitz warns against “[t]he labyrinth of arguments concerning the foreknowledge of God by which our minds are often greatly disturbed.”⁷⁷ The Satanic theologians of *Paradise Lost*, with their excessive use of scholastic reasoning, thus parody the Reformed theologians against whom such criticisms were directed. The narrative voice’s judgment that the reasoning of these theologians is “Vain” and “false” (2.565) warns the reader to distrust this Satanic theology, and to distrust the other instances of Satanic theologising which are encountered throughout the poem’s first two books.

⁷⁵ For an indication of the elaborate detail with which Reformed scholastic theologians discussed such topics, see the extensive treatment of the Reformed orthodox understanding of the divine knowledge and will in Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 3:384-475. In Muller’s account, Reformed orthodoxy posits no fewer than eighteen main binary distinctions within the divine will alone (453-73).

⁷⁶ Thomas Goad, *Stimulus orthodoxus, sive Goadus redivivus: A disputation partly theological, partly metaphysical, concerning the necessity and contingency of events in the world, in respect of Gods eternal decree* (London, 1661). The epistle “To the Reader,” which is not paginated, is signed “F. G.”

⁷⁷ Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, trans. J. A. O. Preus, 2 vols. (St Louis: Concordia, 1989), 1:211.

IV. Devil Writ Large

In the opening books of *Paradise Lost*, then, the fallen angels theologise; and their theology depicts a devilish, tyrannical deity. The demonic character of this deity is perhaps most strikingly illustrated in Mammon's comparison between heaven and hell:

This deep world
Of darkness do we dread? How oft amidst
Thick clouds and dark doth Heav'n's all-ruling Sire
Choose to reside, his Glory unobscur'd,
And with the Majesty of darkness round
Covers his Throne; from whence deep thunders roar
Must'ring thir rage, and Heav'n resembles Hell?
As hee our Darkness, cannot wee his Light
Imitate when we please? (2.262-70)

Here Mammon draws on the familiar Old Testament metaphor of the darkness surrounding God's self-manifestation. The function of this metaphor in the Old Testament is, of course, not to suggest a demonic or hell-like divine darkness, but rather to depict the divine majesty: as Walther Eichrodt notes, "the majestic phenomenon of the thunderstorm" is evoked in the Old Testament theophanies.⁷⁸ But in Mammon's account, the divine thunder expresses the hellish emotion of "rage," while the dark clouds express "our Darkness," that is, the Satanic darkness of hell. Roy Flannagan rightly points out that Mammon's image is thus "perverted," since "the Old Testament God uses darkness or clouds to set off his brilliance . . . , not to make Heaven resemble Hell."⁷⁹ The God of whom Mammon speaks thus hides himself in a darkness that is

⁷⁸ Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, 2 vols. (London: SCM, 1961-67), 2:16.

⁷⁹ Flannagan, 388. Colleen Donnelly, "The Syntactic Counterplot of the Devil's Debates and God's Council," *Language and Style* 19:1 (1986), 63, has it exactly backwards when she suggests that "[t]he flaw in Mammon's argument is that he does not see that hell cannot imitate or ever become heaven."

indistinguishable from the blackness of evil and hell. Such a God—whatever else might be said about him—bears a striking resemblance to the devil.

According to the famous assessment of Ludwig Feuerbach, the Christian idea of God is simply a projection of human consciousness: “the knowledge of God [is] nothing else than a knowledge of man.”⁸⁰ Similarly, in *Paradise Lost* the Satanic theology of God is essentially a projection of the Satanic consciousness. The God described by the fallen angels is devil writ large: a knowledge of him is nothing other than a knowledge of Satan. In this respect, *Paradise Lost* subtly invokes a characteristic seventeenth-century criticism of Reformed orthodox theology, according to which the God of Calvinism is indistinguishable from the devil.⁸¹ Thomas Goad, for example, accuses the Calvinists of holding “this damnable doctrine . . . which transformeth *God* into a *Devil*, to be most *accursed*”;⁸² while an anonymous Arminian treatise asserts that Calvinist views “do make God seem worse to some Men than the Devil.”⁸³ The Laudian theologian Thomas Jackson condemns Calvinism as “idolatrous and blasphemous,”⁸⁴ while John Goodwin speaks of Calvinism’s “evil” and its “intolerable Blasphemies.”⁸⁵ In the same way, but even more pointedly, the *De Doctrina Christiana* likewise accuses Calvinist theologians of blasphemy, stating: “If I should attempt to refute them, it

Rather, Mammon simply draws the conclusion that hell can imitate heaven from his prior, and far more questionable, assumption that heaven often imitates hell.

⁸⁰ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 207.

⁸¹ As noted by Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 2/2, 140, it is especially the God of supralapsarian Calvinism who “threatens to take on the appearance of a demon.”

⁸² Goad, *Stimulus orthodoxus, sive Goadus redivivus*, 5-6.

⁸³ [Anon.], *An antidote against some principal errors of the predestinarians* (London, 1696), 11.

⁸⁴ Thomas Jackson, *Works*, 12 vols. (Oxford, 1844), 11:209.

⁸⁵ John Goodwin, *Redemption redeemed* (London, 1651), 515. See also Richard Burthogge, *Christianity a revealed mystery* (London, 1702), 41, who speaks of the Reformed orthodox idea of predestination as involving “the greatest Blasphemy.”

would be like inventing a long argument to prove that God is not the Devil” (*prolixè disputem Deum non esse Diabolum*).⁸⁶ The need for such a “long argument” is precisely what the Satanic portrayal of God in the first two books of *Paradise Lost* provokes. By overhearing the Satanic theologising of hell, the reader’s first impression of God is that he is indeed a good deal like the devil—that he is, in other words, exactly the kind of God who is in need of justification.

In *Paradise Lost*, then, the fallen angels are heretical theologians of a debased and distorted Calvinism. They depict God as an ethically arbitrary, tyrannical being who undermines the freedom of his creatures and whose own goodness is negated by naked sovereignty. The God of this quasi-Calvinist Satanic theology is a devilish deity, a projection of the Satanic consciousness. By portraying the theology of the fallen angels in this way, *Paradise Lost* critiques Calvinist theological tradition and challenges its “orthodoxy.”⁸⁷ Ironically, in post-Reformation England Calvinism was itself the

⁸⁶ CPW 6:166; CM 14:88. Similarly but more broadly, the underlying assumption of Empson, *Milton’s God*, is that the Christian (not merely the Calvinistic) God is morally identical to the devil. Christians, according to Empson, “worship as the source of all goodness a God who, as soon as you are told the basic story about him, is evidently the Devil” (255). Literally, then, Empson’s position cannot be refuted without “inventing a long argument to prove that God is not the Devil.” More recently, in *The Satanic Epic*, Neil Forsyth suggests that the *De Doctrina*’s statement is in fact a definition of exactly what *Paradise Lost* attempts to do: “to prove that God is not the devil.” According to Forsyth, “Milton knew God may seem very like the Devil—and the poem shows how much” (9). Finally, the central thesis of Michael Bryson’s recent work, *The Tyranny of Heaven*, is that “Milton constructs”—on purpose—“a God who is nearly indistinguishable from Satan” (25), in order to show the evil of all (even divine) forms of monarchy.

⁸⁷ Behind this transformation of orthodox Calvinism into Satanic heresy lies Milton’s distinctive understanding of the concept of “heresy”: “He then who to his best apprehension follows the scripture,

dominant theological orthodoxy which labelled competing theological discourses as heterodox.⁸⁸ In the theological thought-world of *Paradise Lost*, however, Calvinist orthodoxy is subtly redefined as a heresy of Satanic ancestry.

The Satanic theology expressed in the first two books of *Paradise Lost* thus constitutes a heretical foil against which the poem's ensuing theological account of the goodness of God is then presented, from Book 3 onwards. The God who is depicted in the theologising of the fallen angels is a God who needs to be justified; and the justification of the ways of God in *Paradise Lost* rests in part on the demonstration that God is not at all like this deity. As Thomas Kranidas has observed in a different connection, Satan in fact "helps us to know God, through a series of marvelously engineered inversions."⁸⁹ Far from portraying a God who negates creaturely freedom, as Books 1 and 2 suggest, the rest of the epic seeks to show that freedom is in fact God's highest concern. It is the fundamental characteristic of his own being, and of all created being.

though against any point of doctrine by the whole church receivd, is not the heretic; but he who follows the church against his conscience and perswasion grounded on the scripture" (*CPW* 7:248). Such a subjectivised view of heresy is of course appealing to those who find their own theology relegated to the heterodox fringes by the presiding establishment orthodoxy. In a similar way, the English Arminian Goodwin, *Confidence dismounted*, 14, accuses Reformed orthodox authorities of seeking "to bind what burthens of Faith they please upon the necks of men, without giving any why, or wherefore, but their own Authority"; and in contrast to such an orthodoxy, Goodwin advises that Christians should not believe "any thing, whether from me, or any other man, but what they see sufficient ground and reason why they should beleeve." On Milton's view of heresy, see Janel Mueller, "Milton on Heresy," in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 21-38.

⁸⁸ On Reformed orthodox approaches to defining orthodoxy and heterodoxy, see Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:406-45.

⁸⁹ Thomas Kranidas, *The Fierce Equation: A Study of Milton's Decorum* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), 129.

CHAPTER FOUR

Predestination and Freedom

When the narrative of *Paradise Lost* shifts from Book 2 to Book 3, the Satanic theologians cease to occupy centre stage, and God himself becomes the focus of attention. Perhaps surprisingly, God is also portrayed as a theologian. As Roy Flannagan notes, in contrast to the “sensuously deceptive” speeches of Satan and his followers, God speaks with a stark, forthright simplicity; his speech is “plain, clear, unequivocal, dignified, and authoritative.”¹ Many readers have been irritated by the portrayal of God as a theologian. Alexander Pope, for instance, famously intoned that “God the Father turns a School Divine” in *Paradise Lost*.² The depiction of God as a theologian can, however, be appreciated when viewed against the background of the

¹ Roy Flannagan, *John Milton: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 91.

² Alexander Pope, *The first epistle of the second book of Horace, imitated* (London, 1737), 7.

poem's post-Reformation theological context.³ Reformed orthodox writers argued that the mind of God contains the highest form of theological knowledge. They thus spoke of "archetypal theology" (*theologia archetypa*) as the perfect and complete theology which exists in God's own mind, describing the fragmented and incomplete theology of human beings as an "ectypal theology" (*theologia ectypa*) which partially reflects its divine archetype.⁴ According to post-Reformation theology, and according to *Paradise Lost*, God is thus the ultimate theologian. No one, after all, could be more qualified to speak about God than God. In the words of Pascal, "God rightly speaks of God."⁵

In the poem, God's own theologising immediately contradicts the Satanic theologising of the poem's first two books. While the Satanic theologians speak of a divine tyrant who negates the freedom of his creatures, God himself proclaims that he has eternally ordained creaturely freedom, and that he will never undermine or compromise the autonomy of this freedom. While the Satanic theologians speak of God as a cruel and loveless torturer, God himself declares the universality of his grace and goodness. And while the Satanic theologians fatalistically claim to be reprobated by divine predestination, God affirms that there is no reprobation of creatures, except the self-reprobation which some creatures freely choose and actualise for themselves. The Satanic theology is thus the dark background against which Book 3 begins to offer a positive account of the theology of God and freedom. And while Satan and his fallen

³ Thus replying to Pope, Newton rightly remarked that "this sort of divinity was much more in fashion in Milton's days" (Newton, 2:278). See also H. McLachlan, *The Religious Opinions of Milton, Locke and Newton* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1941), 21.

⁴ On the distinction between *theologia archetypa* and *theologia ectypa*, see Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1:225-38; and Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 57-71.

⁵ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. W. F. Trotter (London, 1908), 12.799.

hosts are untrustworthy theological witnesses, God himself can only be regarded as the most reliable of theologians.

I. Universal Election

The entire heavenly colloquy in the third book of *Paradise Lost* may be viewed as a dramatic portrayal of predestination. The world has just been created, and God the Father exercises his foreknowledge, bending “his eye” towards earth in order “to view” both “His own works and their works” (3.58-59). He looks upon “Our two first Parents,” who are enjoying the “blissful solitude” of their “happie Garden,” and reaping the “immortal fruits of joy and love” (3.64-69). Already this punning omen of “fruits” hints at God’s foresight of the fall. Foreseeing Satan’s strategy to visit earth and to attempt the destruction of Adam and Eve, God tells his Son:

Man will heark’n to his glozing lyes,
And easily transgress the sole Command,
Sole pledge of his obedience: So will fall
Hee and his faithless Progenie. (3.93-96)

Lest this foresight of the fall appear to entail the fall’s necessitation, the Father adds that “Foreknowledge had no influence on thir fault” (3.118).

Having foreseen the fall, the Father immediately declares his gracious intent to restore humanity: “Man ... shall find Grace” (3.131). Reflecting the Father’s will and character, the Son shines as a visible expression of the grace of God:

Beyond compare the Son of God was seen
Most glorious, in him all his Father shon
Substantially exprest, and in his face
Divine compassion visibly appeerd,
Love without end, and without measure Grace. (3.138-42)

Praising the Father's "gracious" promise "that Man should find Grace" (3.144-45), the Son himself pleads with the Father for the salvation of humanity, described as God's "youngest Son" and his "lov'd" creature (3.151). The Father replies that the Son has perfectly expressed his own predestined plan:

O Son, in whom my Soul hath chief delight,
 Son of my bosom, Son who art alone
 My Word, my wisdom, and effectual might,
 All hast thou spok'n as my thoughts are, all
 As my Eternal purpose hath decreed. (3.168-72)

The entire colloquy so far is, then, a depiction of the "Eternal purpose" which God has—in the language of post-Reformation theology—"decreed." Before human beings have any need of salvation, before they have fallen, God has already planned their salvation. This is the essential point of the idea of predestination (*praedestinatio*) as it was understood in post-Reformation theology: the grace of salvation is not an afterthought, but a gift of God which precedes even the need for salvation. The heavenly colloquy in *Paradise Lost* especially highlights the gracious character of God's decree for humanity.⁶ God has eternally purposed to turn towards humanity, his "creature late so lov'd" (3.151), in grace. From the outset, predestination in the poem is thus an act of God's grace.

The gracious character of predestination is vividly expressed when the Father proceeds to explain in detail his predestined plan:

⁶ On the portrayal of God as gracious, see the annotation of Todd, 3:18: "Homer, and all who followed him, where they are representing the Deity speaking, describe a scene of terrour and awful consternation." But in contrast, Milton has "the words of the Almighty diffusing fragrance and delight to all around him," and in this way Milton depicts a distinctively "mild, merciful, and benevolent" deity.

Some I have chosen of peculiar grace
 Elect above the rest; so is my will:
 The rest shall hear me call, and oft be warn'd
 Thir sinful state, and to appease betimes
 Th' incens'd Deitie, while offer'd Grace
 Invites; for I will cleer thir senses dark,
 What may suffice, and soft'n stonie hearts
 To pray, repent, and bring obedience due.
 To prayer, repentance, and obedience due,
 Though but endevord with sincere intent,
 Mine eare shall not be slow, mine eye not shut.
 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,
 And to the end persisting, safe arrive. (3.183-97)

This is, theologically, a remarkable passage. Most importantly, it emphasises the sheer universality of grace. When the Father says that “Some” are “Elect above the rest,” he may appear to be asserting the common post-Reformation distinction between election and reprobation. Both Reformed orthodox and Arminian theologians agreed in affirming a notion of double predestination (*praedestinatio gemina*),⁷ according to which God has eternally divided the human race into the elect (*electi*) on the one hand and the reprobate (*reprobi*) on the other.⁸ The definition of William Ames is typical: “There are two kinds of predestination, election and reprobation.”⁹ In such a distinction

⁷ Thus the supralapsarian theologian William Twisse, *Riches of Gods love unto the vessells of mercy, consistent with his absolute hatred or reprobation of the vessells of wrath*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1653), 2:67, takes pleasure in observing that all Arminians affirm not only election but also reprobation.

⁸ The idea of double predestination had been expressed in different ways by Augustine, Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636) and Gottschalk (c. 805-c. 868). The most influential Reformed accounts are John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 3.21-24; Theodore Beza, *Tabula praedestinationis* (Geneva, 1555); and William Perkins, *A golden chaine: or, a description of theologie* (London, 1591). For a modern discussion of double predestination, see Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics*, trans. Olive Wyon et al., 3 vols. (London: Lutterworth, 1949-62), 1:321-39.

⁹ William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, ed. and trans. John D. Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 1.25.17. Reformed orthodox theologians often argued that election cannot exist without reprobation: see for example Pierre du Moulin, *The anatomy of Arminianisme* (London, 1620), 83: “Of ...

between election and reprobation, the grace of God is restricted to a certain number of human beings, while the greater proportion of humanity is excluded from grace. This position probably lies behind John Bunyan's stark observation that only "one of a thousand . . . Men" and "for Women, one of ten thousand" are saved.¹⁰

In *Paradise Lost*, however, the Father's reference to certain individuals as "Elect above the rest" cannot be regarded as a statement of double predestination.¹¹ On the contrary, as Boyd Berry remarks, when the Father says that some are "Elect above the rest," he is asserting "that God extends election to all men," but that "[s]ome . . . are more elect than others."¹² All human beings are eternally elected for salvation, but some individuals are "Elect above the rest." The universality of election is indicated by the

predestination there are two parts; the one is election, the other is reprobation, whereof the first doth necessarily lay downe the second: For, as often as some are chosen out of many, the rest are necessarily reprobated." In the eighteenth century, this view was summed up by the Anglican Calvinist, Augustus Toplady, *The Church of England vindicated from the charge of Arminianism* (London, 1769), 93: "Election, without Reprobation, cannot stand: it must have the other leg, or it will tumble down."

¹⁰ John Bunyan, *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, ed. Roger Sharrock, 13 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980-94), 9:282. Post-Reformation theologians usually speculated that only a small minority of human beings is elect and that the majority is reprobate. In the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century attempt by Princeton theologians to reprimatinate Reformed orthodoxy, this emphasis was dropped and it was asserted instead that the great majority of human beings is elect: see for example B. B. Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), 65.

¹¹ The notion of double predestination has been detected in this passage by Fowler, who suggests that here, as in the *De Doctrina Christiana*, "elect" means "no more than 'whoever believes and continues in the faith'" (Fowler, 153; citing *CPW* 6:168), so that, by implication, all "the rest" are simply unbelievers. An even sharper double-predestination reading is offered by Maurice Kelley, "The Theological Dogma of *Paradise Lost*, III, 173-202," *PMLA* 52 (1937), 75-79. Kelley views the "elect" as referring to generally elected believers, and "the rest" simply as the reprobate unbelievers: "'Some,' then, refers to the believers; and the 'rest' . . . are the unbelievers" (79). In such an interpretation, God's gracious election is relegated to just two lines of the speech, with the following 18 lines speaking of "the rest," i.e., the unbelievers. In this reading the whole passage's emphasis on divine grace is thus undermined.

¹² Boyd M. Berry, *Process of Speech: Puritan Religious Writing and *Paradise Lost** (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 255.

way in which God describes “the rest”: they hear his “call” to salvation (3.185); they are “invite[d]” by “offerd Grace” (3.187-88); their minds are enlightened and their hearts softened (3.188-90); they are brought by grace “To prayer, repentance and obedience due” (3.191); they receive “Light after light” to lead them to salvation (3.196); and if they follow this light and endure to the end, they will “safe arrive” in the kingdom of God (3.197). Saving grace is thus clearly predestined for all human beings alike. The Son echoes this theology of universal grace (*gratia universalis*) when, responding to the Father, he describes grace as “The speediest of thy winged messengers,” which “visit[s] all thy creatures,” and comes “to all” of humanity (3.229-31).

The theological significance of this depiction of universal election can hardly be overstated. In resisting the division of predestination into election and reprobation, *Paradise Lost*'s theology is sharply discontinuous with all the major post-Reformation theological traditions. The seventeenth-century predestinarian controversies among Reformed orthodox, Arminian and Amyraldian theologians centred on the question of the grounds of God's decision to elect some and reject others;¹³ but all such theologians shared the assumption that predestination formally consists of both a decree to elect and a decree to reject.¹⁴ According to Arminius, for instance, Scripture teaches that election “has Reprobation as its opposite”;¹⁵ while a Reformed writer like William Perkins speaks of predestination “either to salvation or condemnation.”¹⁶ Exploring the contours

¹³ See K. R. Hagenbach, *A History of Christian Doctrines*, trans. E. H. Plumptre, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1880-81), 3:95.

¹⁴ Thus as Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 15, notes, even the hypothetical universalism of Amyraldism never claimed “that nonelect individuals might actually believe.”

¹⁵ Jacobus Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols, 3 vols. (1825-75; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 2:226.

¹⁶ *The workes of that famous and worthie minister of Christ, in the Universitie of Cambridge, M. W. Perkins*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1612-19), 1:16.

of the controversy between Reformed orthodoxy and Arminianism, the Arminian theologian John Goodwin notes that both parties agree that there is “both a Decree of Election, and a Decree also of Reprobation,” both decrees being eternal and “absolutely immutable.”¹⁷ In departing from the assumption that predestination must formally be twofold, *Paradise Lost*’s theology moves beyond the conceptual framework of post-Reformation predestinarian theology, offering a radically universalised vision of God’s gracious election. Such a view of universal election stands in the sharpest possible contrast to the Satanic Calvinism propounded by the fallen angels in the opening books of *Paradise Lost*, in which God is depicted as cruel and graceless.

In thus affirming the universality of election, *Paradise Lost*’s theology anticipates the great Enlightenment theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who criticised the line of thought that “if everything is to be neat and logical, we must admit a foreordination by which some are predestined to damnation, as others to blessedness,”¹⁸ and who argued instead for a “single divine foreordination to blessedness” which encompasses the entire human race.¹⁹ For Schleiermacher, if “the universality of redemption” is taken seriously, then election to salvation must also be understood “quite universally.”²⁰ In this reformulation of predestinarian theology, the decree of predestination is seen to be wholly and radically a decree of grace. In the same way, the graciousness of predestination is radically asserted in *Paradise Lost*, and this is one of the most significant features of the poem’s theology of predestination.

But in view of *Paradise Lost*’s account of the universality of God’s gracious election, what is to be made of the poem’s reference to certain individuals being more

¹⁷ John Goodwin, *The agreement and distance of brethren* (London, 1652), 1.

¹⁸ Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 549.

¹⁹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 548-49.

²⁰ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 560.

elect than others, “Elect above the rest” (3.184)?²¹ In the first place, as Dennis Danielson suggests, this may simply be a reference to the notion that certain individuals are chosen to perform special tasks in God’s kingdom.²² Such a view of special election was affirmed in Arminian theology, which distinguished between the election of individuals “to perform some particular service,” and the election of individuals “to be ... heirs of eternal life.”²³ Moïse Amyraut, too, writes that “when God calls out some particular persons on some great and eminent employments ... he frequently confers [on them] more sensible influences of his grace and Spirit”; such influences of grace, he says, differ from the “ordinary methods of the divine Spirit.”²⁴ In *Paradise Lost*, the specially-elected individuals may likewise simply be those who are elected to “great and eminent employments”; indeed, Stephen Fallon has suggested that the poem’s account of special election may reflect Milton’s own self-understanding as an individual specially singled out by God.²⁵

²¹ On this complex feature of the poem’s theology, see especially Newton, 1:178-79; Kelley, “The Theological Dogma of *Paradise Lost*,” 75-79; William J. Grace, *Ideas in Milton* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 6; G. D. Hamilton, “Milton’s Defensive God: A Reappraisal,” *Studies in Philology* 69:1 (1972), 97-98; Berry, *Process of Speech*, 254-56; Dennis R. Danielson, *Milton’s Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 82-85; Thomas N. Corns, *Regaining Paradise Lost* (London: Longman, 1994), 82-83; and above all Stephen M. Fallon, “‘Elect Above the Rest’: Theology As Self-Representation in Milton,” in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 93-116.

²² Danielson, *Milton’s Good God*, 83. Danielson is rightly impressed by the theological difficulty of the poem’s concept of “Elect above the rest,” and so offers this suggestion only tentatively.

²³ H. O. Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1940-43), 2:339-40, summarising the traditional Arminian position.

²⁴ Moïse Amyraut, *A treatise concerning religions, in refutation of the opinion which accounts all indifferent* (London, 1660), 21.

²⁵ Fallon, “Elect Above the Rest,” 93-116. Throughout his essay, Fallon speaks of Milton’s “desires,” his “yearning,” and his “need” to be recognised as outstanding. This view of Milton’s psychological condition is common. It is an axiom for Denis Saurat, *Milton, Man and Thinker* (London: J. M. Dent,

Alternatively, the description of some as “Elect above the rest” may refer to the differing degrees of grace (*gradus gratiae*) which God bestows on different people. Such a notion of degrees of grace was by no means restricted to Reformed orthodox theology.²⁶ Anselm had written that God “does not have mercy equally on all those to whom he shows mercy”;²⁷ and the same point was often made in Arminian theology. According to Arminius, God “does not equally effect the conversion and salvation of all,” even though he “seriously will[s] the conversion and salvation of all”;²⁸ and similarly Simon Episcopius speaks of “a very great disparity of Grace according ... to the most free dispensation of the divine will.”²⁹ Moïse Amyraut, too, writes that all grace is sufficient “to bring salvation,” but that grace may nevertheless “also differ in

1944), xii-xiii, who describes Milton’s personality as consisting of a “powerful feeling of egotism and pride, in the fullest self-consciousness of a tremendous individuality”; and it has sometimes been hyperbolised, as, for instance, by Robert Graves, *Wife to Mr. Milton: The Story of Marie Powell* (New York: Octagon, 1943); and A. L. Rowse, *Milton the Puritan: Portrait of a Mind* (London: Macmillan, 1977). But the emphasis on Milton’s egotism should be balanced by a recognition of his own profound distrust of pride, on which see Charles Williams, Introduction to *The English Poems of John Milton*, ed. H. C. Beeching (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), ix-xiii. As Stanley E. Fish, *How Milton Works* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 280, rightly points out, Milton’s “fierce egotism is but one-half of his story.”

²⁶ For Reformed orthodox examples, see William Day, *Man’s destruction, prov’d to be of himself: in which, the Antinomian and Arminian errors are confuted* (London, 1713), 16, who speaks of the “sev’ral Degrees” of divine grace; and du Moulin, *The anatomy of Arminianisme*, 83: “of them that are chosen, some are preferred before others.” The idea of degrees of grace was occasionally linked explicitly to bourgeois sentiments. See for example Henry Whiston, *A short treatise of the great worth and best kind of nobility* (London, 1661), 46: “the Divine grace and blessing, though not tyed to any, doth most usually fall in some special manner upon those Families whose Ancestors have done worthily,” so that “Birth and Breeding” concur with “special blessings from above.”

²⁷ Anselm, *De concordia*, 3.8; from the text in *Opera omnia*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1938-61), 2:243-88.

²⁸ Arminius, *Works*, 3:442; see also 3:233.

²⁹ Simon Episcopius, *The confession or declaration of the ministers or pastors which in the United Provinces are called Remonstrants, concerning the chief points of Christian religion* (London, 1676), 207.

degrees.”³⁰ In the same way, the *De Doctrina Christiana* affirms that God “has not distributed grace equally” to all people.³¹ According to the treatise, God “bestows grace on all, and if not equally upon each, at least sufficient to enable everyone to attain knowledge of the truth and salvation.”³² *Paradise Lost*’s description of some people as “Elect above the rest” may be a similar reference to the differing degrees of grace which God freely bestows on different individuals. Such a concept of degrees of grace clearly does not undermine the universality or sufficiency of grace. All people are elected by grace, but some are “super-elect.”³³

Again, it is possible that the poem’s account of super-election refers not simply to differing degrees of grace, but to different *kinds* of saving grace. Some such notion was articulated by the counter-Reformation theologian Ambrosius Catharinus (c.1484-1553), who taught that certain specially elected individuals, such as Mary and the Apostles, are saved by the operation of irresistible grace, while the rest of humanity is offered a sufficient grace which can be either accepted or rejected.³⁴ Similarly, the nineteenth-century Lutheran theologian Hans Larsen Martensen (1808-84) writes that “grace interests itself in an especial manner about some, whom it will make its personal subjects and instruments, while it interests itself about others only in a general way,”³⁵ so that even within the kingdom of God there is a great difference between “the chosen

³⁰ Moïse Amyraut, *A discourse concerning the divine dreams mention’d in Scripture* (London, 1676), 20.

³¹ *CPW* 6:192.

³² *CPW* 6:192.

³³ This expression is used by Berry, *Process of Speech*, 256; and Danielson, *Milton’s Good God*, 83.

³⁴ Here I have followed the summary of Catharinus’s theology in the unsigned article, “Catharinus, Ambrosius,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 247-48. As far as I am aware, the only detailed work of scholarship on Catharinus in English is Patrick Preston, “Catharinus Versus Luther, 1521,” *History* 88:3 (2003), 364-78.

³⁵ H. L. Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics: A Compendium of the Doctrines of Christianity*, trans. William Urwick (Edinburgh, 1898), 374.

and the left.”³⁶ Although such ideas of differing kinds of grace were almost unheard of in seventeenth-century theology, they may be close to *Paradise Lost*’s “Elect above the rest,” in which a qualitative distinction seems to be made between those who are saved by the gospel through “sufficient grace” (3.99; 3.189), and those super-elect individuals who are saved in some other way through “peculiar grace” (3.183).

In any case, whether the super-elect differ from the elect in kind or only in degree, the theology of predestination in *Paradise Lost* strongly affirms both the universality of grace and the freedom of God to distinguish between individuals and to be more gracious to some than to others. The super-election of some people in distinction from others thus does not reflect the Satanic Calvinists’ assertion of divine arbitrariness in Books 1 and 2, nor does it qualify the sheer graciousness of God to all humanity. Rather, it accentuates the gracious character of God’s election by offering an illustration of “Grace in her greatest super-abundancy.”³⁷

II. Reprobation

Notwithstanding this emphasis on the universality of electing grace, in *Paradise Lost* God the Father also adopts the theological language of reprobation, and affirms that some human beings will ultimately perish:

This my long sufferance and my day of Grace
They who neglect and scorn, shall never taste;
But hard be hard’nd, blind be blinded more,
That they may stumble on, and deeper fall;
And none but such from mercy I exclude. (3.198-202)

³⁶ Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics*, 379.

³⁷ This expression is used in a different connection by John Goodwin, *The banner of justification displayed* (London, 1659), 5.

In spite of the fact that all people are elected by grace, this election does not negate human freedom. Individuals retain the power to reject the grace of God, to “neglect and scorn” their own election, and in this way to choose their own reprobation.³⁸ The fact that those who are wilfully “hard” and “blind” become increasingly “hard’nd” and “blinded” is due not to any reprobating divine agency, but to their own obstinate denial and rejection of God’s gracious election.

The language of the “blinding” and “hardening” of sinners derives from Scripture,³⁹ and was consistently used in post-Reformation accounts of reprobation (*reprobatio*). Most Reformed orthodox writers defined the divine hardening of sinners as God’s “permission” (*permissio*), in which he simply “passes over” the reprobate, leaving them to their own devices.⁴⁰ Here Reformed orthodoxy followed the thought of the Reformation theologian Heinrich Bullinger, who had argued that the reprobation of some is grounded not in the will of God, “but in the man himself who rejects the grace of God and does not receive the heavenly gifts.”⁴¹ William Prynne expresses this position when he claims that the hardening of reprobate individuals “proceedes not

³⁸ For a parallel statement in modern theology, see Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, trans. Darrell L. Guder, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981-83), 1:486, who, like Karl Barth, speaks of “the ‘impossible possibility’ of human rejection of God’s election.”

³⁹ See, for example, Exodus 4:21; 7:13; 9:12; 14:17; John 9:39; 12:40; Romans 9:18; 11:7; 11:25. The Father’s statement that the hardened and blinded will “stumble on, and deeper fall” (3.201) is perhaps verbally influenced by Romans 9:11: “Have they stumbled that they should fall?” And this question, like the Father’s speech in *Paradise Lost*, is in fact part of a broader defence of the universality of divine mercy.

⁴⁰ See for example Amandus Polanus, *Syntagma theologiae christianae* (Geneva, 1617), 4.10. See also the discussion in Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1932), 108-17.

⁴¹ From the Latin cited in Cornelis P. Venema, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Doctrine of Predestination: Author of “the Other Reformed Tradition”?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 67n38. This had also been Anselm’s position. See *De concordia*, 3.5: the one who “spurns” grace “continues in his hardness and iniquity” only by “his own fault, not God’s.”

primarily from any peremptory Decree, or Act of God ... but from Reprobates themselves.”⁴² Similarly, Thomas Watson writes: “God doth not infuse Evil into Men, only he withdraws the Influence of his Graces, and then the Heart hardens of itself, even as Light being withdrawn, Darkness presently follows.”⁴³ Other Reformed theologians, however, remained closer to Calvin, who had denied the distinction between the divine will and the divine permission,⁴⁴ and had attributed the “blinding” and “hardening” of the reprobate to the immediate will of God.⁴⁵ William Perkins, for instance, asserts that “God is not onely a bare permissive agent in an evill worke, but a powerfull effectour of the same.”⁴⁶ In contrast, Arminian theologians sought to place the full responsibility for “blinding” and “hardening” on the wilful disobedience of the sinners themselves. According to Episcopius, for instance, the wilfully rebellious are “blind[ed]” and “harden[ed]” only when God delivers them “unto their own corrupt desires,” so that

⁴² William Prynne, *God, no impostor, nor deluder, or, An answer to a Popish and Arminian cavill, in the defence of the free-will, and universall grace* (London, 1630), 9. See also 6-7, where Prynne argues that God does not actively blind the reprobate, but that they blind themselves.

⁴³ Thomas Watson, *A body of practical divinity* (London, 1692), 71.

⁴⁴ See John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis*, trans. John King, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1847), 1:144; and Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.23.8. See also Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology From Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 24-25.

⁴⁵ See Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.23.1: “hardening is not less under the immediate hand of God than mercy.” See also *Institutes*, 3.24.13-14. Luther’s position was similar: see *Luther’s Works*, ed. J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (St Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1958-86), 33:164-206. The late medieval theologian Thomas Bradwardine (c.1290-1349) had also rejected the distinction between divine will and permission, advocating a thoroughgoing necessitarianism in which even evil constitutes a necessary part of the divine plan: see Gordon Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians: A Study of His De Causa Dei and Its Opponents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957); and see also the brief discussion in Augustus Neander, *Lectures on the History of Christian Dogmas*, trans. J. E. Ryland, 2 vols. (London, 1858), 2:609.

⁴⁶ Perkins, *Workes*, 1:16.

they are really self-blinded and self-hardened.⁴⁷ And John Goodwin writes that “God never *hardneth* any man,” but he withdraws his prevenient grace from those “who first voluntarily *harden* themselves, and are *obstinately* disobedient.”⁴⁸ The *De Doctrina Christiana* adopts a similar Arminian interpretation, emphasising the sufficiency and universality of grace: “God, to show the glory of his long-suffering and justice, excludes no man from the way of repentance and eternal salvation, unless that man has continued to reject and despise the offer of grace, and of grace sufficient for salvation, until it is too late.”⁴⁹

In the same way, *Paradise Lost*'s account of the blinding and hardening of those who reject grace is grounded in the poem's thoroughgoing commitment to both the universality of election and the freedom of human beings to determine their own futures. The decisiveness of the human will is especially highlighted by the contrasting wordplay between “cleer” and “soft'n” on the one hand (3.188-89), and “hard'nd” and “blinded” on the other (3.200). God is the subject of the former verbs—“I will cleer thir senses . . . and soft'n stonie hearts”—so that the illumining of the mind and the softening of the heart, which make salvation possible, are attributed solely to divine grace. But in contrast, the subjects of “hard'nd” and “blinded” are simply the “hard” and the “blind”: “But hard be hard'nd, blind be blinded more.” Divine action is thus grammatically excluded from this account of reprobation. The blinding of the mind and the hardening of the heart are solely the work of the human agents who choose and

⁴⁷ Episcopius, *The confession or declaration*, 113.

⁴⁸ John Goodwin, *An exposition of the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans* (London, 1653), 214; on the withdrawal of prevenient grace, see 217: “God never withdraws that preventing or exciting grace, which is given unto every man, from any man, untill the man himself by voluntariness of sinning provoketh him to it.”

⁴⁹ *CPW* 6:194.

thereby actualise their own reprobation. God's grace is predestined for and bestowed on all people. But the individual always remains free to reject grace and so to perish.

Even in this context, then, where *Paradise Lost* speaks of the possibility of condemnation, its real emphasis is on the freely offered grace of God. Indeed, the whole divine colloquy in Book 3 is not even peripherally concerned with condemnation, but only with a positive statement of the way in which "Man should find Grace" (3.145). Even when the Father makes passing reference to the condemnation of some human beings, the subject-matter of his speech is still "my day of Grace" (3.198). Most importantly, the emphasis here is on the inclusiveness and universality of grace. Even the line, "none but such from mercy I exclude" (3.202), is a statement of the inclusiveness of mercy. No one is excluded from mercy, except those who wilfully refuse to be included, and thus exclude themselves. Their exclusion rests solely on their own act, and not on any divine decree.

In *Paradise Lost*, reprobation is therefore not an act of the divine will, but an act of the human will. It is not, as in Reformed orthodox theology, an eternal decree which statically fixes the fate of some human beings, but it is rather a temporal decision made by human beings, and as such it can never be a once-for-all, irreversible decision. Even those "hard'nd" and "blinded" individuals, who "stumble on, and deeper fall," are never in principle beyond the possibility of salvation.⁵⁰ As the *De Doctrina Christiana* says, reprobation can always be "rescinded by repentance" (*reprobationem resipiscentia rescindi*).⁵¹ They are among the reprobate only to the extent that they persist in their stubborn self-reprobation, and in the rejection of God's electing grace. Once again,

⁵⁰ Such a position is flatly rejected by Perkins, *Workes*, 1:99: "both the election and reprobation of God stand immutable, so that neither the Elect can become reprobates, nor the reprobates elect; and consequently neither these [can] be saved, nor they condemned."

⁵¹ *CM* 14:144-45.

Paradise Lost here anticipates Schleiermacher's influential reformulation of the idea of predestination. In Schleiermacher's theology, the reprobate are understood simply as those who "at any particular moment" are "not yet to be regarded as chosen."⁵² In this conception, reprobation is taken down from a pre-temporal realm and is instead grounded in the concrete sphere of human decision and history.⁵³ So also, in *Paradise Lost* the self-reprobation of certain individuals is a process which takes place in history, and which in principle always remains open to the possibility of the triumph of grace. Edward Wagenknecht has thus rightly remarked that although *Paradise Lost* does not advocate universal salvation, the poem's theology "obviously trie[s] to make it as difficult as possible to be damned."⁵⁴ As those who have been eternally elected by God, all the "hard'nd" and "blinded" remain potentially among those who will, "to the end persisting, safe arrive" (3.197).

Paradise Lost's account of temporal and dynamic reprobation thus offers a powerful critique of the Reformed orthodox notion of a "fixed number" of elect and reprobate individuals.⁵⁵ Calvin had written: "God, by an eternal decree, fixed the number of those whom he is pleased to embrace in love, and [of those] on whom he is

⁵² Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 548.

⁵³ According to Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991-98), 3:450, this development of "a historical reference to human history for the thought of election" constitutes "one of the most important and lasting achievements of Schleiermacher."

⁵⁴ Edward Wagenknecht, *The Personality of Milton* (Normon: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 141. On the speech under consideration (3.183-202), see also the penetrating observation of Berry, *Process of Speech*, 255: "The last five lines make it clear that not all men make the right choices and progress, yet in a sense the impact of all that precedes these lines suggests ... that all *will* safely arrive."

⁵⁵ On the Reformed orthodox concept of a "fixed number," see Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, ed. Hannelotte Reiffen, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 453-56.

pleased to display his wrath”,⁵⁶ while for Lucas Trelactius, “[t]he number of the Elect, and Reprobates ... is certaine.”⁵⁷ According to the *Westminster Confession*, all those who are “predestinated unto everlasting life” and “foreordained to everlasting death” are “particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.”⁵⁸ In *Paradise Lost*, in contrast, God the Father denies the possibility of any such “certain and definite number” by locating reprobation in the fluid and temporal sphere of human choice. He thus negates the dark idea that a “fixed number” of reprobate individuals can, like the Satanic Calvinists in Book 1 and 2, only dread but not escape their certain condemnation.⁵⁹ According to *Paradise Lost*, because there is no such “fixed number,” every person is potentially savable. The Arminian divine John Goodwin had similarly insisted that all the reprobate “may very possibly be saved, any Decree of God notwithstanding.”⁶⁰ So dynamic an

⁵⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.24.17.

⁵⁷ Lucas Trelactius, *A briefe institution of the common places of sacred divinitie* (London, 1610), 97.

⁵⁸ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3.3-4; in Schaff, 3:608-9. See also the Lambeth Articles, 3; in Schaff, 3:523. The idea of a “fixed number” had already been asserted by Augustine, *De correptione et gratia*, 13; in *PL* 44 and *NPNF* 5: “The number of the predestined is fixed, and cannot be increased or diminished”; and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 60 vols. (London: Blackfriars, 1964-76), 1a.23.7: “the number of the predestined is certain to God; not only by way of knowledge, but also by way of a principal preordination.” Arminius, *Works*, 2:719, had also continued to affirm the fixed number: “the number both of those who are to be saved, and of those who are to be damned, is certain and fixed.” Arminius, however, sought to soften the force of this concept by grounding the fixed number in the divine foreknowledge of human responses to grace: individuals are “fixed” in one group or another not by the mere divine pleasure, but by their own (future and foreseen) response to sufficient grace.

⁵⁹ Balachandra Rajan, *The Lofty Rhyme: A Study of Milton's Major Poetry* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970), 76, notes that “the prolonged drama of temptation” in *Paradise Lost* “would not be very much of a drama if the man at the centre could only prefer what he was elected or condemned to prefer. Predestination may be grimly edifying but it has its deficiencies as a poetic spectacle.”

⁶⁰ John Goodwin, *The agreement and distance of brethren*, 2. Less emphatically, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.23.3, distinguishes between “conditional” and “absolute” possibility: “Reprobation by God does not take anything away from the power of the person reprobated. Hence, when it is

approach to reprobation removes all numerical restrictions from grace, and highlights the universality of the plan of salvation—its *de iure* if not *de facto* universalism. Here the theology of *Paradise Lost* also anticipates the universal emphasis of the twentieth-century theologian Emil Brunner, who writes: “Whoever excludes himself [from grace], is excluded; he who does not allow himself to be included, is not included. But he who allows himself to be included, he who believes, is ‘elect.’”⁶¹ In the same way, according to *Paradise Lost* all human beings are among the elect, but remain free to reject their own election and so to exclude themselves from the grace of God.

III. Predestined Freedom

I have argued that the theology of predestination in *Paradise Lost* is characterised both by an emphasis on the universality of grace, and by a corresponding emphasis on the decisive role of human freedom. But at certain points, the poem’s portrayal of predestination presses human freedom into the foreground in a still more radical and creative way. During the heavenly colloquy in Book 3, the Father says of humanity:

for so
I formd them free, and free they must remain,
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change
Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree
Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordaind
Thir freedom: they themselves ordaind thir fall. (3.123-28)

said that the reprobated cannot obtain grace, this must not be understood as implying absolute impossibility; but only conditional impossibility.” To take up the same distinction: in *Paradise Lost* the reprobate possess the absolute, not merely the conditional, possibility of obtaining grace.

⁶¹ Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 1:320.

In describing the divine “decree” as “Eternal” and “Unchangeable,” the Father uses language typical of both Reformed orthodox and Arminian theologians. The Arminian Articles, for instance, speak of predestination as God’s “eternal and unchangeable decree” (*Deus aeterno et immutabili decreto*).⁶² But while in post-Reformation theology the “eternal and unchangeable decree” refers to God’s election of human beings to salvation, in *Paradise Lost* the Father refers to an eternal and unchangeable decree of human freedom. This freedom is the focus of the eternal, decreeing will of God. Human freedom is “formd” by God, and constituted by a “high Decree.” Its reality is grounded in an eternal, divine decision. In short, the Father makes human freedom, rather than human salvation, the object of predestination (*obiectum praedestinationis*).⁶³ As the object of the divine decree, human freedom is thus elevated to a status of eternal significance. It is depicted as the highest concern of the eternal will of God.

Further, while this freedom has been “ordaind” by God, according to *Paradise Lost* the human beings thus constituted as free agents “themselves ordaind thir fall.” The term “ordained” was commonly used in post-Reformation predestinarian discourse; but in a striking appropriation of this term, the Father shifts its reference from a divine to a human context. According to Reformed orthodoxy, the fall had been predetermined by the God who “unchangeably ordain[s] whatsoever comes to pass.”⁶⁴ But according

⁶² *Articuli Arminiani sive remonstrantia*, 1; in Schaff, 3:545. For an example of the same use of terminology in Reformed orthodoxy, see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992-97), 4.3.3.

⁶³ In post-Reformation discourse, the term “object of predestination” was used especially in the controversy between the infra- and supralapsarian parties within Reformed orthodoxy. On the term and its context, see Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-77), 2/2, 127-45; and Heppel, 157-62.

⁶⁴ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3.1; in Schaff, 3:308. For Calvin’s influential and uncompromising statement on the foreordination of the fall, see *Institutes*, 3.23.7.

to the God of *Paradise Lost*, the fall has not been divinely ordained, but rather “ordaind” by the freedom of human beings.⁶⁵

Earlier in the same speech, the theological term “decree” is similarly taken from its usual context in predestinarian theology and appropriated as a description of human freedom:

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 thir fault,
Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown. (3.114-19)

By the seventeenth century, the concept of an absolute decree (*decretum absolutum*) was widely associated with the Reformed orthodox view of predestination.⁶⁶ The Father's words here thus stand in continuity with anti-Calvinist polemic by asserting that no such “absolute Decree” has compromised the freedom of Adam and Eve.⁶⁷ Rather, the only decree that has any bearing on the fall is that of Adam and Eve themselves: they “decreed” their own revolt from God. Here any notion of a divine decree is deemed to be irrelevant to the fall, and the theological concept of “decree” is shifted from the abstract realm of eternal mysteries to the concrete realm of human action and decision. Using the same terminology of “decree,” the *De Doctrina Christiana* also suggests such a reformulation of predestinarian theology, when it argues that

⁶⁵ Hamilton, “Milton's Defensive God,” 94-95, thus notes that in this passage of *Paradise Lost* God “is skillfully using high Calvinist language to deny high Calvinist conclusions.”

⁶⁶ On the important concept of *decretum absolutum* in Reformed orthodoxy, see Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 2/2, 68-76, 158-61. For use of the term by Reformed orthodox theologians, see for example Polanus, *Syntagma theologiae christianae*, 4.6; and Turretin, *Institutes*, 4.3.2.

⁶⁷ For examples of Arminian polemical use of the concept of *decretum absolutum*, see Arminius, *Works*, 2:718; [Anon.], *An antidote against some principal errors of the predestinarians* (London, 1696), 11; and Richard Burthogge, *Christianity a revealed mystery* (London, 1702), 41.

the reprobation of the disobedient “lies not so much in the divine will, as in the obstinacy of their own minds; nor is it the decree of God, but rather of the reprobate themselves.”⁶⁸ According to the treatise, the only “decree” of reprobation is the decree of the human will. In this conception, it is not God who stands behind history with an all-determining “absolute decree.” Rather, human freedom itself has the power to decree and to render the future certain.

According to *Paradise Lost*, God’s endowment of human beings with radical freedom and autonomy is, even from the divine standpoint, unchangeable. Adam and Eve “must remain” free, or else God himself “must change / Thir nature” (3.125-6). Here the inviolable integrity of human freedom is closely connected to the immutability of God’s own character:⁶⁹ the enjambement—“I else must change / Thir nature”—implicitly suggests that changes in either divine or human nature are equally inconceivable. The integrity and autonomy of human nature are such that God himself, having decreed and created human freedom, cannot compromise or alter it.⁷⁰ With this freedom, this creaturely autonomy vis-à-vis God, human beings have “decreed / Thir own revolt,” “ordaind thir fall,” and predestined their own future.

God’s remark that the fall would have been no less “certain” if it had been “unforeknown” may thus be taken to mean that, far from exercising any positive influence

⁶⁸ *CM* 14:154-55.

⁶⁹ The divine immutability was an aspect of the doctrine of God carried over from patristic theology. On the patristic view, see G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1959), 6-9; and see the discussion and citations in Thomas C. Oden, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (New York: HarperCollins, 1987-92), 1:110-16. On divine immutability in post-Reformation theology, see Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:308-21.

⁷⁰ Even if God could alter the freedom of human nature, such an alteration would bring about, as Roland M. Frye, *God, Man, and Satan: Patterns of Christian Thought and Life in Paradise Lost, Pilgrim’s Progress, and the Great Theologians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 43, observes, “a fall far more drastic than that which man ordains for himself.”

on the future, divine foreknowledge can only observe the “certain” outcome of the human “decree.” The same priority of human action over divine foreknowledge is suggested when God claims that Adam and Eve trespass “without least impulse or shadow of Fate, / Or aught by mee immutabile foreseen” (3.120-21). God’s foresight is not logically prior to the fall.⁷¹ The event of the fall, in so far as it is an event of human freedom, possesses a real autonomy which stands apart even from divine knowledge. Adam and Eve decree their fall and, as a result, God foresees the fall. Strictly speaking, then, the fall itself takes place “without” foreknowledge, “without” any shadow of divine influence. Adam and Eve are thus truly “Authors to themselves in all” (3.122). They are characterised by a staggering volitional autonomy which reaches back, as it were, even to the depths of eternity.

This account of foreknowledge (*praescientia*) stands in continuity with the theory of middle knowledge (*scientia media*) expounded by the Roman Catholic theologian Luis de Molina (1535-1600).⁷² Seeking to uphold the liberty of human choice, Molina affirmed that between God’s knowledge of the possible on the one hand and the necessary on the other there lies a middle knowledge of those events which are brought about by the freedom of creatures. Such events are not determined by the divine will or foreknowledge, but only by the freedom of human agents; God foreknows such events because they will happen, not because he has made them happen.⁷³ Molina’s theory was

⁷¹ Similarly, see Arminius, *Works*, 2:368: “neither Prediction nor any Prescience induces a necessity of any thing that is afterwards to be (*futurae*); since they are posterior in nature and order to the thing that is future. For a thing does not come to pass because it has been foreknown or foretold; but it is foreknown and foretold because it is yet to come to pass.”

⁷² Molina’s major work, first published in 1588, is *Concordia liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis, divina praescientia, providentia, praedestinatione et reprobatione*, ed. Johann Rabeneck (Onia: Collegium Maximum Societatis Jesu, 1953).

⁷³ On middle knowledge, see William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents: Aristotle to Suárez* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 169-206; Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 2/1,

at the centre of extensive controversy in the seventeenth century.⁷⁴ While Reformed orthodoxy rejected middle knowledge because it made the divine knowledge “uncertain and dependent on the Creature,”⁷⁵ Arminian theology appropriated Molinism in metaphysical support of its view of predestination and grace.⁷⁶ Not all Arminians, however, were comfortable attributing this kind of causal independence to human agents; Thomas Goad, for instance, anathematises the notion that events come to pass by “Casuality,” that is, “*ex improviso*, beside the fore-thought.”⁷⁷ Goad’s polemical description of middle knowledge serves as a useful explication of *Paradise Lost*. In the poem, the acts of human beings come about “beside the fore-thought,” independently of the divine knowledge and will. Indeed, in *Paradise Lost* the Father goes still further when he denies that human actions are “by mee immutable foreseen” (3.121). Here the poem’s theology even leans towards Socinianism, which used the theory of middle

569-86; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:417-32; and Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). For a concise summary, see Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, trans. Darrell L. Guder, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981-83), 1:442-43.

⁷⁴ See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:419-20: “The extent of the seventeenth-century debate over middle knowledge was vast... Nearly every theologian and exegete of the age touched on the problem and, with the exceptions of the Jesuits, Socinians, and Arminians, response was largely negative.”

⁷⁵ Edward Leigh, *A system or body of divinity* (London, 1662), 2.7.

⁷⁶ On Arminius’s appropriation of middle knowledge, see Eef Dekker, “Was Arminius a Molinist?” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27:2 (1996), 337-52; Richard A. Muller, “Arminius and the Scholastic Tradition,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 24:2 (1989), 263-77; idem, *God, Creation and Providence*, 154-66; and idem, “Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice: Arminius’s Gambit and the Reformed Response,” in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 2:251-78.

⁷⁷ Thomas Goad, *Stimulus orthodoxus, sive Goadus redivivus: A disputation partly theological, partly metaphysical, concerning the necessity and contingency of events in the world, in respect of Gods eternal decree* (London, 1661), 13.

knowledge to deny that God possesses a full and certain knowledge of the future.⁷⁸

According to *Paradise Lost*, human freedom operates independently of the divine will to so great an extent that the divine knowledge of the future cannot even be described as “immutable.” God’s knowledge is subject to and influenced by the free actions of those creatures to whom he has granted freedom.⁷⁹

In *Paradise Lost*, the freedom of Adam and Eve is thus a freedom which God himself has decreed, so that at the deepest level the freely predestining grace of God retains its primacy. The freedom of human beings is a created and bestowed freedom. Its ground is in the will of the God who has graciously “ordaind / Thir freedom” (3.127-28). Far from negating human freedom, as the Satanic Calvinists claim in the poem’s opening books, God thus ordains and affirms the reality and the decisiveness of human choice.

According to *Paradise Lost*, then, God has elected all people to participate in the grace of salvation. But God has also predestined the freedom of all human beings, leaving them free to accept or to reject their own election. In continuity with Arminian theology, *Paradise Lost* thus depicts the free will of human beings as ultimately the deciding factor in salvation. But the poem’s universalism of electing grace far exceeds the universalistic features of both the Arminian and Amyraldian theologies. While these

⁷⁸ On the Socinian view of limited foreknowledge, see Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:424-30.

⁷⁹ Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium* (Philadelphia, 1907), 284, also suggests that this passage of *Paradise Lost* is close to Socinianism in denying the certainty of God’s knowledge of the free acts of creatures.

traditions had carried over from Reformed orthodoxy the concept of an eternal distinction in God's decree between election and reprobation, in *Paradise Lost* this distinction is radically undermined, so that election is made fully universal, and reprobation is reformulated as the temporal decision of those human beings who willfully reject the grace of God. Reprobation is, in other words, historically rather than eternally conditioned—it is determined by the human will, not by the will of God. In this way, the poem portrays the election of all people as a divinely-appointed actuality, and their reprobation as a self-appointed, mutable possibility. This theology of predestination in *Paradise Lost* invests the whole plan of salvation with a more profound emphasis on universal grace than Arminianism or Amyraldism had been able to achieve with their respective concepts of foreseen faith (*praevisa fides*) and hypothetical universalism (*l'universalisme hypothétique*)—concepts which had, in principle, done little to challenge the Reformed orthodox notion of an eternal decree that immutably fixes the condemnation of a certain number of human beings.

Alongside the universality of grace, at the heart of *Paradise Lost*'s theology of predestination stands the “high mystery”⁸⁰ of the free human will, a will which decrees the future and authors its own fate. The poem's theology of predestination consistently presses the decisiveness of human freedom into the foreground, and views the human will as possessing, by the grace of God, an autonomy which allows it even to decree and to ordain its own future. With this creative reconstruction of the the traditional idea of predestination, *Paradise Lost* moves beyond the entire framework of post-Reformation predestinarian controversy, and presses toward a more historical, more universalist, and more anthropologically-oriented vision of God's gracious election. In

⁸⁰ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3.8; in Schaff, 3:610. Here the “high mystery” refers to God's secret decree.

Paradise Lost, as I will argue in the following chapter, the remarkable power of human choice is in fact an image and reflection of God's own primal freedom and autonomy.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Freedom of God

Although the importance of human freedom in *Paradise Lost* has been widely discussed by Milton scholars, the importance of the portrayal of the freedom of God in the poem has largely gone unnoticed. But as Virginia Mollenkott has noted, Milton's theology is concerned not only with human freedom, but with "freedom of the will both in God and in his creatures."¹ Indeed, from a systematic point of view, the freedom of God in *Paradise Lost* is primary; it is the ground and basis of all creaturely freedom. The poem's portrayal of God therefore properly centres on God's freedom. Even more vigorously than in Reformed orthodox theology, *Paradise Lost* depicts God as a being exalted in his utter freedom; he is free to create or not and free to redeem or

¹ Virginia R. Mollenkott, "Free Will," in *A Milton Encyclopedia*, ed. William B. Hunter et al., 9 vols. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1978-83), 114.

not. Most strikingly, even his generation of the Son is a wholly free act, and the Son's very existence is thus, as in Arian theology, radically contingent.

I. The Free Creator

In the post-Reformation era, Reformed orthodox theology took up the medieval question of whether the work of creation is necessary or contingent. A small number of Reformed theologians argued for the necessity of God's outgoing works (*opera Dei ad extra*), claiming that the divine works flow from the divine nature in such a way that God does not possess genuine alternativity of choice. William Perkins, for example, asserts this position when he defines the divine decree as "that by which God in himselfe, hath necessarily, and yet freely, from all eternitie determined all things."² Yet the majority of Reformed orthodox divines, while maintaining the necessity of God's essence and existence, strongly affirmed the contingency of the works of God.³ William Ames articulates the usual Reformed position when he writes that "[w]hat God wills to do outwardly he wills not out of natural necessity,"⁴ for "there is nothing in the world, that hath a necessary connexion with the divine essence; and so nothing external comes

² William Perkins, *The workes of that famous and worthie minister of Christ, in the Universitie of Cambridge, M. W. Perkins*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1612-19), 1:15.

³ On the Reformed orthodox view of the necessity of the divine nature in relation to the contingency of the divine acts, see Andreas J. Beck, "Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676): Basic Features of His Doctrine of God," in *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, ed. Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 205-26. For a useful summary, see also Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1958), 129-30.

⁴ William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, ed. and trans. John D. Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 1.7.36.

from God by any necessity of his nature, but from his wisdom and free-will.”⁵ In the same vein, Zacharias Ursinus had written: “God created the world not by an absolute necessity” but by his “immutable, yet utterly free decree. Neither was God tied down to creating things, nor if he had never created the world ... would he be on that account less good or less blessed.”⁶ In this respect Reformed orthodoxy’s emphasis on “the utter freedom of God”⁷ followed the lead of Duns Scotus, who had written that the creative act “proceeds from God not from any necessity ... but from a pure freedom which is not moved, much less necessitated, by anything outside itself.”⁸ The contingency of the work of creation had in this way been maintained against pantheistic and emanationist doctrines and, in the late seventeenth century, Reformed orthodoxy sought in particular to defend divine contingency against the necessitarianism of Spinoza’s theory of *Deus sive natura*, according to which the will of God simply “cannot be other than it is.”⁹

In contrast to Reformed orthodoxy, Arminian theology developed a more circumscribed view of the divine freedom¹⁰—indeed, it restricted God’s freedom to such an extent that a Reformed divine like William Twisse could accuse the Arminians of “making God himselfe a necessary Agent, devoyd of all liberty and freedom.”¹¹

⁵ William Ames, *The substance of Christian religion, or, A plain and easie draught of the Christian catechism* (London, 1659), 67.

⁶ Zacharias Ursinus, *Opera theologica*, 3 vols. (Heidelberg, 1612), 1:548; cited in Heppe, 192.

⁷ The term is from Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 3:447.

⁸ John Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones disputatae de rerum principio*, 4.1.3; in *Quaestiones disputatae de rerum principio, Tractatus de primo rerum omnium principio*, ed. R. P. M. F. Garcia (Florence, 1910).

⁹ See Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner, 1949), 71.

¹⁰ See here especially Richard A. Muller, “God, Predestination, and the Integrity of the Created Order: A Note on Patterns in Arminius’ Theology,” in *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, ed. W. Fred Graham (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994), 431-46.

¹¹ William Twisse, *The riches of Gods love unto the vessells of mercy, consistent with his absolute hatred or reprobation of the vessells of wrath*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1653), 1:101.

According to Arminian theology, God “is not FREELY good,”¹² but he wills the good by a “natural necessity,”¹³ that is, a necessity grounded in “his entire nature and essence.”¹⁴ The necessary goodness of the divine nature, Arminius writes, “constitutes an entire, total, and sufficient cause for the exclusion of liberty.”¹⁵ God is therefore neither “freely good,” nor does he do “all things freely.”¹⁶ Rather, all the “acts of God,” both his internal (*ad intra*) acts and his outgoing (*ad extra*) acts, find their “foundation”¹⁷ and their “proximate and immediate principle” in the life and essence of God.¹⁸ The will of God therefore “can only will that which is not opposed to the Divine Essence (which is the foundation both of his understanding and of his will).”¹⁹ The divine will’s liberty and range of possibilities are in this way limited and restricted by the nature of God. Although Arminius still insists on the freedom of God’s creative act,²⁰ he understands freedom, as Richard Muller observes, not in the Reformed sense of “an utter freedom” by which God can do as he pleases “apart from consideration of external circumstances,”²¹ but only in the sense of an intellectualist freedom by which “the [divine] intellect directs the [divine] will to act.”²² In this circumscribed account of the freedom

¹² Jacobus Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols, 3 vols. (1825-75; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 2:34.

¹³ Simon Episcopius, *Opera theologica*, 2 vols. (London, 1678), 1:305.

¹⁴ Arminius, *Works*, 2:33. In contrast, representing the Reformed position, Richard Baxter, *The divine life in three treatises* (London, 1664), 131, writes: “God hath a natural *Freedome of Will*, being Determined to Will by nothing without him, nor liable to any Necessity.”

¹⁵ Arminius, *Works*, 2:35.

¹⁶ Arminius, *Works*, 2:35.

¹⁷ Arminius, *Works*, 2:340.

¹⁸ Arminius, *Works*, 2:119.

¹⁹ Arminius, *Works*, 2:352.

²⁰ See for example Arminius, *Works*, 2:356: “The creation was freely produced, not necessarily.”

²¹ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:447.

²² Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991),

of God, Arminian theology differs in a subtle but highly significant way from the Reformed orthodox vision of a God who is “the most free agent,”²³ and who is not in any sense “a natural and necessary agent.”²⁴

In its portrayal of creation, *Paradise Lost* exhibits close continuity with Reformed orthodoxy by affirming the freedom and contingency of this creative act of God. As he commissions the Son to create the world, the Father explicitly asserts that his decision to create is a contingent one:²⁵

And thou my Word, begott'n Son, by thee
This I perform, speak thou, and be it don:
My overshadowing Spirit and might with thee
I send along, ride forth, and bid the Deep
Within appointed bounds be Heav'n and Earth,
Boundless the Deep, because I am who fill
Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.
Though I uncircumscrib'd my self retire,
And put not forth my goodness, which is free
To act or not, Necessitie and Chance
Approach not mee, and what I will is Fate. (7.163-73)

Creation is to be brought about by God's “goodness,” and this goodness “is free / To act or not.” That is, God himself is faced with alternative possible choices, and he is free to decide between these alternatives. His decision to create is thus contingent. Not only does the Father affirm his own volitional contingency in creation, but he also denies the contrary: “Necessitie” does not approach him. Nothing in God's own nature leads him inexorably to bring anything into being by a creative act. Further, while Arminian

226. On Arminius's intellectualist view of freedom, see also Muller, “The Priority of the Intellect in the Soteriology of Jacob Arminius,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993), 55-72.

²³ Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (s.l., 1797), 371.

²⁴ Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 372.

²⁵ David Loewenstein, *Milton: Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 29, adduces this passage as an example of Milton's opposition to the “predestinarian orthodoxy” of Reformed theology. But the passage is concerned only with the question of the freedom or necessity of the divine creative act; the question of predestination is not in view.

theology closely connected the divine acts to the necessary goodness of the divine nature, the God of *Paradise Lost* asserts that it is precisely his “goodness” which is contingently “free” and which remains untouched by necessity. This means that God’s goodness is equally perfect and complete, regardless of whether or not he chooses to create. His goodness imposes no necessity upon his actions.²⁶

In this decidedly “non-Arminian”²⁷ emphasis on the divine freedom in creation, *Paradise Lost* exhibits close continuity with the Reformed orthodox tradition. Indeed, A. S. P. Woodhouse has even suggested that “[t]here is no tenet of orthodox belief to which Milton adheres more tenaciously than the voluntary character of the creative act.”²⁸ Engaging with the Reformed divines Ames and Wollebius, Stephen Fallon has shown the extent to which divine freedom in *Paradise Lost* is continuous with Reformed orthodoxy. Fallon rightly notes that “the God of *Paradise Lost* exhibits demonstrably more freedom of choice than does the God of the theological compatibilists” like Hobbes or Arminius:²⁹ in the poem, God has “freedom to choose among equal alternative goods.”³⁰ He is not constrained by nature to act in any particular way; nor, more

²⁶ For an analogy of this kind of compatibility between necessary goodness and contingent action, see Colin E. Gunton, *Becoming and Being: The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 147-48: “I may know from his consistent past behaviour that Smith loves his family, but that is not to say that I know which particular loving acts he will perform tomorrow or next week.” The analogy breaks down, however, in the respect that the God of *Paradise Lost* can choose not only between alternative acts, but also (unlike human beings) between acting and not-acting.

²⁷ Stephen M. Fallon, “‘To Act or Not’: Milton’s Conception of Divine Freedom,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49:3 (1988), 426n4.

²⁸ A. S. P. Woodhouse, “Notes on Milton’s Views on the Creation: The Initial Phases,” *Philological Quarterly* 28:1 (1949), 215.

²⁹ Fallon, “To Act or Not,” 444.

³⁰ Fallon, “To Act or Not,” 448.

importantly, is he constrained by nature to act at all. He is “free / To act or not.”³¹ With a similar emphasis on God’s freedom to refrain from acting, the *De Doctrina Christiana* argues that “God cannot rightly be called Actus Purus, or pure actuality . . . for thus he could do nothing except what he does do, and he would do that of necessity, although in fact he is omnipotent and utterly free in his actions.”³² In such a conception, the possibilities of the freedom of God far transcend the possibilities of creaturely freedom. For, in Fallon’s words, “[m]an is free to do right or wrong, but he must act; God, on the other hand, can do only right, but he is free to act or not.”³³ The point, then, is not simply that God might have chosen to create this world in a different way; rather, *Paradise Lost* presents “the disorienting possibility that our world might never have been created”³⁴—that God, without compromising his goodness, might have chosen never to act at all.³⁵ Such a possibility strikingly highlights the contingency of God’s creative act, and as a result the gracious character of all creaturely existence. Here the words of T. F. Torrance, the most vigorous twentieth-century advocate of theological

³¹ In parallel, see the summary of the Reformed orthodox position in Heppie, 192: “Above all it is fixed, that the creation of the world is a thoroughly free act of God, in fact an act of God free *libertate contradictionis* . . . so that God could also refrain from creating.”

³² *CPW* 6:145-46. The concept of God as *actus purus* was especially developed by Thomas Aquinas: for a recent discussion, see Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 187-91, 199-203.

³³ Fallon, “To Act or Not,” 448.

³⁴ Fallon, “To Act or Not,” 449. Articulating the Thomist position, E. L. Mascall, *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism* (London: Longmans, 1943), 95, observes: “The real miracle is not that God exists but that the world does.” For a theological discussion of the possibility of nonexistence, and the “ontological shock” which this possibility evokes, see Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63), 1:126, 207-13.

³⁵ On the complex Reformed orthodox view of divine *volitio* and *nolitio*, see the account of Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:456: “in the case of an event ‘a,’ God can will ‘a’ or will ‘not-a’—but he can also ‘not will a’ without any necessity of willing ‘not-a’ and, indeed, he can ‘not will a’ and in the same moment ‘not will not-a.’” Muller suggests that these distinctions between *volitio* and *nolitio* may be due to Scotist influences on Reformed orthodox theology.

contingence, may serve as a gloss on *Paradise Lost*'s account of the freedom of God in creation: "Since the Creator was free not to create," and since the creation was "a contingent act unconditioned by anything in God," the act of creation can only be understood as "an act of pure liberality and grace."³⁶ Reformed orthodox theology, with its emphasis on the divine freedom, accentuated this theme of the graciousness of creation,³⁷ a theme which is summed up in the statement of Karl Barth: "Creation is grace."³⁸ In the same way, in *Paradise Lost* all creaturely existence is profoundly rooted in a contingent choice of God, so that the relationship between God and his creatures remains always and only a relationship grounded in the divine liberality. For this reason, when the newly-created Adam awakes for the first time and knows himself to be a creature, his thoughts turn immediately to the liberality of the creator's goodness:

Thou Sun, said I, faire Light,
 And thou enlight'nd Earth, so fresh and gay,
 Ye Hills and Dales, ye Rivers, Woods, and Plaines,
 And yee that live and move, fair Creatures, tell,
 Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?
 Not of my self; by some great Maker then,
 In goodness and in power præeminent;
 Tell me, how may I know him, how adore,
 From whom I have that thus I move and live,
 And feel that I am happier then I know. (8.273-82)

³⁶ T. F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 34. See also the remark of Mascall, *He Who Is*, 109: "It is precisely because creation can give nothing whatever to God which in any way enhances his beatitude, that creation is an act of entire giving on the part of God.... In creating the world he gains nothing; that is why creation is an act of supreme love."

³⁷ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:570, notes that in Reformed orthodoxy grace is "a characteristic of God's relations to the finite order," and is "fundamental to all of God's relationships with the world and especially with human beings" (3:570n512).

³⁸ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: SCM, 1949), 54. The idea that creation is grace had been stated already by Origen, and was developed by Augustine, Anselm, Luther and Calvin. See the historical discussion in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-77), 3/1, 29-31; and the comments in Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, trans. Darrell L. Guder, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981-83), 1:483-84, 2:411-12.

As Stephen Fallon notes, Adam here “awakes at his creation to a sense of gratitude for life as a gift.”³⁹ Creation is not a necessary expression of the divine nature, but a free expression of God’s preeminent “goodness.” And for this reason God can only be thanked and “adore[d]” for bestowing on Adam the gift of creaturely existence.

But while Reformed orthodox theology insisted that “no creature was or could have been a cause . . . in the act of creation,”⁴⁰ since any cause external to the divine will itself would compromise the freedom of God’s creative act, *Paradise Lost* speaks of the angelic rebellion as a “cause” of creation. Early in Book 7, Adam asks Raphael to explain:

what cause
 Mov’d the Creator in his holy Rest
 Through all Eternitie so late to build
 In *Chaos*. (7.90-93)

In reply, Raphael does not even pause over the question of whether an external “cause” is proper to the divine will; rather, he simply explains that the cause of creation was the rebellion and expulsion from heaven of Lucifer and “his flaming Legions” (7.134).

When the Son returns from his conquest over the rebellious spirits, the Father tells him of his plan to make amends for the “many” who have forfeited their place in heaven:

I can repaire
 That detriment, if such it be to lose
 Self-lost, and in a moment will create
 Another World, out of one man a Race
 Of men innumerable, there to dwell,
 Not here, till by degrees of merit rais’d
 They op’n to themselves at length the way
 Up hither. (7.152-59)

³⁹ Fallon, “To Act or Not,” 445.

⁴⁰ Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, 1.8.16.

And on hearing of this plan, the heavenly angels sing:

to him
 Glorie and praise, whose wisdom had ordaind
 Good out of evil to create, in stead
 Of Spirits maligne a better Race to bring
 Into thir vacant room. (7.186-90)

God's creative act is, then, motivated by the vacancy in heaven left by the expelled angels. Satan had thought to lessen the number of God's worshippers (7.609-16), but God will re-people heaven with a better race. This concept of the re-peopling of heaven constitutes a significant theological risk in a poem that seeks to accentuate the freedom of God and to show that God is always "free / To act or not," and is untouched by any shadow of "Necessitie" (7.171-72). Indeed, the re-peopling theory, which can be traced back at least as far as Augustine,⁴¹ had traditionally been accompanied by a necessitarian view of the will of God in creation. The most elaborate account of this theory is found in Anselm's *Cur deus homo*,⁴² where Anselm posits the re-peopling of heaven as part of the "reason or necessity"⁴³ of creation and redemption alike. According to Anselm, it was necessary for God to exact payment for sin;⁴⁴ it was necessary that the number of elect human beings replace the number of fallen angels;⁴⁵ it was necessary that a satisfaction be made for sin, since sinful human beings cannot replace holy an-

⁴¹ See Augustine, *De civitate Dei contra paganos*, 22.1; in *PL* 41 and *NPNF* 2. For a brief historical survey of the idea of the re-peopling of heaven, see Grant McColley, *"Paradise Lost": An Account of Its Growth and Major Origins, With a Discussion of Milton's Use of Sources and Literary Patterns* (Chicago: Packard, 1940), 46-47.

⁴² Anselm, *Cur deus homo*; in *Opera omnia*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1938-61), 2:37-133.

⁴³ Anselm, *Cur deus homo*, 1.1.

⁴⁴ Anselm, *Cur deus homo*, 1.12.

⁴⁵ Anselm, *Cur deus homo*, 1.16-17.

gels;⁴⁶ and it was necessary for God to become human, in order to make the necessary satisfaction for sin.⁴⁷ Anselm seeks also to maintain the freedom of God, by claiming that God “freely submits himself” to necessity,⁴⁸ but this note of divine freedom is itself subsumed under the overarching necessitarian framework.⁴⁹

In describing the re-peopling of heaven as a “cause” of creation, *Paradise Lost* might seem similarly to risk sliding into such a necessitarian scheme. Yet the most theologically important aspect of *Paradise Lost*’s appropriation of the re-peopling theory is the way in which it modifies and corrects the Anselmic account. Before speaking of his desire to re-people heaven, the Father radically qualifies this “cause” of creation. Satan has, the Father says, drawn “many” away from “thir place” in heaven (7.144):

Yet farr the greater part have kept, I see,
Thir station, Heav’n yet populous retaines
Number sufficient to possess her Realmes
Though wide, and this high Temple to frequent
With Ministeries due and solemn Rites. (7.145-49)

In spite of the fall of Satan and his hosts, the great majority of angels remains in heaven, and the number of these angels remains “sufficient.” In this way God flatly

⁴⁶ Anselm, *Cur deus homo*, 1.19.

⁴⁷ Anselm, *Cur deus homo*, 1.20-23; 2.6-7.

⁴⁸ Anselm, *Cur deus homo*, 2.5.

⁴⁹ Perhaps the most striking example of Anselm’s tendency to subsume freedom into a broader necessitarian framework is his paradoxical argument that Christ lays down his life freely, precisely because it is “necessary” that he should “die of his own free will” (*Cur deus homo*, 2.11; see also 2.17). For discussions of the complex problem of necessity in Anselm’s thought, see Michel Root, “Necessity and Unfittingness in Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo*,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40:2 (1987), 211-30; and Brian Leftow, “Anselm on the Necessity of the Incarnation,” *Religious Studies* 31:2 (1995), 167-85.

counters Satan's boast that his rebellion has "emptied Heav'n" (1.633).⁵⁰ God has not suffered any loss; heaven remains "populous"; and there is accordingly no need for the number of fallen angels to be replaced. Only after making this crucial—and deeply non-Anselmic—point does God proceed to explain that he has, nevertheless, freely decided to re-people heaven. Of Satan, the Father says:

But least his heart exalt him in the harme
 Already done, to have dispeopl'd Heav'n,
 My damage fondly deemd, I can repaire
 That detriment, if such it be to lose
 Self-lost, and in a moment will create
 Another World. (7.150-55)

Satan's claim "to have dispeopl'd Heav'n" is only "fondly deemd" by Satan to have damaged God. God has lost nothing, for the fallen angels are "Self-lost," that is, "lost to themselves rather than to God."⁵¹ But still God claims that he "can" and "will" repair the situation, which he ironically calls a "detriment." By saying only that he "can" and "will," God emphasises the simple freedom of his decision to create. The rebellion of the angels is therefore, as Stephen Fallon notes, a "reason" for God's creative act, but not a "sufficient" reason;⁵² or more precisely, it is simply the *occasion* for creation—an occasion which in no way impels the will of God to act. After all, it is precisely in this connection that God affirms his sheer freedom "To act or not" (7.172). Further, God claims that he will freely choose to re-people heaven with a "better Race" (7.189)—and what is more, he will re-people heaven not simply with a fixed number of human beings, but with "men innumerable" (7.156). Thus, as Dennis Danielson observes, *Paradise Lost* does not envisage a mere "replacing of a certain number of angels with

⁵⁰ As noted by Verity, 535.

⁵¹ Hughes, 349.

⁵² Fallon, "To Act or Not," 445. See also C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 38.

the same number of human beings,” but rather the loss of angels is “more than compensated” by replacing a limited number of angels with an “innumerable” host of human beings.⁵³ This over-compensation for the lost angels especially highlights the freedom of God in creation. In contrast to any necessitarian view of the re-peopling of heaven, the God of *Paradise Lost* creates freely and contingently. He exercises his goodness by creating “Another World” (7.155) even when he has no need to do so.⁵⁴ He has lost nothing in the Satanic rebellion, so he stands to gain nothing for himself in the creation of a new world. As William Ames had said, there can ultimately be no reason for God’s creative act, “beyond or above his free will.”⁵⁵ This Reformed orthodox notion is deeply ingrained in *Paradise Lost*’s portrayal of the “cause” of creation. The poem thus appropriates the Anselmic theory of the re-peopling of heaven in order to achieve a fundamentally non-Anselmic effect: a more pronounced emphasis on the freedom and contingency of God’s will, and therefore also on the gracious character of the creative act.⁵⁶ This feature of *Paradise Lost*’s theology illustrates the poem’s distinctive tendency to appropriate existing theological concepts in such a way that these concepts are radically transformed.

⁵³ Dennis R. Danielson, *Milton’s Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 233.

⁵⁴ Michael Lieb, *The Dialectics of Creation: Patterns of Birth and Regeneration in Paradise Lost* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 57n3, also notes that the concept of the re-peopling of heaven reflects “the major pattern of the poem: creation springs from destruction as good springs from evil.”

⁵⁵ Ames, *The substance of Christian religion*, 68.

⁵⁶ Out of a proper concern to insist that the concept of the re-peopling of heaven “does not make creation ‘necessary,’” Fowler goes so far as to say that “Raphael nowhere advances any theory about the cause of man’s creation” (Fowler, 365). Yet this uneasiness about the idea of a “cause” of creation seems ill-founded in view of the non-necessitarian function of the “cause” in *Paradise Lost*’s account.

II. Arian Freedom

Paradise Lost's emphasis on the freedom of God becomes even more pronounced, and this time in a highly heterodox way, in the poem's account of the Father's free generation of the Son. Trinitarian orthodoxy consistently regarded the internal works of God (*opera Dei ad intra*), in which the Father generates the Son, and the Father and Son spirate the Spirit,⁵⁷ as "most necessary" acts of the divine essence;⁵⁸ by his necessary will (*voluntas necessaria*) "God the Father necessarily wills to beget God the Son."⁵⁹ This is a necessity in the strictest sense; it is, in the words of Francis Turretin, a necessity grounded in the divine "nature."⁶⁰ Responding to the Arian view that the Son is begotten not "by nature" but "by the freewill of the Father," William Perkins writes that the Son "is the Sonne of the Father by nature, *not by will*."⁶¹ Since this generation of the Son by the Father is a necessity of the nature of God, it is maintained as an "eternall generation," which "hath neither beginning, middle, or ende."⁶²

⁵⁷ I am referring here to Western trinitarian orthodoxy, according to which both Father and Son spirate the Spirit. Eastern orthodoxy, however, denied the validity of the Western *filioque* clause, and affirmed that the Father alone spirates the Spirit. On the differences of opinion regarding the *filioque*, see Aristeides Papadakis, *Crisis in Byzantium: The Filioque Controversy in the Patriarchate of Gregory II of Cyprus (1283-1289)* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1983). Notwithstanding this division, however, the Eastern and Western churches were united in viewing the internal trinitarian works (*opera Trinitatis ad intra*) as taking place by a necessity of nature (*ex necessitate naturae*), and not by any indifferent freedom of the divine will.

⁵⁸ John Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures: The Quodlibetal Questions*, trans. F. Alluntis and A. B. Wolter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 16.1.5.

⁵⁹ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:453.

⁶⁰ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992-97), 3.29.22.

⁶¹ Perkins, *Workes*, 1:177.

⁶² Perkins, *Workes*, 1:174-75.

In sharp contrast to this orthodox trinitarian position, *Paradise Lost*'s account of the generation of the Son is characterised not by necessity but by contingency. When the still solitary Adam expresses his desire for human companionship, God the Father replies.⁶³

What thinkst thou then of mee, and this my State,
Seem I to thee sufficiently possest
Of happiness, or not? who am alone
From all Eternitie, for none I know
Second to mee or like, equal much less.
How have I then with whom to hold converse
Save with the Creatures which I made, and those
To me inferiour, infinite descents
Beneath what other Creatures are to thee? (8.403-11)

Adam responds with what is perhaps the poem's strongest statement of Arian theology:

No need that thou
Shouldst propagate, already infinite;
And through all numbers absolute, though One;
But Man by number is to manifest
His single imperfection, and beget
Like of his like, his Image multipli'd,
In unitie defective, which requires
Collateral love, and deerest amitie. (8.419-26)

⁶³ Some debate has focused on whether the divine speaker in this section of Book 8 is in fact the Father, or whether it might instead be God the Son. According to James H. Sims, "*Paradise Lost*: 'Arian Document' or Christian Poem?" *Études Anglaises* 20 (1967), 343, Adam is speaking not with the Father but with the Son, and Sims thus argues that the theology of the dialogue should not be taken in an Arian sense. In contrast, Michael Bauman, *Milton's Arianism* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1987), 263-66, more convincingly argues that the divine speaker here can only be God the Father. Bauman rightly notes that, in the statement "Whom thou soughtst I am" (8.316), the divine speaker implicitly identifies himself as the "I AM" of Exodus 3:14, and thus as Yahweh, the monotheistic God of the Old Testament. On the allusion to Exodus 3:14, see also Todd, 3:444; and Fowler, 413. It is especially worth noting, too, that when the "voice" of this divine speaker is compared with the respective voices of the Father and the Son elsewhere in the poem, it bears clear resemblance to the distinctive voice of the Father.

According to Adam, God does not need to “propagate” or “beget.” He is perfect and complete simply as “One”; his perfection is expressed by his numerical simplicity, in contrast to the humanity’s imperfection which is witnessed by its need for numerical multiplication. This emphasis on numerical simplicity stands in continuity with Arian theology. The British Arian Samuel Clarke, for instance, argues that the word “God” in Scripture “never signifies a complex Notion of more Persons ... than One; but always means One Person only.”⁶⁴ Similarly, the Socinians took it as axiomatic that “the divine essence is numerically one,”⁶⁵ so that their anti-trinitarian theology was motivated by “their radical assumption of the oneness of God.”⁶⁶ In *Paradise Lost*, Adam’s speech is allusively replete with theological terms like “propagate,” “infinite,” “absolute,” “beget,” “image” and “unitie”; but the most theologically significant term is “need”—“No need that thou / Shouldst propagate.” Here “need” immediately evokes the entire Nicene tradition, which understood the Father’s generation of the Son to be a “necessary” act of the divine essence (_____). Only by stressing this divine necessity could theologians maintain the eternal consubstantiality of the Son with the Father; in fact, in arguing for the restriction of the freedom of God, Arminius had insisted that too great an emphasis on divine freedom would entail Arianism: “For if [God] be *freely* good, he ... does all things *freely*, even when he begets the Son and breathes forth the Holy Spirit!”⁶⁷ Arian theology had indeed placed the greatest possible emphasis on God’s freedom, insisting that the Son is generated not by necessity but “by a punctiliar act of God’s free will,” and in this way highlighting “[t]he freedom of God from all limitations, his essential independence of all contingencies, and the essential

⁶⁴ Samuel Clarke, *The works of Samuel Clarke*, 4 vols. (London, 1738), 4:155.

⁶⁵ Thomas Rees, ed., *The Racovian Catechism* (London, 1818), 4.1.

⁶⁶ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:283.

⁶⁷ Arminius, *Works*, 2:35.

contingency of the Son's status as Son."⁶⁸ Thus Samuel Clarke describes the generation of the Son as occurring "not by absolute *necessity of nature* (which infers self-existence and independency) but by the *power* of the *will* of the Father."⁶⁹ And according to the *De Doctrina Christiana*, the Father "begot his Son not from any natural necessity but of his own free will," for God "always acts with absolute freedom," and so "must have begotten his Son with absolute freedom."⁷⁰ Indeed, according to the treatise God "stands in no need of propagation" (*propagatione*).⁷¹ This is exactly the point of Adam's affirmation that God does not "need" to propagate.⁷² Even the propagation of the Son depends solely on the free decision of the divine will, so that, as Michael Bauman observes, in *Paradise Lost* the Son's very existence is not necessary but contingent: "The Son need not ever have existed."⁷³ Hence even *Paradise Lost*'s most notorious and controversial "heresy"—its Arianism—is itself grounded in the poem's profound and rigorously consistent commitment to the freedom of God.⁷⁴

Further, the exaltation of the Son is not an eternal and necessary reality, but a contingent event which occurs at a particular temporal moment within the narrative action of *Paradise Lost*. Summoning the whole "Empyrean Host" (5.583), the Father declares:

⁶⁸ Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God From Origen to Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 144.

⁶⁹ From a letter of Samuel Clarke, recorded in William Whiston, *Historical memoirs of the life and writings of Dr. Samuel Clarke* (London, 1730), 79.

⁷⁰ *CPW* 6:209.

⁷¹ *CPW* 6:209; *CM* 14:186.

⁷² The close parallel between the *De Doctrina* and *Paradise Lost* on this point has been rightly noted by Maurice Kelley, *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's De Doctrina Christiana as a Gloss Upon Paradise Lost* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 120-21.

⁷³ Bauman, *Milton's Arianism*, 267.

⁷⁴ The same, I believe, may be said of the Arianism of the *De Doctrina Christiana*: see especially the argument in *CPW* 6:209, which is succinct but nonetheless decisive for the whole structure of the treatise's theology of the Son of God.

Hear all ye Angels, Progenie of Light,
 Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers,
 Hear my Decree, which unrevok'd shall stand.
 This day I have begot whom I declare
 My onely Son, and on this holy Hill
 Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
 At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;
 And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow
 All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord. (5.600-8)⁷⁵

Here the Father's public "begetting" of the Son is distinct from the moment of the Son's creation, since the Son had already existed before the angels were "By him created" (5.838);⁷⁶ as Michael Bauman notes, the Son's begetting in this connection consists in the fact that he is exalted by the Father "to a position of high eminence which He did not previously possess."⁷⁷ The fact that the Son does not naturally or necessarily occupy this exalted position at the Father's "right hand" is crucial for the development of the narrative that follows. Satan, jealous of being suddenly "eclipt" by "Another" (5.775-76), feels himself "impaired" (5.665) by the exaltation of the Son, who has been "that day / Honour'd by his great Father" (5.662-63). And so Satan rebels. The whole cosmic drama of *Paradise Lost* is therefore contingent on the event of the exaltation of the Son. And the contingency of the Son's exaltation is highlighted by the Father's insistence that this exaltation depends not on any intrinsic necessity—not, that is, on the fact that

⁷⁵ The Father's speech alludes to Psalm 2:7: "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." This verse has a controversial history of trinitarian and anti-trinitarian interpretation in the post-Reformation era: see Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:276, 285, 301-2. The theological appropriation of Psalm 2:7 at this point in the narrative of *Paradise Lost* deserves a detailed study against the background of the verse's interpretive history. For the *De Doctrina's* interpretation of Psalm 2:7, see *CPW* 6:206-7.

⁷⁶ According to the *De Doctrina Christiana*, the "generation" or begetting of the Son can refer either to the Son's "production" or to his "exaltation" (*CPW* 6:205). The same distinction seems to be implicit in this section of *Paradise Lost*, in which the already existent Son is publicly "begotten" by the Father with the result that he will henceforth sit at God's right hand.

⁷⁷ Bauman, *Milton's Arianism*, 259.

the Son is “of one substance with the Father” (_____ π _____),⁷⁸ and is therefore already necessarily exalted—but simply on the Father’s “Decree.” It is the free choice of the Father to honour the Son in this way. This is a contingent choice, a decree that the Father need not and might not have made.

This distinctively Arian characterisation of divine freedom is accentuated further by the contingency of the work of redemption in *Paradise Lost*. An important theological function of the Father-Son colloquy in Book 3 is to portray dramatically the sheer contingency of God’s decision to redeem the human race. When the Father declares that humankind “must die” (3.209) unless some other will pay the “rigid satisfaction, death for death” (3.212), there is stunned silence in heaven. In the midst of this silence, before the Son steps forward and offers himself as a sacrifice for humanity, the narrative voice points out the dramatic contingency of the entire plan of salvation:

And now without redemption all mankind
Must have bin lost, adjudg’d to Death and Hell
By doom severe, *had not the Son of God,*
In whom the fulness dwels of love divine,
His dearest mediation thus renewd. (3.222-6; emphasis added)

The human race need not have been saved. There need not have been a mediator. The Son offers himself with true freedom, exhibiting what Desmond Hamlet calls the “creative use of His freedom and His responsibility.”⁷⁹ Here the Son is not simply a natural and necessary expression of the Father’s will; in the drama of the poem, his decision is not simply a given from the outset. On the contrary, as Barbara Lewalski observes, “Milton’s Arianism allows him to portray the Son as a genuinely dramatic

⁷⁸ Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed; in Schaff, 2:57.

⁷⁹ Desmond M. Hamlet, *One Greater Man: Justice and Damnation in Paradise Lost* (London: Associated University Presses, 1976), 18.

and heroic character, whose choices are made and whose actions are taken freely.”⁸⁰

The Son exercises his freedom to bring about the will of the Father; in the words of John Rumrich, he is the “contingent” Son who “acts to fulfill the will of the one absolute being.”⁸¹ In this respect the theology of *Paradise Lost* is discontinuous with the Reformed orthodox insistence on the necessity of the work of salvation through Christ. The Puritan Stephen Charnock had argued elaborately for the necessity of Christ’s death,⁸² and Thomas Manton similarly writes: “Surely [Christ’s] death was necessary, or God would never have appointed it; his bloody death suited with God’s design.”⁸³ Ames also speaks of the necessity by which God—being the kind of God he is—must necessarily provide a way of salvation.⁸⁴ The Amyraldian theologians insisted even more emphatically on the necessity of redemption. According to Amyraut, it would be “impossible” for the divine justice to leave human sin unpunished,⁸⁵ but it would be even more impossible for God not to be merciful,⁸⁶ since God’s actions are strictly subordinated to his nature.⁸⁷ On account of his goodness, God “cannot but love”

⁸⁰ Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 473.

⁸¹ Rumrich, *Milton Unbound*, 45.

⁸² Stephen Charnock, *The Works of Stephen Charnock*, 5 vols. (Edinburgh, 1864-66), 5:3-48. For an earlier argument for the necessity of redemption, see Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Loci communes* (London, 1576), 2.17.19; on Vermigli’s position, see Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 60-61.

⁸³ Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, 20 vols. (London, 1870-74), 1:422.

⁸⁴ Ames, *The substance of Christian religion*, 33.

⁸⁵ Moïse Amyraut, *A treatise concerning religions, in refutation of the opinion which accounts all indifferent* (London, 1660), 459.

⁸⁶ On this aspect of Amyraldian theology, see G. Michael Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology From Calvin to the Consensus, 1536-1675* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 170, 174, 179-80.

⁸⁷ See Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 198.

unfallen human beings; he is “unable not to love” those who are fallen but repentant.⁸⁸ Such concepts of divine necessity are entirely absent in *Paradise Lost*. Instead, the poem points to a vision of the totally uninhibited freedom of God. The Father need not have begotten the Son. The Son need not have redeemed humanity.

In this respect the Son occupies a crucial place in the theodicy of *Paradise Lost*. As John Rumrich notes: “the Son’s freely made decisions to obey the Father’s will function as a striking counter-example to the decisions of Satan and Adam.”⁸⁹ The Son is not simply a reflection of the Father’s essence and will; his decision to offer himself is not a necessary emanation from the will of the Father. It is, rather, a free and utterly contingent decision, a decision which might never have been made. The gracious character of the work of redemption is, in Protestant fashion, thus emphasised, albeit it in a distinctively heterodox way. Human salvation, like creation, is portrayed as a sheer gift, as something which need not and might not have taken place. The entire human race may well have “bin lost,” condemned to die “without redemption” (3.222-23)—“had not the Son of God” freely decided to intervene (2.224-26).

III. Divine and Creaturely Freedom

The radical freedom of God in *Paradise Lost* is, moreover, the ground of all creaturely freedom. In the poem, creation is equated with liberation, so that God’s creatures, being

⁸⁸ Moïse Amyraut, *Mosis Amyraldi dissertationes theologicae quatuor* (Saumur, 1645), 30-31, 36-39; cited in Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 198.

⁸⁹ John P. Rumrich, “Milton’s Arianism: Why It Matters,” in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 86. See also John C. Ulrich, “‘Substantially Express’d’: Milton’s Doctrine of the Incarnation,” *Milton Studies* 39 (2000), 116-17.

endowed with genuine autonomy, are made to participate in and to reflect something of God's own freedom.

In *Paradise Lost*, God does not create from nothing (*ex nihilo*), as in Reformed orthodox theology,⁹⁰ but from preexisting matter (*ex materia*). As Raphael tells Adam:

O *Adam*, one Almighty is, from whom
 All things proceed, and up to him return,
 If not depriv'd from good, created all
 Such to perfection, one first matter all,
 Indu'd with various forms, various degrees
 Of substance, and in things that live, of life;
 But more refin'd, more spiritous, and pure,
 As neerer to him plac't or neerer tending
 Each in thir several active Sphears assignd,
 Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
 Proportiond to each kind. (5.469-79)

All creatures, angels as much as human beings, have been formed from the same "first matter." The "formless Mass" of primal matter constitutes "This Worlds material mould" (3.708-9); and this primal matter (*materia prima*) itself "proceed[s]" from God's own being.⁹¹ Further, God initially brings forth this "first matter" through an act of self-withdrawal and self-limitation.⁹²

⁹⁰ On the Reformed orthodox view of *creatio ex nihilo*, see Heppie, 196-99. For a discussion of the historical development of this doctrine, see Alister E. McGrath, *A Scientific Theology*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001-3), 1:155-66.

⁹¹ See the concise statement of Hughes: "Milton thought of creation as God's shaping through the Word, his Son, of the unformed matter which originated in him" (Hughes, 193).

⁹² Recent interpretations of monist-materialist creation in *Paradise Lost* are still indebted to the account of creation by retraction in Denis Saurat, *Milton, Man and Thinker* (London: J. M. Dent, 1944), 102-10, 236-38, an account which contains penetrating insights in spite of its obvious deficiencies and imbalances: for criticisms, see especially R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Milton and the *Conjectura Cabbalistica*," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 18 (1955), 90-113; and Kelley, *This Great Argument*, 205-13. Perhaps the most important problem in Saurat's reading is the exaggerated interpretive weight which he places on lines 7.168-73, claiming that "these six lines are the most important passage in *Paradise Lost*," and that from the retraction theory presented here "everything else derives" (238-39),

I am who fill
 Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.
 Though I uncircumscrib'd my self retire,
 And put not forth my goodness, which is free
 To act or not. (7.168-72)

In this view of the creative act, as John Rumrich has argued, God retires from a certain “shadowy” part of his own material being, leaving behind a formless chaos of divine “material potency.”⁹³ By freely “retir[ing]” from himself and limiting himself in this way, God creates the possibility of creaturely freedom.⁹⁴

Although the monistic materialism of *Paradise Lost* was foreign to Arminian theology, the concept of divine self-limitation was often expressed by Arminian writers. Arminius himself, as Richard Muller notes, had viewed creation “as a self-limiting act of God,”⁹⁵ and had also affirmed “the self-limitation of God in relation to the created order.”⁹⁶ Victoria Silver has suggested that *Paradise Lost*’s account bears “distinct ... resemblances to the Arminian and Molinist doctrine of God’s middle knowledge, in which deity by delimiting its active and determining goodness through covenant creates

since it constitutes “the very centre of [Milton’s] metaphysics” (102). This extreme systematic interpretation of Milton’s metaphysics appears to stem from Saurat’s own profound absorption of the nineteenth-century impulse of deductive systematisation, an impulse which did not, however, characterise seventeenth-century theology.

⁹³ John P. Rumrich, *Milton Unbound: Controversy and Reinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 129, 144.

⁹⁴ See Stephen M. Fallon, “*Paradise Lost* in Intellectual History,” in *A Companion to Milton*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 339: “Chaos is that region from which God retires, refraining from putting forth his goodness. The distance won by this restraint accounts not only for the formlessness of Chaos, but also for the freedom of the universe created from the body of God, including the freedom of creatures.”

⁹⁵ Muller, *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius*, 234, 268.

⁹⁶ Muller, *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius*, 239.

a domain of contingent order.”⁹⁷ But whereas for Arminius the divine self-limitation derives from God’s goodness, which seeks to create and to preserve creaturely freedom,⁹⁸ *Paradise Lost* more radically equates God’s self-limitation with the very act of creation. In a single act and moment, God’s withdrawal from himself creates a sphere which is other to God, and which possesses its own ontological autonomy: “since Milton’s God is in some sense material, he need only to withdraw his control from a portion of himself to leave freed matter in an area no longer controlled.”⁹⁹ Denis Saurat is therefore right when he remarks that “[t]he question of free will ... becomes with Milton ontological. Being is freedom.”¹⁰⁰ By withdrawing ontologically from his own active essence, God freely relinquishes part of his own being, and in this way calls forth a created order, an ontological Other, the very being of which consists in its autonomy vis-à-vis God. Creation itself, as that from which God “retire[s]” (7.170), is therefore nothing other than a radical “liberation” of creaturely reality.¹⁰¹ As Victoria Silver has noted, God occasions creaturely freedom by creating ontological “room” for his creatures.¹⁰² God withdraws and circumscribes his own fullness in order to grant autonomous space to his creatures.¹⁰³

To draw a perverse analogy, the autonomy of human creatures in *Paradise Lost* is rather like that of amorous Sin, who springs full-grown from Satan’s head, no longer

⁹⁷ Victoria Silver, *Imperfect Sense: The Predicament of Milton’s Irony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 358n9.

⁹⁸ See Muller, *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius*, 239-40.

⁹⁹ Harry F. Robins, *If This Be Heresy: A Study of Milton and Origen* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 93.

¹⁰⁰ Saurat, *Milton, Man and Thinker*, 103.

¹⁰¹ Saurat, *Milton, Man and Thinker*, 104.

¹⁰² Silver, *Imperfect Sense*, 103.

¹⁰³ The theme of God’s self-withdrawal has become important in modern theology: see for instance Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1985), 86-89.

bounded by her maker, but wholly governed by her own will and affections (2.746-67). And the point at which this analogy breaks down is also instructive. Whereas Satan's offspring is generated by an unconscious, unwilled emanation, God's creatures are granted their existence by a wholly free and therefore wholly gracious act of the divine will. They are free creatures whose autonomous existence is grounded in the freedom of God. In Stephen Fallon's succinct expression, "God freely grants freedom to his creatures,"¹⁰⁴ and in precisely this way God allows himself to become limited by his autonomous creatures. With their ontology deriving from the liberation of matter from the divine being, human creatures are thus free to decree and to actualise their own futures—they are literally "Authors to themselves in all" (3.122). In Hegelian terms, one might say that their being consists in becoming, or at any rate in an intrinsic potency for becoming.

Creaturely freedom is, then, derived from divine freedom, just as creaturely being is derived from the divine being. God is, as Juliet Cummins observes, "the archetype of freedom."¹⁰⁵ The freedom of God's creatures is thus a reflection of God's own freedom; it is, in the words of Genesis 1:27, the "image of God." The narrative voice in *Paradise Lost* therefore describes the "filial freedom" of Adam and Eve (4.294);¹⁰⁶ and God tells Adam that "the spirit within thee free" is "My Image" (8.440-41). In spite of its monist-materialist underpinnings, this aspect of *Paradise Lost's* theology stands in continuity with Reformed orthodox theology. Richard Baxter describes human freedom

¹⁰⁴ Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 215.

¹⁰⁵ Juliet L. Cummins, "The Metaphysics of Authorship in Milton's *Paradise Lost*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Sydney, 2000), 55.

¹⁰⁶ See Danielson, *Milton's Good God*, 105, who notes that "filial" in this line "reminds us of the genetic relationship between the characteristics of parent and child, creator and creature, and hence of their corresponding value."

as “part of Gods Natural Image on Man”;¹⁰⁷ and, articulating the Reformed conception of the relationship between divine and human freedoms, Baxter refers with approval to those medieval scholastics who had maintained “not only that there is *Contingency from God*, but that there could be no *Contingency* in the creature, if it had not its original in God: the Liberty of God being the fountain of Contingency.”¹⁰⁸ In the same way, as A. G. George has remarked, every exercise of creaturely freedom in *Paradise Lost* “has a trace of divinity in it,”¹⁰⁹ for “all creation reflects, in varying degrees, the Creator who is Freedom.”¹¹⁰

The portrayal of the freedom of God in *Paradise Lost* thus draws on a diverse range of theological traditions. In accentuating the sheer freedom of the creative act, the poem’s theology is close to Reformed orthodoxy, and discontinuous with Arminian theology’s more circumscribed view of divine freedom. But in its depiction of the contingent freedom with which the Father generates the Son, the poem’s theology departs radically from Reformed orthodoxy and Arminianism alike, and instead affirms an Arian position. *Paradise Lost*’s Arianism is itself grounded in the poem’s thoroughgoing

¹⁰⁷ Richard Baxter, *Catholick theologie* (London, 1675), 115.

¹⁰⁸ Baxter, *The divine life*, 131. According to Iain M. MacKenzie, *God’s Order and Natural Law: The Works of the Laudian Divines* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 38, the Laudian divines conceived of the natural order in terms of a similar “double contingency,” namely, a contingency *to* God as well as a contingency *from* God.

¹⁰⁹ A. G. George, *Milton and the Nature of Man: A Descriptive Study of Paradise Lost in Terms of the Concept of Man as the Image of God* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1974), 40.

¹¹⁰ George, *Milton and the Nature of Man*, 39. In a different connection, Lieb, *The Dialectics of Creation*, 64, speaks paradoxically of Adam’s “limited omnipotence” as a reflection of God’s “total omnipotence.” See also the annotation of Todd, 3:452-53.

commitment to the absolute freedom of God, and in its corresponding commitment to the contingency of all the divine acts. The fact that the entire plan of redemption is also radically contingent highlights not only this divine freedom, but also the gracious character of redemption. Throughout the poem, the freedom of God is thus consistently affirmed. Indeed, it is not going too far to suggest that *Paradise Lost* presents one of the seventeenth century's most profound and rigorous theological accounts of the freedom of God.

Further, in the poem's theology all creaturely freedom is grounded in the deeper reality of contingent divine freedom. Like God's own freedom, this creaturely freedom is, as I will argue in the following chapter, characterised by the contingent ability to choose between alternative possibilities. But by its very nature the freedom of human beings is also mutable—it is a freedom which possesses even the ability to negate itself and to choose unfreedom, by plunging into the spiritual enslavement of the fall.

CHAPTER SIX

Human Freedom and the Fall

In *Paradise Lost* Adam and Eve are, like God, characterised by the ability to choose between alternative possibilities. God has placed them in an environment in which they are free to grow and to develop through a creative use of their freedom. Their freedom consists in an indifferent liberty to choose from among an abundance of possibilities, and their possession of right reason enables them to choose wisely and well. But by its very nature, human freedom also entails the possibility of turning away from God and falling. Adam and Eve are thus contingent agents, able freely to stand or to fall. The fall itself, I will argue in this chapter, is thus a contingent, self-determined act which is not necessitated by any influencing cause. In the narrative of *Paradise Lost* the fall is depicted as an irrational possibility of human nature which stands in fundamental discontinuity with all the preceding choices of Adam and Eve. Further, I will argue that the free act with which Adam and Eve fall is not only self-determined but also self-negating. Through its evil choice, human nature freely abdicates its own

liberty of indifference. Its range of possibilities is drastically narrowed. It becomes self-enslaved, lacking the freedom to rise beyond itself into genuine freedom. In this way *Paradise Lost* presents the fallen will as a will in need of liberation—a will in need of grace.

I. Freedom and Necessity

In post-Reformation theology, necessitarianism involved the assertion that every choice is the necessary effect of a prior cause, and the subsequent denial that alternative possible choices exist. A necessitated event is, then, the antithesis of a contingent event, which Duns Scotus had defined simply as anything “whose opposite could have occurred at the time that this actually did.”¹ The necessity (*necessitas*) or contingency (*contingentia*) of human choice was discussed extensively in post-Reformation theology, and, as William Cunningham has noted, the central question was whether or not a “liberty of spontaneity” is “sufficient for moral responsibility.”² In other words, is *spontaneity* of choice a sufficient condition for human freedom, or must human

¹ John Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings: A Selection*, trans. Allan Wolter (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1962), 59. For a similar post-Reformation definition, see Christophorus Pezelius, *Argumentorum et objectionum de praecipuis articulis doctrinae christianae*, 7 vols. (Neustadt, 1582-88), 2:191; cited in Heppel, 266: “That is contingent . . . which when it takes place has a cause that could by its nature have acted differently.” For a recent discussion of necessity as a theological concept, see Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 25-30.

² William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1862), 498. Cunningham’s discussion, entitled “Calvinism, and the Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity” (471-524), is still one of the fullest treatments of the relationship between necessitarianism and seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy.

freedom also involve *alternativity* of choice?³ In the necessitarian view, the will is free merely by virtue of its ability to choose spontaneously or voluntarily, in accordance with its own inclination. This was the position generally adopted by Reformed orthodox divines. William Perkins, for instance, asserted both “necessitie and freedome of will,” since “in the doing of a voluntarie action, it is sufficient that it procede of judgment.”⁴ And, according to Francis Turretin, the will’s freedom consists only in its “willingness and spontaneity.”⁵

In contrast to this Reformed view of freedom, Arminian theologians insisted not only that the will is able to choose spontaneously, but also that it possesses the genuine possibility of alternative choice. Articulating the Arminian position, Thomas Goad claimed that God has “poised some things in such an equal *possibility* of being or not being, and left it to his creatures *choice* to turn the *scale*, that in respect of him they fall out *contingently*; it being as possible for his creatures to have *omitted* them, as to have *done* them.”⁶ Similarly, Simon Episcopius argued that the human will is “indifferently disposed or enclined to the opposites or contraries,” and that for this reason the will

³ Here I have followed the useful summary of Eef Dekker, “An Ecumenical Debate Between Reformation and Counter-Reformation? Bellarmine and Ames on *liberum arbitrium*,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, ed. Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 144. For a discussion of these two views of freedom, see William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes (1888-89; Phillipsburg: P&R, 2003), 518-27.

⁴ William Perkins, *The workes of that famous and worthe minister of Christ, in the Universitie of Cambridge, M. W. Perkins*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1612-19), 1:704.

⁵ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992-97), 6.5.11. For a similar Reformed condemnation of the idea of indifference, see John Edwards, *The Arminian doctrines condemn’d* (London, 1711), 87.

⁶ Thomas Goad, *Stimluus orthodoxus, sive Goadus redivivus: A disputation partly theological, partly metaphysical, concerning the necessity and contingency of events in the world, in respect of Gods eternal decree* (London, 1661), 2.

remains “free from all necessity whatever.”⁷ In short, for the Arminians the will’s freedom is equated with its liberty of indifference (*libertas indifferentiae*)—its ability to choose either of two alternative possibilities at a given moment. In this view, the human will is therefore defined simply as “a Power either to do, or not to do.”⁸ Its freedom consists not merely in spontaneity of choice, but also in alternativity of choice. Arminian writers thus accused Reformed orthodoxy of affirming “inevitable necessity,”⁹ “absolute necessity,”¹⁰ and “fatal necessity”;¹¹ and they attributed to Reformed orthodoxy the notion that “Sin be necessitated in some, as well as Vertue is in others.”¹² According to Thomas Goad, the Reformed divines “go further” even than the Stoics, in as much as they “impose a *necessity* on all things whatsoever.”¹³ The *De Doctrina Christiana* also takes up this characteristic Arminian polemic when it asserts: “From the concept of freedom . . . all idea of necessity must be removed.”¹⁴

Paradise Lost appropriates this Arminian polemic against Reformed orthodox necessitarianism. Throughout the poem, it is only fallen creatures who claim to be subject to necessity. When Satan claims to be “compell[ed]” to bring about the fall (4.391), the narrative voice remarks that “with necessitie, / The Tyrants plea,” Satan has simply “excus’d his devilish deeds” (4.392-93). Similarly, confronted by God in the garden, the fallen Adam explains with a show of magnanimity that he himself would take the

⁷ Simon Episcopius, *The confession or declaration of the ministers or pastors which in the United Provinces are called Remonstrants, concerning the chief points of Christian religion* (London, 1676), 109.

⁸ [Anon.], *An antidote against some principal errors of the predestinarians* (London, 1696), 8.

⁹ Goad, *Stimulus orthodoxus, sive Goadus redivivus*, 5.

¹⁰ John Goodwin, *Confidence dismounted* (London, 1651), 10.

¹¹ Simon Episcopius, *Opera theologica*, 2 vols. (London, 1678), 2:209. See also Episcopius’s sustained critique of “necessity” in his *Tractatus de libero arbitrio*; in *Opera theologica*, 2:198-208.

¹² [Anon.], *An antidote against some principal errors*, 13.

¹³ Goad, *Stimulus orthodoxus, sive Goadus redivivus*, 3.

¹⁴ *CPW* 6:161.

blame for the fall, except that “strict necessitie” and “calamitous constraint” compel him to place the blame squarely on Eve (10.131-32). While these fallen creatures claim to be necessitated, God himself states that if his creatures did not possess genuine freedom to obey or to disobey they would have “servd necessitie, / Not mee” (3.110-11); and God denies that any predestinarian decree has “necessitate[d]” the fall (10.44). Raphael explains to Adam that the human will is “not over-rul’d by Fate / Inextricable, or strict necessity” (5.527-28), and that God thus requires “Our voluntary service ... Not our necessitated” (5.529-30).

Such denials of any divine necessitation of human choice are coupled with a corresponding denial of Satan’s power to coerce or necessitate the human will. If Satan were able to determine the human will, then Adam and Eve would lose their contingent freedom and, as a result, their moral responsibility for the fall. Thus the Father instructs Raphael to warn Adam that Satan:

is plotting now
 The fall of others from like state of bliss;
 By violence, no, for that shall be withstood,
 But by deceit and lies; this let him know,
 Least wilfully transgressing he pretend
 Surprisal, unadmonisht, unforewarnd. (5.240-45)

For all his might, Satan is not capable of overpowering the human will, of effecting a fall “By violence.”¹⁵ Rather, his only strategy against prelapsarian humanity is “deceit and lies.” Satan can only attempt to talk Adam and Eve into misusing their own freedom; he cannot interfere with their contingent ability to choose. Emphasising this point, the Puritan Thomas Boston insists that “the devil did only allure, he could not

¹⁵ The language of “violence” against free will was common in post-Reformation theology. The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3.1, for example, denies that “violence [is] offered to the will of the creatures” by predestination (Schaff, 3:608); and Episcopius, *The confession or declaration*, 118, argues that Adam’s will “was not forc’t ... by any outward violent impulse.”

ravish [Adam's] consent,"¹⁶ and that he "could only tempt, not force" the human will.¹⁷

Thus in *Paradise Lost* if human beings are to fall at all, it can only be by "wilfully transgressing" (5.244). Addressing the heavenly angels, the Father says of Satan:

I told ye then he should prevail and speed
On his bad Errand, Man should be seduc't
And flatterd out of all, believing lies
Against his Maker; no Decree of mine
Concurring to necessitate his Fall (10.40-44)

At a glance, the Father's language here may seem to approach a notion of Satanic causation: "Man" is said to be passively "seduc't" and "flatterd." But the active verb, "believing," places responsibility on the free human agent, who is not simply overwhelmed by Satanic seduction and flattery, but who in the last resort takes the active step of "believing" the "lies" of Satan. Still, the predominantly passive voice of these lines has the effect of grammatically distancing God from the fall, while in contrast Satan is described as having a specific and active role in bringing about the fall. But even Satan's role is reduced to a matter of mere rhetoric. He seduces, flatters and lies—in all this, there is clearly no coercion of the human will, and no "violence" against the autonomy of human freedom.

In the same lines, any divine coercion is also ruled out. In insisting that he has not "concur[red] to necessitate" the fall with any decree of predestination, God the Father invokes the Reformed orthodox concept of concurrence (*concursum*).¹⁸ According to Reformed orthodoxy, God's concurrence is the providential activity by which he moves created things to action through second causes, in such a way that "does not

¹⁶ Thomas Boston, *Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, 2 vols. (Aberdeen, 1853), 1:248.

¹⁷ Boston, *Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, 1:254.

¹⁸ Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 353-54, notes that these lines also portray the Reformed orthodox notion of a "permissive decree."

destroy second causes, but upholds them.”¹⁹ Johann Heinrich Heidegger defines concurrence as “the operation of God by which he co-operates directly with the second causes ... so as to urge or move them to action and to operate along with them.”²⁰ In contrast to this theology of concurrence, the God of *Paradise Lost* is not causally related to human choice and action; in the poem, the divine will and the human will do not interact in any cause-effect relationship. According to God, any such notion of concurrence would mean ultimately that the fall of human beings had already been “necessitated” by the divine will.

In its sustained rejection of all kinds of necessitation, then, the theology of *Paradise Lost* stands in close continuity with one of the central concerns of seventeenth-century Arminian theology, and its recurring insistence on the contingency of human freedom sets the theological backdrop for the poem’s portrayal of the fall.

II. Contingent Freedom

The account of the fall in *Paradise Lost* constitutes a powerful critique of necessitarianism, and it presents a narrative portrayal of the Arminian concept of a contingent liberty of indifference. In his defence of human freedom, God insists that the divine decree does not

touch with lightest moment of impulse
His free Will, to her own inclining left
In even scale. (10.45-47)

¹⁹ Johannes Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae*; in *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. John W. Beardslee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 1.6.1. For an extended account of the doctrine of concurrence in post-Reformation theology, see Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-77), 3/3, 90-154; and see also G. C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 125-60.

²⁰ Johann Heinrich Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae* (Zurich, 1700), 7.28; cited in Heppel, 258.

Here the metaphor of the balance invokes the Arminian view of contingent freedom.²¹ The balance image was frequently used by post-Reformation writers to represent the theory of the will's liberty of indifference, according to which the self-determining will is essentially uninfluenced towards either good or evil. Being left in "even scale," the will directs its own course. Emphasising this indifference of the will, God the Father says that divine action does not "touch" the will even "with lightest moment of impulse"—with "moment" denoting both the small particle of a balance,²² and the "[c]ause or motive of action; determining influence."²³ The human will, poised on a balance, is not inclined or determined in even the smallest degree by any external influence. Further, the Father's assertion that the will is equally capable of being inclined in either of two contrary directions constitutes an implicit denial of any internal, natural necessity. According to internal necessitarianism, the will is irresistibly determined by its own inclinations; but in *Paradise Lost*, the will's choice between good and evil is entirely undetermined. It remains poised on the balance until it moves itself in one direction or the other. The power of human choice is therefore radically contingent.

This characteristically Arminian view of human freedom was vigorously condemned by Reformed orthodox theologians. Johann Heinrich Heidegger, for example, denies that Adam was created "indifferent to good and evil," arguing that "[s]uch indifference, lying as it were on the scales and fluctuating between right and wicked" would be "a flaw in the creature," since it implies that Adam does not possess a natural

²¹ For a useful discussion of the significance of the role of balance metaphor in the epic, see Fowler, 253-54.

²² *OED* 3a.

²³ *OED* 5.

inclination towards righteousness.²⁴ In the same way, Francis Turretin argues that any “equilibrium” of the will must conflict with the will’s created goodness, for the prelapsarian will “would not have been very good, if it had been disposed to vice equally with virtue.”²⁵ Notwithstanding its emphasis on the indifference of the will, however, Arminian theology still maintained that the unfallen will possessed “an inclination to good.”²⁶ For Arminian theologians, the concept of the will’s “indifferency” did not imply an “[a]bsence of ... favour for one side rather than another,”²⁷ or a mere “apathy”;²⁸ rather it meant simply that the will possesses “an equal power to take either of two courses.”²⁹ The Arminian “balance model” of liberty thus means, in Dennis Danielson’s words, that “in a given moral choice, necessary conditions exist that allow the agent to choose one way or the other.”³⁰

For this reason, the liberty of indifference which characterises the will of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* does not exclude the fact that their “right Reason” (12.84) will lead them to prefer certain moral choices over others.³¹ As Adam says, all the “Faculties” of the human soul “serve / Reason as chief” (5.101-2). Even love, the highest of human virtues, “hath his seat / In Reason” (8.590-1). The perfect freedom of the first human beings consists in the rectitude of their reason. It is by reason that they

²⁴ Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae*, 6.100; cited in Heppie, 242-43.

²⁵ Turretin, *Institutes*, 8.1.8. See also Cotton Mather, *Free-grace, maintained and improved* (Boston, 1706), 24.

²⁶ Jacobus Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols, 3 vols. (1825-75; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 2:363.

²⁷ *OED* I 1.

²⁸ *OED* I 2.

²⁹ *OED* I 3.

³⁰ Dennis R. Danielson, *Milton’s Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 134.

³¹ On Milton’s view of “right reason,” see Douglas Bush, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 361, 395-97, 400.

are able to choose freely between good and evil; and it is the “Sanctitie of Reason” (7.508) that enables them to recognise, approve and choose the good. The concept of right reason (*recta ratio*) was commonly invoked in post-Reformation theology, and was especially characteristic of the Arminian and Amyraldian theologies, both of which stressed the primacy of reason over will.³² In the words of Moïse Amyraut: “Reason in innocence was that inward principle, that divine light set up in the soul of man ... by which we were both instructed in our duty and enabled to perform it.”³³ The concept of right reason in *Paradise Lost* stands in continuity with this emphasis on the primacy of reason, and it contrasts with the Reformed orthodox emphasis on the primacy of the will.³⁴

In the same way, in *Paradise Lost* “true Liberty” dwells “always with right Reason,” and, apart from right reason, liberty “hath no dividual being” (12.83-85).³⁵ Freedom is, in other words, virtually synonymous with right reason: “Reason also is choice” (3.108).³⁶ In the words of Adam, “God left free the Will, for what obeyes /

³² See for example Episcopius, *Opera theologica*, 2:203. For a study of the concept of right reason in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Robert Hoopes, *Right Reason in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).

³³ Moïse Amyraut, *A discourse concerning the divine dreams mention'd in Scripture* (London, 1676), 15.

³⁴ Here I differ from Georgia B. Christopher, *Milton and the Science of the Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 98-99, who interprets right reason in *Paradise Lost* in terms of Luther's equation of *recta ratio* with *fides*. In this reading, the concept of right reason in fact undermines any notion of autonomous reliance on rationality. But *Paradise Lost* places far more emphasis on reason qua reason than any such Lutheran interpretation allows. Accordingly, the poem's concept of right reason stands in continuity not with a Lutheran view of faith, or with a Reformed voluntarism, but with the intellectualist view of freedom articulated by Arminian and Amyraldian theologians.

³⁵ See Newton's annotation: “Liberty and virtue ... are *twin-sisters*, and the one hath no being divided from the other” (Newton, 2:386-87).

³⁶ The same sentiment is expressed in *Areopagitica*: “when God gave [Adam] reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing” (CPW 2:527). On the close connection between reason and freedom, see A. G. George, *Milton and the Nature of Man: A Descriptive Study of Paradise Lost in*

Reason, is free, and Reason he made right” (9.351-52). The rectitude of Eve’s and Adam’s reason does not, however, entail a necessitarian inclination towards the good, but only an ability to judge wisely between good and evil, and to make a purely self-determined decision on the basis of this judgment. Reason itself therefore guarantees both the *probability* of standing and the *possibility* of falling. As Adam says, “Firm we subsist, yet possible to swerve” (9.359). In their unfallen state, Adam and Eve are “firm” in the uprightness of their reason; but their freedom consists in their ability to incline their own wills, so that it is always possible for them to “swerve” from righteousness. The prelapsarian perfection of Adam and Eve consists precisely in this power of contingent choice—the ability to stand or to fall.

Prelapsarian perfection is thus not static but dynamic. Instructing Adam on the freedom of the will, Raphael says:

That thou art happie, owe to God;
That thou continu’st such, owe to thy self,
That is, to thy obedience; therein stand.
This was that caution giv’n thee; be advis’d.
God made thee perfet, not immutable;
And good he made thee, but to persevere
He left it in thy power, ordaind thy will
By nature free, not over-rul’d by Fate
Inextricable, or strict necessity (5.520-28)

In their original state Adam and Eve are “perfet,” and as such they are able to persevere in obedient happiness. Yet according to Raphael they may continue in their happy state only by freely obeying the creator, for they are “perfet” but “not immutable.” This distinction between perfection and mutability, so important for any theodicy based on the Genesis story, was strongly emphasised in Reformed orthodox theology. Thus in

Terms of the Concept of Man as the Image of God (London: Asia Publishing House, 1974), 38: “freedom and rationality as man’s constitutive principles of being are one and the same.”

spite of his necessitarian view of freedom, William Perkins affirms that “[i]n *Adams* will there were two things, *Libertie* and *Mutabilitie*”,³⁷ and according to the *Westminster Confession*: “Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom and power to will and to do that which is good and well-pleasing to God, but yet mutably, so that he might fall from it.”³⁸ Such an ability to fall from perfection may itself seem to constitute an imperfection; but Reformed orthodox divines argued that “mutability” entails “no fault or imperfection” in human nature.³⁹

In *Paradise Lost* this mutability entails the possibility not only of falling, but also the possibility of positive development.⁴⁰ Through their free obedience to God, human beings may be “by degrees of merit rais’d” to a heavenly mode of existence (7.157); indeed, even the physical bodies of Adam and Eve may, through a process of gradual development, “turn all to spirit, / Improv’d by tract of time” (5.497-98). The perfection of human nature therefore cannot be a mere “static perfection.”⁴¹ Rather, as Barbara Lewalski notes, perfection in *Paradise Lost* is a matter of “challenge, choice, and growth”,⁴² it is “complex and constantly developing, not simple and stable.”⁴³

³⁷ Perkins, *Workes*, 1:708.

³⁸ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 9.2; in Schaff, 3:623.

³⁹ Turretin, *Institutes*, 8.1.7.

⁴⁰ George Musacchio, *Milton’s Adam and Eve: Fallible Perfection* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 70, therefore rightly notes that in *Paradise Lost* the mutable perfection of Adam and Eve is a “relative perfection” which is capable either of “future growth” or of “withering away.” The distinction between relative perfection and absolute perfection was developed by Augustine: see for example Augustine, *De genesi ad litteram*, 11.7; in *PL* 34. Describing Augustine’s view, William G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1884), 2:64-65, writes: “The relative perfection of a creature placed upon temporary trial ... would have become the absolute perfection of a creature who has safely passed through probation.”

⁴¹ As noted by Danielson, *Milton’s Good God*, 178.

⁴² Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 466. Lewalski observes that even the heaven of *Paradise Lost* is “a place of process, not stasis, complexity not simplicity, and the continuous and active choice of good rather than the absence of evil” (465).

Prelapsarian perfection is, in Danielson's words, "capable of enrichment and increase"; humanity's created state in Eden is only a "beginning," open to a future of diverse possibilities.⁴⁴ In the seventeenth century, this dynamic view of the perfection and freedom of the first human beings was affirmed by Walter Raleigh: "God gave man to himselfe, to be his owne guide, his owne workeman, and his owne painter, that he might frame or describe unto himselfe what hee pleased, and make election of his own forme."⁴⁵

In *Paradise Lost*, Eve affirms the richness of her alternative choices and possibilities, even as she talks with the serpent about the forbidden tree:

For many are the Trees of God that grow
In Paradise, and various, yet unknown
To us, in such abundance lies our choice,
As leaves a greater store of Fruit untoucht. (9.618-21)

⁴³ Barbara K. Lewalski, "Innocence and Experience in Milton's Eden," in *New Essays on Paradise Lost*, ed. Thomas Kranidas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 99. See also Joseph H. Summers, *The Muse's Method: An Introduction to Paradise Lost* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), 149; Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London: Faber, 1977), 259-62; and Stanley E. Fish, *How Milton Works* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 528: "the Miltonic Eden is characterised by its dynamism." Tillyard's famous criticism of prelapsarian life thus rests on a misunderstanding of the dynamic nature of prelapsarian perfection: see E. M. W. Tillyard, *Milton* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930), 282-83: "Adam and Eve are in the hopeless position of Old Age pensioners enjoying perpetual youth.... Any genuine activity would be better than utter stagnation." With similar misunderstanding, A. J. A. Waldock, *"Paradise Lost" and Its Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 125, speaks of Edenic life as "an eternity of boredom."

⁴⁴ Dennis R. Danielson, "The Fall and Milton's Theodicy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. Dennis R. Danielson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 154.

⁴⁵ Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World*, ed. C. A. Patrides (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1971), 142.

Human choice in the garden is characterised by “such abundance” that the great majority of possibilities and choices are never realised.⁴⁶ Indeed, while post-Reformation writers often suggested that the fall of Adam and Eve had taken place on the same day as their creation,⁴⁷ the narrative of *Paradise Lost* withholds the fall for several days,⁴⁸ in order to portray dramatically Eve’s and Adam’s dynamic and evolving process of growth through the exercise of their freedom. Before falling, they use their freedom to engage creatively in prayer and education, gardening and lovemaking, conversation and cooking. This rich variety of activities indicates something of the variety of their prelapsarian possibilities. Further, the divine prohibition itself is not a narrow restriction placed upon human freedom, but in its simplicity even this prohibition serves to illustrate the richness and openness of freedom. As Eve tells the serpent, the prohibition of the tree of knowledge is the “Sole Daughter of [God’s] voice”; in all other respects, “we live / Law to our selves, our Reason is our Law” (9.653-54). The divine prohibition is therefore light and easy—“One easie prohibition” (4.433)—in view of the abundance of prelapsarian choice. As John Downham says of Adam and Eve: “having but one

⁴⁶ Thus Kester Svendsen, *Milton and Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), 187-88, has aptly spoken of the “dynamic opulence” of Eden.

⁴⁷ See for example Thomas Watson, *A body of practical divinity* (London, 1692), 79: “the most probable and received Opinion is, That *Adam* fell the very same day in which he was created”; and thus Adam did not take up even “one night’s lodging in Paradise.” According to the more detailed chronology of John Lightfoot, *The works of the reverend and learned John Lightfoot, D.D.*, 2 vols. (London, 1684), 1:1-3, heaven and earth were created “in a moment,” with the angels being created “in the very same instant”; but when human beings were created, certain angels became devils “through spite at man,” and thus set out at once to ruin humanity, with the result that the human race fell on the same day. In this scheme angels and humans alike become fallen on the same day—they begin to exist and then begin to sin almost instantaneously.

⁴⁸ According to the computations of Fowler, there are 13 days from the creation of Adam and Eve to their fall: see Fowler, 25-28. See also the comment of David Masson, *The Life of John Milton: Narrated in Connexion With the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of His Time*, 7 vols. (Cambridge and London, 1859-94), 6:549.

onely Commandement, and that so easie to keepe, as to abstaine from one onely fruit, in so great plentie and varietie of other, yet they brake it.”⁴⁹ And similarly, Arminius had written that the first sin was “easily avoidable by man in the midst of such abundant plenty of good and various fruits.”⁵⁰ But if the fall is inexcusable in light of the “abundance” of Adam’s and Eve’s possible choices,⁵¹ in *Paradise Lost* the fall is also only possible because of the human will’s ability to choose and to actualise its own future, and to do so vis-à-vis a multitude of alternative possibilities. By making Adam and Eve free for a future of development and growth, God has also endowed their freedom with the contingent possibility of falling. The possibility of falling in itself is therefore not a sinister flaw in human nature, but an aspect of the rich freedom of that nature.

III. Contingence and Theodicy

The emphasis on the contingent freedom of human choice is of special significance in *Paradise Lost*’s theodicy. A justification of the ways of God based on the Genesis story must seek to explain not only why God allowed the first human beings to fall, but also why he allowed them to be subject to temptation—subject, that is, to the mere possibility of falling—in the first place. In *Paradise Lost*, this question of the possibility of falling is answered with the concept of contingent freedom. Speaking of God, Raphael tells Adam:

⁴⁹ John Downham, *The summe of sacred divinitie first briefly and methodically propounded, and then more largely and cleerly handled and explained* (London, 1620), 234.

⁵⁰ Arminius, *Works*, 2:155.

⁵¹ This point had been made by Augustine, *De civitate Dei contra paganos*, 14.12; in *PL* 41 and *NPNF* 2.

Our voluntary service he requires,
 Not our necessitated, such with him
 Finds no acceptance, nor can find, for how
 Can hearts, not free, be tri'd whether they serve
 Willing or no, who will but what they must
 By Destinie, and can no other choose? (5.529-34)

According to Raphael, a necessitated will is a will which does not choose contingently; it possesses no alternative possibility, and thus “can no other choose.” No choice is truly free, and no obedience truly acceptable to God, unless possible alternative choices also exist: in Stanley Fish’s words, “the possibility (or capability) of falling is what gives the act of standing meaning.”⁵² God thus places Adam and Eve in the garden in order that they should serve him freely; and in order to guarantee authentic freedom, and consequently the possibility of authentic obedience, God also establishes the possibility of the alternative choice of disobedience.

The power to choose contingently between the alternative possibilities of obedience and disobedience, then, is not accidental but essential to freedom in *Paradise Lost*, just as it is essential to freedom in Arminian theology.⁵³ Thus in the poem the possibility of falling is present from the beginning as part of human nature, as a vital component of the freedom of the human will. As Milton had asserted in *Areopagitica*, without the possibility of choosing between good and evil, Adam would have been “a

⁵² Fish, *How Milton Works*, 527.

⁵³ The contrast between Reformed orthodoxy, which regarded alternativity of choice as accidental to freedom, and Arminianism, which regarded it as essential to freedom, can be traced back to the archetypal patristic contrast between the anthropology of the Latin West and the anthropology of the Greek East. On this contrast in patristic theology, see Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, 2:60-63: “The Latin anthropology regards the will as always in a state of decision, by its very nature.... The Greek anthropology, on the contrary, conceives of the voluntary faculty as intrinsically undecided. At and by creation, it is without character, because it is in a state of indifference.... In the Greek anthropology ... the substance of moral freedom consists in what the Latin anthropologist regards as the accident—viz., in the power to do another thing, or to do differently.”

meer artificiall *Adam*,” more puppet than human.⁵⁴ The choice of God to grant contingent freedom to Adam and Eve is in this way justified. Even the possibility of falling is in fact a possibility granted by the gracious God who provides for his creatures not “artificiall” but genuine freedom.

The angels enjoy a similar freedom through contingency. Comparing human beings to angels, the Father affirms that both are created “just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall” (3.98-99):

Such I created all th’ Ethereal Powers
And Spirits, both them who stood and them who faild;
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell. (3.100-2)

Likewise Raphael contrasts the contingent obedience of the unfallen angels with the disobedience of the fallen:

My self and all th’ Angelic Host that stand
In sight of God enthron’d, our happie state
Hold, as you yours, while our obedience holds;
On other surety none; freely we serve,
Because we freely love, as in our will
To love or not; in this we stand or fall:
And som are fall’n, to disobedience fall’n,
And so from Heav’n to deepest Hell; O fall
From what high state of bliss into what woe! (5.535-43)

The angels stand only by free obedience. They do not obey God as a result of any volitional necessity, for their wills retain the power “To love or not.” Following Augustine and Thomas Aquinas,⁵⁵ Reformed orthodoxy emphasised the volitional immutability of the righteous angels;⁵⁶ once these angels had persevered in obedience,

⁵⁴ *CPW* 2:527.

⁵⁵ See Augustine, *De correptione et gratia*, 27; in *PL* 44 and *NPNF* 5; and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 60 vols. (London: Blackfriars, 1964-76), 1.62.

⁵⁶ For the Reformed orthodox view, see the discussion and citations in Heppe, 207-8.

they were “confirmed in good and endowed with full happiness so that they immutably cleave to God with perfect obedience.”⁵⁷ According to Reformed orthodoxy, such angels can never again possess even the hypothetical possibility of falling away. Arminian theology agreed with Reformed orthodoxy on this point: Arminius writes that the “good Angels” have an “infused habit” of goodness, and have received from God a “confirmation in habitual goodness.”⁵⁸ But the portrayal of angelic freedom in *Paradise Lost* departs explicitly from this theological position. According to Raphael, the angels maintain their “happie state” only while they continue obediently to exercise their free choice. They have received no divine confirmation in righteousness; their wills remain indifferent, able at any moment either “To love or not.” The angels thus have “other surety none,” apart from their own free obedience. Their obedience is always a contingent obedience, characterised by the possibility of the alternative choice of disobedience.⁵⁹ The fallen angels, too, possessed the same alternativity of choice before they rebelled; they too were able to direct their own wills according to “Right reason” (6.42). Gazing at the sun through tears, Satan declaims:

Hadst thou the same free Will and Power to stand?
 Thou hadst: whom hast thou then or what to accuse,
 But Heav’ns free Love dealt equally to all? (4.66-68)

⁵⁷ William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, ed. and trans. John D. Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 1.10.18. The same point was made in Lutheran orthodoxy: see for instance Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, trans. J. A. O. Preus, 2 vols. (St Louis: Concordia, 1989), 1:174.

⁵⁸ Arminius, *Works*, 2:361.

⁵⁹ John P. Rumrich, *Milton Unbound: Controversy and Reinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16, therefore seems mistaken when he suggests that “the continued obedience of the good angels seems, if not automatic, almost inevitable after the war in heaven. Having seen what they have seen, who could disobey?” One might equally ask how Adam could disobey, having heard what he has heard about the angelic rebellion. But such questions simply highlight the irrationality of disobedience, rather than any immutability of creaturely choice.

In this fleeting confession, Satan acknowledges that “Heav’ns free love” has secured for all the angels the power of freedom and the alternativity of choice. The authentic freedom of all the angels was assured by their liberty of indifference, their self-determining ability to love or not: “firm they might have stood, / Yet fell” (6.911-12).

IV. A Free Fall

The fact that in *Paradise Lost* there is no essential difference between human freedom and angelic freedom highlights the absence of any necessity from “Mans First Disobedience” (1.1).⁶⁰ Some angels, possessing the same ability to fall, chose instead to stand firm; and just so the poem’s human protagonists might have chosen to stand and not to fall. The whole episode of the fall is thus characterised by radical contingency. All Eve’s and Adam’s choices might have been otherwise; all that happens might not have happened. Readers of the episode of the fall in *Paradise Lost* enjoy the privileged perspective of knowing from the outset how the story will end, and this foresight can too easily give rise to a necessitarian reading of the fall. Joseph Summers rightly cautions: “As we read the poem with our hindsight and the occasional reminders of God’s foreknowledge, we can, if we are not careful, construct an image of inexorable necessity in the development of the events to their final outcome.”⁶¹ In *Paradise Lost*, even God’s foreknowledge of the fall had “no influence on thir fault” (3.118)—and nor does the reader’s privileged knowledge render the fall certain or necessary. In partic-

⁶⁰ On the importance of the parallels between human freedom and angelic freedom, see John S. Diekhoff, *Milton’s Paradise Lost: A Commentary on the Argument* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), 87.

⁶¹ Summers, *The Muse’s Method*, 148.

ular, the fall is not theologically necessitated by the fact that certain events in the developing narrative seem to be leading towards this crucial event.⁶²

The separation of Eve from Adam, initiated by the industrious suggestion of Eve, is of particular importance in this connection:

Let us divide our labours, thou where choice
Leads thee, or where most needs, whether to wind
The Woodbine round this Arbour, or direct
The clasping Ivie where to climb, while I
In yonder Spring of Roses intermixt
With Myrtle, find what to redress till Noon. (9.214-19)

The fact that the fall could not have taken place in the way that it does without this division of labour has led many readers to posit a necessary connection between the separation and the ensuing fall. Barbara Lewalski, for instance, asserts that “Eve’s proposal that they undertake separate gardening tasks as a means to greater efficiency is shown to lead directly to the Fall”;⁶³ and A. G. George speaks of a “transgressive separation,” claiming that the eating of the forbidden fruit is “only the completion of the fall.”⁶⁴ But in contrast to such readings, other critics have rightly seen that Eve’s decision to work alone is not invalidated by the fact that the fall takes place soon

⁶² In this respect, a traditional Aristotelian theory of “plot” does not offer an appropriate interpretive approach to *Paradise Lost*. According to Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452a, the most effective narrative is one in which incidents “occur unexpectedly and at the same time in consequence of one another”; in particular, the change of the hero’s fortunes should take place not merely *post hoc* but *propter hoc*, arising “out of the structure of the Plot itself, so as to be the consequence, necessary or probable, of the antecedents.” To approach the episode of the fall in *Paradise Lost* through this kind of necessitarian narrative framework is to miss the fact that *Paradise Lost* attempts a very different and more challenging kind of narrative, in which the decisive action is not necessary (*propter hoc*), but radically contingent (*post hoc*). I have cited the edition of the *Poetics* in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

⁶³ Barbara K. Lewalski, “Milton on Women—Yet Once More,” *Milton Studies* 6 (1974), 6.

⁶⁴ George, *Milton and the Nature of Man*, 142-43.

afterwards.⁶⁵ Indeed, as Marilyn Farwell notes, Eve's desire for temporary solitude may be viewed as "a logical step in her growth."⁶⁶ Although Eve does in fact fall, it is a mistake to read the fall back into the separation scene, such that the fall becomes a foregone conclusion. Eve's capacity to resist temptation alone is, as David Gay observes, "necessary to the integrity of the poem."⁶⁷ If the separation entails the fall, then the epic's argument lapses into "notions of fate rather than providence,"⁶⁸ necessity rather than freedom. There can of course be no hermeneutically naïve approach to this scene; the reader knows that the fall is imminent, just as the narrative voice does when it laments that "hapless *Eve*" will be "deceav'd" and will fail (9.404). But mere chronology and occasion do not amount to causation. Eve will fall; and had she remained with Adam she might not have fallen. But even as she leaves him to work alone in the garden, she possesses fully the capacity to stand. She may still resist temptation and decide not to fall. Whatever psychological, existential and relational implications her separation from Adam may have, the separation itself has not compromised her innocence or her liberty of indifference.

In a perceptive argument, Stanley Fish has thus correctly pointed to the causal "irrelevance" of the separation scene:

The decision of an absolutely free will cannot be determined by forces outside it, and, in a causal sense, such a decision has no antecedents. I would suggest that the point of the scenes in *Paradise* from Book 4 to

⁶⁵ See especially Susannah B. Mintz, *Threshold Poetics: Milton and Intersubjectivity* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 142-51; Diane Kelsey McColley, *Milton's Eve* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 140-86; and Joan Malory Webber, "The Politics of Poetry: Feminism and *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Studies* 14 (1980), 3-24.

⁶⁶ Marilyn R. Farwell, "Eve, the Separation Scene, and the Renaissance Idea of Androgyny," *Milton Studies* 16 (1982), 15.

⁶⁷ David Gay, *The Endless Kingdom: Milton's Scriptural Society* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), 86.

⁶⁸ Gay, *The Endless Kingdom*, 86.

Book 9 is their irrelevance, as determining factors, to the moment of crisis experienced by the characters.⁶⁹

But while the division of labour may be irrelevant as a cause of the fall, the whole scene is important as a depiction of the rich freedoms of prelapsarian life. Indeed, the possibility of Eve's solitude is itself an expression of her perfect freedom.⁷⁰ Eve is right when, responding to Adam's argument that together they are safer against temptation, she says:

Let us not then suspect our happie State
Left so imperfet by the Maker wise,
As not secure to single or combin'd:
Fraile is our happiness, if this be so,
And *Eden* were no *Eden* thus expos'd. (9.337-41)

Eve has rightly understood the perfection of human nature and the ability of the human will to withstand temptation and to choose good instead of evil. The fact that she will soon fall does not negate the validity of her insight at this point. Adam, moreover, is right to allow Eve at last to go. His decision is based on a recognition of her freedom: "Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more" (9.372).⁷¹ Adam could have compelled

⁶⁹ Stanley E. Fish, "Discovery As Form in *Paradise Lost*," in *New Essays on Paradise Lost*, ed. Thomas Kranidas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 6. For a similar point, see Northrop Frye, *The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 102-3. Further, McColley, *Milton's Eve*, 212, rightly observes: "If Adam and Eve had not fallen, everything in the prelapsarian scenes could have been seen as prefiguring the act of faith of refusing Satan's lures."

⁷⁰ See Arthur E. Barker, "Paradise Lost: The Relevance of Regeneration," in *Paradise Lost: A Tercentenary Tribute*, ed. Balachandra Rajan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), 63-64.

⁷¹ Joan S. Bennett, "'Go': Milton's Antinomianism and the Separation Scene in *Paradise Lost*, Book 9," *PMLA* 98 (1983), 401, argues that, instead of either compelling Eve to stay or commanding her to go, Adam should have simply "withheld his permission for her to go." According to Bennett, when Adam tells Eve to "Go" he is in fact giving her "a positive command," and is thus acting "legalistically." Adam's statement should not, however, be categorised as a "command"; on the contrary, it is a

Eve to stay with him only by compromising her freedom, and he realises that such a restriction of her choice would render her “not free.” It would entail a resort to “force”—and “force upon free Will hath here no place” (9.1173-74).⁷² If Eve were to lose her freedom in this way, it would be a worse fate than any temptation she might encounter alone in the garden. William Riley Parker’s suggestion that the fall began with Adam’s “fall from responsibility and good judgment when he yielded to Eve’s whim to work apart” therefore seems mistaken⁷³—on the contrary, a different kind of fall would have begun had Adam chosen to make his wife “not free,” by compelling her to stay with him against her own will and judgment. The fall, then, cannot be causally traced back to the separation scene. Throughout this scene, Eve and Adam remain innocent beings, both of them making creative use of their contingent freedom in face of a dynamic range of alternative choices and possibilities. When Eve departs from Adam, she “actively chooses . . . , takes the risk of being alone, and reaches toward the possibility of alternatives.”⁷⁴

But although she is free to stand—and although she might have stood—Eve freely falls:

her rash hand in evil hour
Forth reaching to the Fruit, she pluckd, she eat:

conditional statement: “if thou think, trial unsought may finde / Us both securer . . . / Go” (9.370-72).

And Eve herself understands this statement not as a command, but simply as “thy permission” (9.378).

⁷² Thus I cannot agree with the suggestion of Anthony Low, “The Parting in the Garden in *Paradise Lost*,” *Philological Quarterly* 47 (1968), 35, that Adam’s “duty is to command obedience to what is right,” and that Adam “abdicates” his proper authority over Eve by allowing her to work alone. Eve’s freedom and Adam’s responsibility (but not his authority) are the basic issues at stake in the scene. As Farwell, “Eve, the Separation Scene, and the Renaissance Idea of Androgyny,” 15, observes, the separation scene is not concerned with obedience; rather it is “a drama in which two growing individuals attempt to discover and work out the most viable answer to their immediate problem.”

⁷³ William Riley Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 1:512.

⁷⁴ Mintz, *Threshold Poetics*, 150.

Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat
Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe,
That all was lost. (9.780-84)

While the poem offers a detailed exploration of the process of Eve's deception, it presents no specific psychological analysis of the movement of her will. Similarly, the movement of Adam's will is not directly portrayed. As Boyd Berry observes, "we do not ... see Adam and Eve change their minds," but we only see them "with *changed* minds."⁷⁵ When Eve tells Adam that she has "tasted" (9.874), and urges him also to "taste, that equal Lot / May joine us" (9.881-82), an "Astonied" Adam, chilled with "horror" (9.890), declares that he has made his choice. Speaking first to himself, Adam says:

Certain my resolution is to Die;
How can I live without thee, how forgoe
Thy sweet Converse and Love so dearly joind,
To live again in these wilde Woods forlorn?
Should God create another *Eve*, and I
Another Rib afford, yet loss of thee
Would never from my heart; no no, I feel
The Link of Nature draw me: Flesh of Flesh,
Bone of my Bone thou art, and from thy State
Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe. (9.907-16)

This soliloquy reveals the suddenness with which Adam decides to fall. Even before he speaks of his reasons for falling, his "resolution" is already "Certain." But when he comes to articulate the reason for his choice, he claims that it is not his own freedom, but the "Link of Nature" that "draw[s]" him. His choice, he says, is necessitated by a power greater than that of his own will. Turning to Eve, Adam repeats this statement of necessitation even more strongly:

⁷⁵ Boyd M. Berry, *Process of Speech: Puritan Religious Writing and Paradise Lost* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 253.

I with thee have fixt my Lot,
 Certain to undergoe like doom; if Death
 Consort with thee, Death is to mee as Life;
 So forcible within my heart I feel
 The Bond of Nature draw me to my owne,
 My own in thee, for what thou art is mine;
 Our State cannot be severd, we are one,
 One Flesh; to loose thee were to loose my self. (9.952-59)

Adam claims that he is drawn so “forcibl[y]” by the “Bond of Nature” that he simply “cannot” be parted from Eve.

Some readers have been so impressed by Adam’s profession of necessitation at this point that they have interpreted the whole episode of the fall in necessitarian terms. J. B. Savage, for instance, suggests that Adam’s choice “is compelled as a necessary consequence,” and that under the circumstances the fall is “irresistible and inevitable.”⁷⁶ According to A. J. A. Waldock, Adam’s two declarations of necessity are “the two most important passages in *Paradise Lost*,”⁷⁷ and Waldock employs the necessitarianism of these declarations as an interpretive key to Adam’s fall. Similarly, Robert Crosman argues that *Paradise Lost* depicts “a tragic Adam unable to resist temptation.”⁷⁸ Such necessitarian readings simplify Adam’s transgression to such an extent that the essential theological mystery of the fall is explained away—namely, the mystery of an uncaused act of will in which reason contradicts itself by choosing the irrational possibility of sin and death.⁷⁹ This is, however, a mystery which defies reductive necessitarian explan-

⁷⁶ J. B. Savage, “Freedom and Necessity in *Paradise Lost*,” *ELH* 44 (1977), 305-7.

⁷⁷ Waldock, “*Paradise Lost*” and *Its Critics*, 46.

⁷⁸ Robert Crosman, *Reading Paradise Lost* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 178-79.

⁷⁹ Necessitarian readings also tend to assume that some element of fallenness is a necessary precondition for the fall. Such an assumption rests on a misapprehension of the basic idea of the fall, namely, in the words of Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, 2 vols. (London: SCM, 1951-55), 1:251: “Sin came into the world by sinning.”

ations.⁸⁰ In the words of Thomas Watson, sin is “absurd and irrational”; it “makes a Man act not only *wickedly*, but *foolishly*.”⁸¹ In a word, sin is “madnesse.”⁸² In *Paradise Lost* the fall is a real possibility of human nature, but it is an irrational possibility that can be actualised only by a flagrant denial and contradiction of the judgment of “right reason.”⁸³ The poem’s portrayal of the fall can therefore be understood only when all notions of necessity are set aside, and when “Mans First Disobedience” (1.1) is seen in its sheer singularity, in its utter discontinuity with everything that has transpired in prelapsarian life. Søren Kierkegaard’s description of the fall is thus apposite here: “By the qualitative leap sin came into the world.”⁸⁴ Indeed, John Tanner has argued that just as in Kierkegaard’s thought sin is always “a qualitative leap, inexplicable as the sum of quantitative determinants,”⁸⁵ so also in *Paradise Lost* the emergence of sin is “radically

⁸⁰ On the other hand, this mystery also defies reductive attempts to demonstrate its logical contradictoriness. Such attempts, which rest on necessitarian assumptions about the nature of freedom, have been offered by Savage, “Freedom and Necessity in *Paradise Lost*,” 286-311; Mili N. Clark, “The Mechanics of Creation: Non-Contradiction and Natural Necessity in *Paradise Lost*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 7:2 (1977), 207-42; and R. D. Bedford, “Time, Freedom, and Foreknowledge in *Paradise Lost*,” *Milton Studies* 16 (1982), 61-76. Given *Paradise Lost*’s view of contingent, indifferent freedom, there is nothing intrinsically impossible about a free fall—even though such a fall is intrinsically irrational.

⁸¹ Watson, *A body of practical divinity*, 77.

⁸² William Ames, *The substance of Christian religion* (London, 1659), 29. For a twentieth-century statement of sin as “radically unintelligible” and “irrational,” see H. R. Mackintosh, *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness* (London: Nisbet, 1927), 61.

⁸³ This point had already been made by Augustine: see Henry Chadwick, *Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 39, who says, describing Augustine’s view, that although the human will possesses “the potentiality for the fall . . . , the actual choice of the will to neglect the good is causeless and inexplicable.”

⁸⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*, trans. Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), 99.

⁸⁵ John S. Tanner, *Anxiety in Eden: A Kierkegaardian Reading of Paradise Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 33.

incommensurable” and “irrational.”⁸⁶ The fall of Adam and Eve ultimately resembles an existential leap more than a conditioned (i.e. caused) and rational choice.⁸⁷ It is a leap from reason to unreason,⁸⁸ from innocence to fallenness, not a gradual transition in which one step predictably and necessarily follows another. Ultimately then, on a theological level little more can be said about Adam’s fall than that “he knew better, and he ate anyway.”⁸⁹ As William Riley Parker observes, Adam’s choice is not fixed by any circumstances. Adam is not persuaded or seduced by Eve; his decision is simply a “foolish” gesture, “a suicidal, useless, thoroughly human choice.”⁹⁰ From the moment of his creation Adam does, of course, possess the *ability* to fall, because of his contingent liberty of indifference; but he never possesses a sound *reason* to fall, and in this sense one cannot accurately speak of any cause of his fall. At the moment of decision, he simply uses his freedom to plunge—without reason and against reason—into ruin.

More particularly, the narrative account of Adam’s fall shows that his choice is not necessitated by the prior fall of Eve. As G. K. Hunter observes: “Milton could easily have shown an Adam who was betrayed by fleshly weakness, unable to resist the seductive and carnally irresistible Eve”; but, on the contrary: “Adam’s speech of resolution and tragic knowledge that he is to die is spoken . . . *to himself*, without persuasion and interruption from Eve. When he speaks to her his mind is already made

⁸⁶ Tanner, *Anxiety in Eden*, 45.

⁸⁷ The Kierkegaardian language of the “leap” is used also by George, *Milton and the Nature of Man*, 137: “Using (or misusing) freedom, man leaps into action. This leap is itself the fall, and is caused by no other fact.” George further describes the fall as a leap into the Kierkegaardian condition of “dread” (138).

⁸⁸ See John Carey, *Milton* (London: Evans Brothers, 1969), 97, who notes that the fall is not only “disobedience to God,” but also “disobedience to reason.”

⁸⁹ David M. Miller, *John Milton: Poetry* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), 137.

⁹⁰ Parker, *Milton*, 1:515.

up.”⁹¹ Adam has a “Certain . . . resolution” to fall (9.907), even before he speaks of the bond of nature, or of the unity of marriage, or of the sweetness of Eve’s companionship. With his gestures of tragic necessitation, he is, as Dennis Burden points out, seeking simply to justify a course of action on which he has already settled.⁹²

A necessitarian reading of Adam’s fall can be maintained only at the expense of the view of contingent freedom that has been developed consistently throughout the entire poem. Everything that the reader has learned about the contingency of human freedom is a preparation for this decisive moment, when Adam claims to be “draw[n]” by “Nature” into disobedience (9.914; 9.956), and when he laments that he “cannot” resist falling along with Eve (9.958). Raphael had already corrected Adam on this point, when the latter claimed to be enslaved by his wife’s “loveliness”: “Accuse not Nature,” warns Raphael, “shee hath don her part; / Do thou but thine” (8.561-62). In attempting to shrug off his moral responsibility and to impute the cause of his disobedience to “Nature,” Adam is in reality denying the truth about his own nature: that he is the free image of God, possessing the power to choose between good and evil, and that he is volitionally autonomous in face of all external circumstances and internal inclinations alike, so that nothing can determine the movement of his will. Indeed, in his speech to Eve, Adam himself admits that his decision is purely self-determined—“I with thee

⁹¹ G. K. Hunter, *Paradise Lost* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), 197. See also Kristin A. Pruitt, *Gender and the Power of Relationship: “United as One Individual Soul” in Paradise Lost* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 151-53.

⁹² Dennis H. Burden, *The Logical Epic: A Study of the Argument of Paradise Lost* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 164. Burden highlights the speed with which Adam falls, and the importance of this speed for an effective narrative: “The more his decision to eat the forbidden Fruit is delayed, the more difficult does it become to understand. The longer Adam is made to think about it, the more resolved should he become not to do it” (160-61). Similarly, John Peter, *A Critique of Paradise Lost* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 131, speaks of Adam’s decision as “virtually instantaneous, unhesitating,” although Peter mistakenly connects this haste with necessity.

have fixt my Lot” (9.952)—even though he immediately contradicts this admission, adopting instead, like the Satanic theologians, a notion of “Fixt Fate” (2.560).

In *Paradise Lost*, there can be no authentic freedom and therefore no moral responsibility without the contingency of the will. If this is recognised, then Adam’s denial of his contingent liberty of indifference must itself be taken as a reflection and expression of his turn from God towards disobedience. This feature of *Paradise Lost* is best understood in the context of the opinion, widespread in post-Reformation theology, that Adam fell as soon as he decided to eat the fruit,⁹³ so that he was already fallen before he had physically broken the divine prohibition. In the words of William Ames: “The first motion or step of ... disobedience necessarily came before the act of eating, so that it may truly be said that man was a sinner before he did the eating.”⁹⁴ Similarly, the Adam who soliloquises about his necessitation by the “Link of Nature” (9.914) is an already fallen Adam.⁹⁵ In denying his own freedom, Adam seeks to rid his actions of their moral implications—to act without consequences. But in the theology of *Paradise Lost* there can be no moral choice without consequences, for built into the very structure of the poem’s universe is the volitional autonomy of created beings, and the alternativity of choice with which free creatures actualise their own futures. The one who chooses to

⁹³ Thus Fish, *How Milton Works*, 555, observes that “Adam falls ... somewhere in the middle of line 894.” And Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, *The Empty Garden: The Subject of Late Milton* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 103, notes that Eve’s and Adam’s external act of eating is “merely a formality signifying their internal decision.”

⁹⁴ Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, 1.11.6.

⁹⁵ See in this connection Beverley Sherry, “Speech in *Paradise Lost*,” *Milton Studies* 8 (1975), 259, who notes that in *Paradise Lost* the “monologue” is “a characteristically fallen mode of utterance.” Sherry thus speaks of Adam’s and Eve’s “Satanic tendency to soliloquise.” Similarly, Leonard Mustazza, “*Such Prompt Eloquence*”: *Language as Agency and Character in Milton’s Epics* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1988), 90, describes the “diabolical features” of fallen human speech. On the fallenness of Adam’s speech before he eats the forbidden fruit, see also John Leonard, *Naming in Paradise: Milton and the Language of Adam and Eve* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 227.

fall must therefore be responsible for his or her own choice and its ruinous consequences. The God of *Paradise Lost* is thus justified when he says of humanity:

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. (3.96-99)

The fact that both Adam and Eve are “Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall” should be basic to any reading of the episode of the fall in *Paradise Lost*. If Adam and Eve themselves seem to contradict this fact, it is only because fallen creatures, having already exercised their freedom “to fall,” are subsequently quick to deny their sufficiency “to have stood.” Such denials reflect not their original freedom, but their present state of corruption. Ultimately, in spite of all external circumstances and internal motivations, Eve and Adam might have stood. In the words of Arminius, it was “the duty of man” to resist all internal and external “causes” of sin, and this resistance was entirely “in his power”: “This resistance might have been effected by his repelling and rejecting the causes which operated outwardly, and by reducing into order and subjecting ... those which impelled inwardly.”⁹⁶ Viewed in this light, the “causes” of the fall are not really causes in the proper sense at all. There is finally no cause, except for the free, contingent and self-determined choice of a human being.⁹⁷ It is this Arminian view of contingent freedom which the whole episode of the fall in *Paradise Lost* so dramatically enacts.

⁹⁶ Arminius, *Works*, 2:153.

⁹⁷ In a different connection, Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), 190, has said of Milton’s Satan: “If Satan fell freely, there is no cause of his fall, for there can be no cause of a truly free-will act.”

V. Freedom Enthralled

The fall thus takes place by an act of human freedom. But this act is not only an expression of freedom. It is at the same moment also a negation of freedom, in which the human will becomes enslaved.⁹⁸ In its pronounced emphasis on the enslavement of the fallen will, *Paradise Lost* is closely continuous with Reformed orthodox theology; this is, indeed, one of the most strikingly orthodox features of the poem's theology,⁹⁹ although it is a feature which has received little attention in Milton scholarship. Many readers of the poem continue to follow Sir Herbert Grierson's simplistic characterisation of its theology as "Pelagian."¹⁰⁰ In contrast, William Riley Parker is one of the few scholars to have recognised the important role of the concept of lost freedom in *Paradise Lost*. According to Parker, one of the poem's "dominant ideas" is that "tyranny must be, 'true liberty' having been lost to the human race since Adam's 'original lapse' from 'right reason.'"¹⁰¹ This important insight, recently restated by Marshall Grossman¹⁰² and developed by William Walker,¹⁰³ is crucial not only for an understanding of *Paradise Lost*'s view of the fall, but also for an understanding of its

⁹⁸ For a twentieth-century statement of this theological concept, see Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, 2 vols. (London: Nisbet, 1941-43), 1:17: "Man contradicts himself within the terms of his true essence. His essence is free self-determination. His sin is the wrong use of his freedom and its consequent destruction." As does *Paradise Lost*, Niebuhr emphasises that this act of self-enslavement is itself an expression of freedom: "Man is most free in the discovery that he is not free" (1:276).

⁹⁹ See Augustus H. Strong, *The Great Poets and Their Theology* (Philadelphia, 1897), 265.

¹⁰⁰ Herbert J. C. Grierson, *Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), 267.

¹⁰¹ Parker, *Milton*, 1:591.

¹⁰² Marshall Grossman, "Authors to Themselves": *Milton and the Revelation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 148-49.

¹⁰³ William Walker, "Human Nature in Republican Tradition and *Paradise Lost*," *Early Modern Literary Studies* 10:1 (2004), 32-41 <<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/10-1/walkmilt/htm>>.

theology of grace. In the poem, the unfallen will is poised in a liberty of indifference between good and evil; but the fall decisively tips the balance towards evil, so that the freedom to choose the good is lost. Human nature is thus left with an inclination towards evil which cannot be overcome except by the liberating grace of God.

The portrayal of original sin in *Paradise Lost* brings the poem's theology remarkably close to the Reformed orthodox concept of "total depravity." *Paradise Lost* consistently affirms the Augustinian notion of original sin (*peccatum originale*),¹⁰⁴ according to which all human beings were present "in" Adam when he fell,¹⁰⁵ and have in this way become partakers of Adam's guilt (*reatus*) and corruption (*corruptio*).¹⁰⁶ As God the Father says, if Adam falls, he will perish "with his whole posterity" (3.209). Adam's and Eve's understanding of this concept of original sin motivates much of their despair after the fall. Adam laments that everything he "shall beget, / Is propagated curse" (10.728-29), so that the creator's command to "*Encrease and multiplie*" has, by a bitter irony, become "death to heare" (10.730-31). In all this, *Paradise Lost's* theology is discontinuous with both Pelagian¹⁰⁷ and Socinian¹⁰⁸ denials of original sin. Further, the poem's view of original sin is continuous with the Reformation and post-

¹⁰⁴ On the parallels between *Paradise Lost* and Augustine regarding original sin, see Peter A. Fiore, *Milton and Augustine: Patterns of Augustinian Thought in Paradise Lost* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981), 42-60. Fiore suggests that original sin is one of the doctrines "most central to the theological framework of *Paradise Lost*" (42).

¹⁰⁵ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 13.14.

¹⁰⁶ This Augustinian distinction between guilt and corruption was taken up in Reformed orthodox theology. See for instance Amandus Polanus, *Syntagma theologiae christianae* (Geneva, 1617), 6.3.

¹⁰⁷ For the Pelagian view of original sin, see Augustine, *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali contra Pelagium, ad Albinam, Pinianum, et Melaniam*, 2.1-48; in *PL* 44 and *NPNF* 5.

¹⁰⁸ Formulating the Socinian position, the *Racovian Catechism*, 10, presents an uncompromising denial of original sin: "the fall of Adam, as it was but one act, could not have power to deprave his own nature, much less that of his posterity"; in Thomas Rees, ed., *The Racovian Catechism* (London, 1818). For a concise statement of the Socinian view, see Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (1937; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), 149-50.

Reformation emphasis on the positive corruption of original sin,¹⁰⁹ as opposed to Roman Catholic theology's claim that original sin is simply a privation of the supernatural gift of original righteousness.¹¹⁰ Pondering his unborn offspring, which now "stands curst" in him (10.818), Adam asks:

But from mee what can proceed,
But all corrupt, both Mind and Will deprav'd,
Not to do onely, but to will the same
With mee? (10.824-27)

As a result of the fall, Adam's offspring must be "all corrupt"—that is, "all" of Adam's offspring will be corrupt, and each member of Adam's offspring will be "all" corrupt.¹¹¹ This totality of human corruption is such that human nature is "deprav'd" in "both Mind and Will." Reformed orthodox theology similarly emphasised the corruption of both intellect and will. Theodore Beza writes that "the reason and will of man" are "blind and perverse" respectively;¹¹² and Stephen Charnock speaks of human nature's "darkened wisdom" and "enslaved will."¹¹³ Similarly Johannes Wollebius writes that "the intellect ... is beclouded," while "the will ... has lost its rectitude."¹¹⁴ Arminianism followed Reformed orthodoxy in this respect, also denying that fallen human beings can

¹⁰⁹ For an elaborate Reformed orthodox discussion of original sin, see Anthony Burgess, *The doctrine of original sin, asserted and vindicated against the old and new adversaries thereof* (London, 1659).

¹¹⁰ For an example of this Roman Catholic position, see Anselm, *Opera omnia*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1938-61), 2:169-70. Closer to the Protestant position was Thomas Aquinas's affirmation of both a privative and a positive aspect of original sin: see Thomas, *Summa theologiae*, 1a2ae.82.1. The argument of Fiore, *Milton and Augustine*, 52-55, that Milton, with Roman Catholic theology, regards original sin only as the loss of the gift of original righteousness is unconvincing.

¹¹¹ See the annotation of Bentley, 334.

¹¹² Theodore Beza, *A Little Book of Christian Questions and Responses, in Which the Principal Headings of the Christian Religion Are Briefly Set Forth*, trans. K. M. Summers (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 33.

¹¹³ Stephen Charnock, *The Works of Stephen Charnock*, 5 vols. (Edinburgh, 1864-66), 3:169.

¹¹⁴ Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae*, 1.10.1.

either “think” (*cogitare*) or “will” (*velle*) anything good,¹¹⁵ since sin both “darken[s] our Minds” and “pervert[s] our Wills.”¹¹⁶ This emphasis on the corruption of both reason and will was an expression of the totality of corruption: “Sin hath made its sickly impressions in every faculty.”¹¹⁷ The Reformed orthodox concept of total depravity (*corruptio totalis*)¹¹⁸ was a statement not of the absoluteness of human corruption—as though human beings were as sinful as they could be—but of its pervasiveness throughout “the whole man.”¹¹⁹ Calvin had asserted that “the whole man” is “so deluged, as it were, that no part remains exempt from sin”;¹²⁰ and William Perkins speaks similarly of “the whole body and soule” as corrupted by original sin.¹²¹ In the same way, in *Paradise Lost* Adam claims that original sin will cause both the “Mind and Will” of his descendents to be “deprav’d.” As a result of the fall, human reason is darkened, and the will is condemned to follow the evil will of Adam, and “to will the same.” Human nature has, as Michael later says, been subjected to a “natural pravitie” (12.288).¹²²

¹¹⁵ *Articuli Arminiani sive remonstrantia*, 3; in Schaff, 3:546-47.

¹¹⁶ Episcopius, *The confession or declaration*, 121.

¹¹⁷ Charnock, *The Works of Stephen Charnock*, 3:171.

¹¹⁸ On *corruptio totalis* in Reformed orthodox theology, see G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin*, trans. Philip C. Holtrop (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 469-76, 579-81.

¹¹⁹ Ames, *The substance of Christian religion*, 15.

¹²⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 2.1.9.

¹²¹ William Perkins, *Workes* 1:165.

¹²² Commenting on this line, William J. Grace, *Ideas in Milton* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 5, suggests that “Michael here speaks as a straightforward Calvinist.” Although this expression is incautious, it is clearly not without some justification. In contrast, it is less justified when Edward Wagenknecht, *The Personality of Milton* (Normon: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 141, speaks simply of Milton’s “rejection of total depravity.” Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background: Studies in the Thought of the Age in Relation to Poetry and Religion* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), 241, is rightly suggests that “Milton stands half-way between those who . . . hold the utter depravity of the natural man, and those who . . . believe unreservedly in his goodness.”

But human nature is not only thoroughly corrupt in the theology of *Paradise Lost*; it is also, and more importantly, radically enslaved. After insisting that the unfallen Adam and Eve are “free to fall” (3.99), God the Father says: “I formd them free, and free they must remain, / Till they enthrall themselves” (3.124-25). This concise statement indicates the profound effect of the fall on human freedom. The freedom in which prelapsarian Adam and Eve were created is qualified by the preposition—“Till.” Freedom, according to God, is not necessarily a permanent feature of human nature. It can be compromised by human beings themselves. Adam and Eve are to remain free only “Till” they “enthrall themselves.” As elsewhere in *Paradise Lost*, “enthrall” does not denote a pleasing, merely figurative captivity; rather the word is used with full literal force: “To reduce to the condition of a thrall; . . . to enslave, bring into bondage.”¹²³ In the sixteenth century, Edwin Sandys had described the fallen will as being “in such thraldom and slavery unto sin, that it cannot like of any thing spiritual and heavenly”;¹²⁴ and Reformed divines like William Prynne and John Owen speak in the same way of the will’s “cursed thraldome,”¹²⁵ asserting that the fallen will “is corrupted, enthralld, and under a miserable bondage,” to such an extent that human beings “can do nothing but sin.”¹²⁶ So too, *Paradise Lost* refers to this kind of

¹²³ *OED* 1.

¹²⁴ Edwin Sandys, *The Sermons of Edwin Sandys*, ed. John Ayre (Cambridge, 1841), 21.

¹²⁵ William Prynne, *God, no impostor, nor deluder, or, An answer to a Popish and Arminian cavill, in the defence of free-will, and universall grace* (London, 1630), 24.

¹²⁶ John Owen, *A display of Arminianism, being a discovery of the old Pelagian idol free-will, with the new goddess contingency* (London, 1721), 69. This view of the will’s depravity did not, however, teach the negation of the will’s volitional character, but only that of its ability to perform spiritually good choices. See James Ussher, *An answer to a challenge made by a Jesuite in Ireland* (London, 1631), 515-16: “And now since the Fall of *Adam* wee say . . . that freedome of Will remayneth still among men; but the abilitie which once it had, to performe spirituall duties and things pertayning to salvation, is quite lost and extinguished.”

enslavement of the will (*servo arbitrio*) when it describes human nature as “forfeit and enthralld / By sin” (3.176-77).

According to Michael, human freedom—defined as right reason—is negated and lost through sin:

Since thy original lapse, true Libertie
Is lost, which alwayes with right Reason dwells
Twinnd, and from her hath no dividual being:
Reason in man obscur'd, or not obeyd,
Immediatly inordinate desires
And upstart Passions catch the Government
From Reason, and to servitude reduce
Man till then free. (12.83-90)

The “true Libertie” of the created human nature is now “lost.” The will is no longer governed by “right Reason,” but by the desires and passions of sin. After the fall, “Understanding rul’d not, and the Will / Heard not her lore” (9.1127-28). The primacy of right reason is thus lost. Human nature is reduced to an internal “servitude”—it is enslaved not to any outward necessitating force, but to itself. In the words of Luther, human nature is “curved in upon itself” (*incurvatus in se*),¹²⁷ enslaved by its own inclination to sin, and lacking the power to transcend and so to escape the enslaving self.¹²⁸ Here Abdiel’s words to Satan also offer a fitting description of human enslavement: “Thy self not free, but to thy self enthralld” (6.181). Enthralled to itself, human nature has “lost” its power of contingent choice; the will is no longer poised indifferently between good and evil, but it is radically and inescapably inclined to evil. Michael

¹²⁷ Luther often uses the expression: it is, for example, repeated throughout his lectures on Romans. See *Luther’s Works*, ed. J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (St Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1958-86), 25:245, 291, 345, 351.

¹²⁸ Thus Sherry, “Speech in *Paradise Lost*,” 259, notes the connection between the soliloquies of Adam and Eve and the way in which these fallen characters “turn away from each other and from God into themselves.” And Grossman, *Authors to Themselves*, 157, aptly speaks of “the solipsism of sin.”

adds that this theological form of unfreedom is the source of all forms of political tyranny:

Therefore since hee permits
 Within himself unworthie Powers to reign
 Over free Reason, God in Judgement just
 Subjects him from without to violent Lords;
 Who oft as undeservedly enthrall
 His outward freedom: Tyrannie must be,
 Though to the Tyrant thereby no excuse. (12.90-96)

Significantly, the enslavement of the human will is depicted here as purely self-caused: “hee permits” sin to reign “Within himself” (12.90-91). The loss of “outward freedom” through political tyranny is simply a consequence of this self-caused loss of inward liberty.

The most important feature of human beings’ enslavement to sin is their lack of power to seek or even to desire the grace of God. According to the Son of God, grace can only come to human beings “unimplor’d” and “unsought” (3.231):

Happie for Man, so coming; hee her aide
 Can never seek, once dead in sins and lost;
 Attonement for himself or offering meet,
 Indebted and undon, hath none to bring (3.232-35)

Fallen human beings “Can never seek” the grace of salvation, for they are utterly “undon” in their fallenness, even to the extent of being “dead in sins.” The metaphor of spiritual death was widely employed in post-Reformation theology as a profound expression of both the pervasive corruption and the sheer helplessness of the human condition. This “deadness” metaphor was especially asserted in polemic against Roman Catholic theology, which took offence at the Reformation idea of humanity’s total helplessness. Against Luther, Erasmus of Rotterdam had written that “although the freedom of the will has been wounded by sin, it is not dead; and although it has been lamed, so

that we are more inclined to evil than to good before we receive grace, it has not been destroyed.”¹²⁹

In contrast, post-Reformation Reformed theologians speak unequivocally—as does *Paradise Lost*—of human nature as “dead in sins.” William Perkins, for example, describes the fallen will as “not onely sicke and weake, but even starke dead”;¹³⁰ and John Downham claims that human nature “is not only decayed, and in part hurt and wounded by the fall of *Adam*, but utterly dead in sinne.”¹³¹ Likewise William Ames depicts human nature as “altogether drowned in sin and death.”¹³² This metaphor of death illustrates the extent of the human will’s unfreedom: it no more possesses the power to turn to God than a corpse possesses the power to lift itself from the tomb.¹³³ The human will, enslaved to sin, is thus utterly helpless. This point was affirmed with equal emphasis by Arminian writers.¹³⁴ Episcopius, for instance, speaks of the “ser-

¹²⁹ Desiderius Erasmus, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 86 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974-93), 76:26-27.

¹³⁰ Perkins, *Workes*, 1:552.

¹³¹ Downham, *The summe of sacred divinitie*, 240.

¹³² Ames, *The substance of Christian religion*, 14.

¹³³ This was a common analogy in Reformed orthodox theology. See for instance Pierre du Moulin, *The anatomy of Arminianisme* (London, 1620), 302: “as the Carkasse cannot dispose nor prepare it selfe to the resurrection... So man in the state of sinne, and before his regeneration, hath nothing whereby he may dispose himselfe, or further his regeneration and spirituall new birth.”

¹³⁴ This aspect of post-Reformation Arminianism has frequently been misunderstood. Even a leading historian like Christopher Hill has perpetuated a caricatured view of Arminianism’s theology of the fallen will. See Christopher Hill, “From Lollards to Levellers,” in *Rebels and Their Causes: Essays in Honour of A. L. Morton*, ed. Maurice Cornforth (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1978), 58, where Arminianism is defined as “the doctrine that men may save themselves by their own efforts.” In contrast, the statement of the eighteenth-century Arminian John Wesley, *The question, what is an Arminian? answered* (Bristol, 1770), 5, is hyperbolic but closer to the truth: “No man that ever lived, not *John Calvin* himself, ever asserted ... Original Sin ... in more strong, more clear and express terms, than *Arminius* has done.”

vitute of sin,”¹³⁵ and argues that “we can neither shake off the miserable Yoak of Sin, nor do any thing truly good.”¹³⁶ Similarly Arminius writes that the human will “is not free from the first fall,”¹³⁷ for it is “not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent, and weakened; but ... also imprisoned, destroyed, and lost.”¹³⁸ The fallen will is thus an impotent “slave.”¹³⁹ In affirming that the human will is “enthralled” and “dead in sin,” *Paradise Lost*’s theology thus stands in continuity with the Reformation theology of sin which was affirmed by Reformed orthodoxy and Arminianism alike; and it has little in common with the radical theology of an Anabaptist like Balthasar Hubmaier, who had condemned Luther’s view of the fallen will as “rubbish,”¹⁴⁰ claiming instead that human nature “has remained utterly upright and intact before, during and after the Fall”,¹⁴¹ or with Socinian theology, which insisted that “the nature of man is by no means so depraved as that he is deprived of the liberty and power of obeying or not obeying God.”¹⁴²

The crucial and distinctive emphasis in *Paradise Lost* is, however, not so much on the enslavement of human nature as such, but on the self-enslaving power of human choice. Far from being mere victims of sin, Adam and Eve actively “enthral themselves” (3.125). The enslavement of their wills is therefore not simply a negation of their freedom, but a striking expression of it: Adam and Eve are so free that they can even relinquish and negate their own freedom. This paradox had already been stated by

¹³⁵ Episcopius, *The confession or declaration*, 123.

¹³⁶ Episcopius, *The confession or declaration*, 127.

¹³⁷ Arminius, *Works*, 2:194.

¹³⁸ Arminius, *Works*, 2:192.

¹³⁹ Arminius, *Works*, 2:192-94.

¹⁴⁰ Balthasar Hubmaier, *On Free Will*, in *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers: Documents Illustrative of the Radical Reformation*, ed. G. H. Williams (London: SCM, 1957), 131.

¹⁴¹ Hubmaier, *On Free Will*, 120.

¹⁴² *Racovian Catechism*, 10.

Augustine: “it was by the bad use of free will that man destroyed both it and himself.”¹⁴³ Freedom is lost through freedom. The twentieth-century theologian Emil Brunner expresses this paradox with a striking analogy: “Like someone who has shrieked too loudly and has lost his voice, so we have been boastful in our freedom, and now freedom ... has been lost.”¹⁴⁴ And with a different analogy, William Ames describes sin as “a bargain, in which the sinner for the enjoyment or use of some short pleasure, out of a madness sells himself into slavery.”¹⁴⁵ In the same way, Adam and Eve freely abdicate their freedom in *Paradise Lost*. They have shrieked too loudly and lost their voice. They have “chosen to have no choice.”¹⁴⁶

Further, this choice to have no choice is not simply a once-for-all act which takes place at the moment of the fall; it is a continuing act, in which the human will consistently and “freely” chooses its own enslavement. In the words of Thomas Watson, human beings are slaves who “willingly obey” the “Tyrant” that rules over them. They are “willing to be Slaves, they will not take their Freedom; they kiss their Fetters.”¹⁴⁷ In the same way, William Ames writes that, although fallen human beings “serve a most miserable servitude ... to sin,” they do not desire to “shake off this slavish yoke,” since “their very will it selfe, and the spirit of their minde is possessed by this slavery.”¹⁴⁸ Augustine had made this point when he insisted that in spite of its enslavement to sin, the fallen will is “freely enslaved.”¹⁴⁹ So too, in *Paradise Lost*, the

¹⁴³ Augustine, *Enchiridion de fide, spe et charitate*, 30; in *PL* 40 and *NPNF* 3.

¹⁴⁴ Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth, 1939), 135.

¹⁴⁵ Ames, *The substance of Christian religion*, 29.

¹⁴⁶ C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 102. Lewis is referring here to Satan; but his comment is also apt as a description of the fallen human condition.

¹⁴⁷ Watson, *A body of practical divinity*, 86.

¹⁴⁸ Ames, *The substance of Christian religion*, 25-26.

¹⁴⁹ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 30.

will that enslaves itself is freely enslaved; it continues to choose as if it were free, even though it has in fact lost the liberty of indifference and the governance of right reason. Such a will is, in the words of Calvin, “a voluntary slave.”¹⁵⁰

In this chapter I have argued that, in continuity with the anti-Calvinist polemics of Arminian theology, *Paradise Lost* consistently repudiates necessitarian views of human freedom. In the poem, as in Arminianism, authentic freedom and moral responsibility are considered to be impossible without alternativity of choice. So in *Paradise Lost* human freedom is portrayed in Arminian terms as a liberty of indifference, in which the will is poised between alternative possibilities, possessing the power to determine its own course, and guided by “right reason,” which enables it to judge well and to prefer what is good. All the choices of Adam and Eve in the events leading up to the fall are therefore contingent choices, and the fall is possible only because of Adam’s and Eve’s freedom of alternative choice. Not being necessitated by anything, the fall is itself brought about purely by the freely willed and self-determined decisions of Eve and Adam. Having an abundant range of freedoms, the first human beings freely choose to fall.

But in the poem the act of falling is viewed as both an expression and a negation of freedom. In this respect, the theology of *Paradise Lost* stands in close continuity with the Reformed orthodox conception of original sin as total depravity. While the unfallen will is characterised by a rich abundance of alternative possibilities and by the power to choose and to actualise such possibilities, the fallen will, in contrast, is charac-

¹⁵⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.7.

terised by a restricted narrowness: a radical loss of alternative possibilities. Human nature has become slavishly turned in upon itself, and its horizons have in this way been drastically narrowed and restricted. Such a corrupted human nature cannot raise itself from itself; it cannot transcend itself in order to grasp again the genuine freedom that consists in abundant alternative possibilities. Such an enslaved will must, in other words, be liberated—it must be set free from itself in order to receive anew the power of freedom.¹⁵¹

As I will argue in the following chapter, *Paradise Lost*'s account of universal, liberating grace constitutes a dramatic theological qualification of its depiction of the corrupting power of original sin. Left to itself, fallen human nature can only be corrupt and enslaved. But it has not been left to itself—the same humanity which has been ruined by Adam has also been “Restore[d]” by “one greater Man” (1.4-5). It has been liberated by grace, and granted the fresh possibility of receiving the gift of salvation through the Son of God.

¹⁵¹ See the parallel statement of Arminius, *Works*, 2:157: “With these evils [all men] would remain oppressed for ever, unless they were liberated by Christ Jesus; to whom be glory for ever.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

Grace, Conversion and Freedom

According to Sir Walter Raleigh, *Paradise Lost*'s entire plot "radiates" from a single point: the moment when Eve plucks and eats the forbidden fruit.

Referring to this moment, Raleigh remarks that "there is not an incident, hardly a line of the poem, but leads backwards or forwards to those central lines in the Ninth Book."¹

This influential reading, subsequently adopted by James Holly Hanford² and, initially, by E. M. W. Tillyard,³ entailed a diminution of the significance of grace in the epic.

Accepting Raleigh's claim that the epic action centres on the single episode of the fall, A. J. A. Waldock attempted a devastating critique of the entire poem by arguing that this episode ultimately fails.⁴ The force of Waldock's argument led to a substantial defection from Raleigh's theory. In "The Crisis of *Paradise Lost*," still one of the most

¹ Walter Raleigh, *Milton* (London, 1900), 81-82.

² James Holly Hanford, *A Milton Handbook* (New York: Appleton, 1961), 213.

³ E. M. W. Tillyard, *Milton* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930), 245-49.

⁴ A. J. A. Waldock, "*Paradise Lost*" and *Its Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 25-64.

important studies of the poem's portrayal of conversion, Tillyard repudiated his earlier position and argued instead for an "adjustment of balance,"⁵ in which "the centre of importance should be shifted to [Adam's and Eve's] regenerate action after the Fall."⁶ By thus raising the conversion scene to a place of eminence within the epic action, Tillyard also attempted to compensate for the comparative neglect of this part of the poem, and several scholars have followed him in recognising the crucial significance of this scene in *Paradise Lost*. G. A. Wilkes, for example, identifies its importance within the context of the poem's theodicy, arguing that the conversion of Adam and Eve exhibits "the operation of Providence in bringing forth good from evil."⁷ C. A. Patrides suggests that the conversion of Adam and Eve is "one of the most important though least understood incidents in *Paradise Lost*,"⁸ and Robert Crosman speaks of the closing lines of Book 10, where Eve and Adam water the ground with penitent tears, as "perhaps the greatest moment of Milton's poem."⁹

The theological significance of the conversion scene has, however, often been overlooked, especially by readers who view the conversion of Adam and Eve as no more than a reconciliation between two estranged human beings. John Broadbent, for instance, argues that Eve and Adam simply "become plain wife and husband" in their

⁵ E. M. W. Tillyard, *Studies in Milton* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), 51.

⁶ Tillyard, *Studies in Milton*, 45.

⁷ G. A. Wilkes, *The Thesis of Paradise Lost* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1961), 35-36. In a similar way, John T. Shawcross, *With Mortal Voice: The Creation of Paradise Lost* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 24-25, argues that the heavenly colloquy in Book 3 is the poem's climax, and that this climax highlights the providence of God in providing salvation even before the need for it exists.

⁸ C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 210.

⁹ Robert Crosman, *Reading Paradise Lost* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 204. For a similar comment, see John Carey, *Milton* (London: Evans Brothers, 1969), 103.

penitence;¹⁰ and according to Michael Wilding, “[w]hat finally emerges at the end of Book 10” is simply “human dignity.”¹¹ Similarly, Tillyard misses the theological meaning of conversion entirely when he describes the scene as an account of “two ordinary human beings ... coming together in ordinary human decency.”¹²

The stated aim of *Paradise Lost* is not, however, to portray “ordinary human decency,” but to demonstrate the triumph of the goodness of God over evil. This demonstration of God’s good providence rests in part on the fact that Adam and Eve are not left in their misery, but are restored by divine grace. The conversion scene can be fully understood only against the backdrop of the fall, and, correspondingly, the fall is seen in its proper light only when it is viewed in relation to the ensuing intervention of the grace of God. “Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit / Of that Forbidd’n Tree” (1.1-2) have subjected human nature to a radical corruption. Human freedom has become enslaved to the tyrannical power of the sinful self. But the fall and the power of sin occupy centre stage in the poem only “*till* one greater Man / Restore us” (1.4-5; emphasis added). The gracious providence of God does not leave human nature in its fallen state, but brings forth good from evil by triumphing over the power of original sin and liberating the human will from its dark enthrallment. Roland Frye has rightly remarked that the whole of *Paradise Lost*, “as an assertion of eternal providence, of God’s reversal of evil,” is “far less concerned with the commission of sin than with the triumph of grace.”¹³ Indeed, within the narrative of *Paradise Lost*, the destructive power of the fall is subsumed under the overarching framework of the providence of

¹⁰ John B. Broadbent, *Some Graver Subject: An Essay on Paradise Lost* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), 266.

¹¹ Michael Wilding, *Milton’s Paradise Lost* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1969), 107.

¹² Tillyard, *Studies in Milton*, 43.

¹³ Roland M. Frye, *God, Man, and Satan: Patterns of Christian Thought and Life in Paradise Lost, Pilgrim’s Progress, and the Great Theologians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 70.

God, which works to bring good from evil by showing grace and mercy to the fallen human race.¹⁴ The fall of Adam and Eve is not the final word, for “over wrauth Grace shall abound” (12.478), so that God’s “Mercy first and last shall brightest shine” (3.134).

I. Universal Preventive Grace

The close of Book 10 in *Paradise Lost* finds Adam and Eve confessing their sins, begging for divine pardon, and “with tears / Watering the ground” (10.1101-2). Patrides has drawn attention to the “unexpectedness and uncharacteristic nature of this incident,”¹⁵ and Joseph Summers similarly notes that we know of “no reason, no set of natural circumstances whereby we could predict or expect that love could be rekindled after such abusive lust and such hatred, that life could again be welcomed after such despair.”¹⁶ The fact that Eve and Adam become penitent at all, after all that has taken place, bears witness to the intervention of the grace of God. And as Book 11 opens, the narrative voice explains that their repentance is due to the influence of that grace:¹⁷

Thus they in lowliest plight repentant stood
Praying, for from the Mercie-seat above
Prevenient Grace descending had remov'd
The stonie from thir hearts, and made new flesh

¹⁴ For a valuable discussion of providence as the central theme of the poem, see Wilkes, *The Thesis of Paradise Lost*.

¹⁵ Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition*, 210.

¹⁶ Joseph H. Summers, *The Muse's Method: An Introduction to Paradise Lost* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), 108.

¹⁷ See the observation of A. S. P. Woodhouse, *The Heavenly Muse: A Preface to Milton*, ed. Hugh MacCallum (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 278: “A light is thrown back on the moments of Book 10 by the opening lines of Book 11; for the poet tells us that the resolution of repentance had not been reached without the silent interposition of grace.”

Regenerat grow instead, that sighs now breath'd
Unutterable, which the Spirit of prayer
Inspir'd. (11.1-7)

Here the narrative voice describes the conversion of Adam and Eve with richly allusive biblical and theological language. Reference to the theological concept of “Prevenient Grace” (*gratia praeveniens*) is especially important, since this concept is central to the theology of conversion in *Paradise Lost*, and was also a central feature of the major post-Reformation controversies regarding grace and conversion.

Following Augustine,¹⁸ medieval theology distinguished between exciting, operating and prevenient grace on the one hand, and assisting, cooperating and subsequent grace on the other.¹⁹ For writers like Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas, prevenient grace was understood to be a work solely of divine grace which, excluding any element of human cooperation, prepares human beings for the subsequent grace of justification.²⁰ According to Duns Scotus, William of Ockham and Gabriel Biel, on the other hand, fallen human beings retain the ability to prepare themselves for the subsequent bestowal of grace.²¹ The former position was taken up by the reformers, who affirmed that the will remains entirely passive in its initial conversion by prevenient grace. Thus Calvin writes that the fallen will is “converted solely by the

¹⁸ See Augustine, *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, 33; in *PL* 44 and *NPNF* 5.

¹⁹ For a summary of these terms, see Karl Rahner, “Grace, II B: Systematic,” in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. Karl Rahner et al., 6 vols. (London: Burns & Oates, 1968-70), 2:415-22.

²⁰ See for example Bernard of Clairvaux, *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, 14.46-47; in *PL* 182. In the sixteenth century, this view was also affirmed by the Catholic reformer, Johann von Staupitz: see Franz Posset, *The Front-Runner of the Catholic Reformation: The Life and Works of Johann von Staupitz* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 45-47.

²¹ On the different medieval views of prevenient grace, see Heiko A. Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 123-41; and see the summary in Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 1:190-93.

power of God” through “prevenient grace,”²² and that the will itself possesses not even “the minutest ability” to cooperate with grace, until it has already been “wholly transformed and renovated.”²³ Reacting against this Protestant position, counter-Reformation Catholic theology anathematised the idea “that man’s free will, when moved and excited by God, gives no cooperation by assenting to God’s exciting and calling,” and that the will cannot in any way “dispose and prepare itself” for salvation.²⁴ In this counter-Reformation view, then, prevenient grace alone does not prepare human beings for salvation, but it aids and enables them to prepare themselves.²⁵

In the seventeenth century, the concept of prevenient grace was at the heart of the divergence of Arminian theology from Reformed orthodoxy. A focal point of the controversy between the two theological traditions was the question whether the mode of conversion is resistible or irresistible. This question was, according to Francis Turretin, “the principle hinge of the controversy” between Reformed orthodoxy and Arminianism,²⁶ and Arminius himself claimed that “the whole controversy” concerning grace “reduces itself to the solution of this question, ‘Is the grace of God a certain, irresistible force?’”²⁷ On the one hand, the Reformed orthodox concept of irresistible

²² John Calvin *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 2.3.7.

²³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.6.

²⁴ *Canones et decreta Concilii Tridentini*, 6.4; in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, 2 vols. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 2:679. On the Tridentine position, see Edward Schillebeeckx, “The Tridentine Decree on Justification: A New View,” *Concilium* 5 (1965), 176-79.

²⁵ For an important Protestant critique of the counter-Reformation view of prevenient grace, see Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, trans. Fred Kramer, 4 vols. (St Louis: Concordia, 1986), 1:553-64.

²⁶ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992-97), 15.6.1.

²⁷ Jacobus Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols, 3 vols. (1825-75; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 1:664. Historians of theology like James Orr and B. B. Warfield emphasise the centrality of the idea of irresistible grace to the whole theological system of

grace (*gratia irresistibilis*) affirmed both the infallible efficacy of grace and the passivity of the human will in the first moment of conversion. The human will is rendered passive by its total depravity (*corruptio totalis*); therefore “those who attribute to unredeemed man either a free will or powers by which he might do good or prepare himself for conversion and God’s grace, are seeking a house in ashes.”²⁸ Since human beings cannot prepare themselves for conversion, they are simply “overpower[ed]”²⁹ by the grace of God, and “invincibly” and irresistibly converted;³⁰ and “at the first moment” of such conversion the human will remains “in a purely passive state.”³¹ Indeed, “man is as passive in his Regeneration, as in his first generation.”³² For Reformed orthodoxy, then, prevenient grace is the grace which irresistibly converts the elect without any human cooperation. In contrast to this Reformed view, the Arminian concept of resistible grace (*gratia resistibilis*) affirmed both the universality of grace and the role of the human will in cooperating with it. In Arminian theology, the beginning of conversion is effected by a cooperation between divine grace and the human will. The influence of prevenient grace enables the fallen will to cooperate with grace, and thus to be converted.³³ This prevenient grace is thus universally bestowed,

Reformed orthodoxy. See James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (London, 1901), 299; and B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), 359: “What lies at the heart of [Reformed] soteriology is the absolute exclusion of the creaturely element in the initiation of the saving process.”

²⁸ Johannes Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae*; in *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. John W. Beardslee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 1.10.1.

²⁹ John Lightfoot, *The works of the reverend and learned John Lightfoot, D.D.*, 2 vols. (London, 1684), 1:1291.

³⁰ Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (s.l., 1797), 419-20.

³¹ Bartholomaeus Keckermann, *Systema sacrosanctae theologiae* (Heidelberg, 1602), 263-64; cited in Heppe, 520.

³² John Cotton, *The new covenant* (London, 1654), 55.

³³ For a useful discussion of the Arminian view of prevenient grace, see H. O. Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1940-43), 2:352-57.

and it “does not [always] obtain its effect.”³⁴ Fallen human beings retain “freedom of will, and a capability of resisting the Holy Spirit, of rejecting the proffered grace of God.”³⁵ In short, for Arminianism the initial influence of prevenient grace is only a *necessary* condition for conversion; while for Reformed orthodoxy the initial influence of grace is a *sufficient* condition for conversion.

When the narrative voice in *Paradise Lost* speaks of “Prevenient Grace,” it thus evokes this complex history of theological controversy. The term “Prevenient Grace” can denote such a range of theological and polemical positions that *Paradise Lost*’s view of this concept needs to be explored in some detail.

The poem’s concept of prevenient grace is, in the first place, sharply discontinuous with the Roman Catholic view that the human heart is able to prepare (or “prevent”) itself for salvation. Addressing the Father in Book 3, the Son of God says:

Man shall find Grace;
And shall Grace not find means, that finds her way,
The speediest of thy winged messengers,
To visit all thy creatures, and to all
Comes unprevented, unimplor’d, unsought,
Happie for Man, so coming; hee her aide
Can never seek, once dead in sins and lost. (3.227-33)

The Son’s theological emphasis here is both on the inability of the human will to turn to God, and, correspondingly, on the sheer initiative of God’s turning to humanity in grace. The fallen human beings who, through the enslavement of their wills, could not even “seek” the aid of grace, will now become the recipients of grace. Grace is thus described as “unprevented”—literally, “not prepared for.”³⁶ This means that fallen

³⁴ Arminius, *Works*, 2:721-22.

³⁵ Arminius, *Works*, 2:721.

³⁶ In his annotation, Bentley fails to realise that “prevented” is a theological term, and he thus writes:

“How *Unprevented* can stand here, does not appear; unless in this Meaning, *comes unimplor’d, if not*

human beings, who are “dead in sins,” cannot in any way prepare themselves for salvation. In this respect *Paradise Lost* sides with the common Reformed orthodox polemic³⁷ against the Roman Catholic doctrine of prevenient grace, as expressed by the Council of Trent.³⁸ Further, the poem’s denial of a human preparation for conversion (*preparatio ad conversionem*) also contrasts with the form of preparationism that became prominent among many Puritans in England and New England.³⁹ According to Thomas Hooker, for example, “when the heart is fitted and prepared, the Lord Jesus comes immediately into it”;⁴⁰ and John Cotton writes that “if we smooth the way for Him, then He will come into our hearts.”⁴¹ In affirming that preparation is solely a work of God, the theology of *Paradise Lost* is closer to the Reformed orthodox theology of Richard Sibbes, who insists that all “preparations themselves are of God”;⁴² and of the *Westminster Confession*, which asserts that “natural man, being ... dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.”⁴³ In *Paradise Lost*, the beginning of conversion thus arises solely from the initiative of

prevented. But that would diminish the gracious favour, set forth here” (Bentley, 86). On the contrary, the meaning of “unprevented” highlights the gratuitousness of grace.

³⁷ For an example of Reformed orthodox polemic against the Roman Catholic position, see Jeremias Bastingius, *An exposition or commentarie upon the Catechisme of Christian Religion* (Cambridge, 1589), 8: “Therefore this errour of the schoolemen is to be corrected, who thinke that men are able ... to doe good works of preparation, that is such as goe before the grace of God in us, and yet that they deserve grace of congruitie, as they barbarouslie speake.”

³⁸ *Canones et decreta Concilii Tridentini*, 6.5-6; in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2:672-73.

³⁹ On the development of Puritan preparationism, see R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Bernhard Citron, *New Birth: A Study of the Evangelical Doctrine of Conversion in the Protestant Fathers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1951), 53-59; and especially Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

⁴⁰ Thomas Hooker, *The soules humiliation* (London, 1638), 170.

⁴¹ John Cotton, *Christ the fountaine of life* (London, 1651), 40-41.

⁴² Richard Sibbes, *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, 7 vols. (Edinburgh, 1862-64), 6:522.

⁴³ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 9.3; in Schaff, 3:623.

God's grace, and not from any self-preparation of the human heart. Grace, in other words, "Comes unprevented" precisely because it is itself prevenient.

The Son of God therefore points out that it is "Happie for Man" that grace comes unprevented, since "hee her aide / Can never seek, once dead in sins and lost" (3.232-33). Grace cannot be prepared for or even sought by human beings in their fallen state, so that even the seeking of grace must already be a response to grace. As Luther had said, "this very wishing and asking, seeking or knocking, is the gift of prevenient grace, not of our eliciting will."⁴⁴ In contrast to any notion of self-preparation, the Son's affirmation that "Man shall find Grace" is thus a statement of the initiative of grace, in continuity with Reformation theology.

On the other hand, *Paradise Lost's* theology of prevenient grace departs from the Reformation and Reformed view of particular and irresistible grace. According to Reformed orthodoxy, divine grace comes only to the particular number of elect individuals who have been chosen out of the corrupt mass (*corrupta massa*). But in *Paradise Lost*, the triumph of grace over sin is given expression in the universality of grace: grace comes "to all" (3.230), and God is "Merciful over all his works, with good / Still overcoming evil" (12.565-56).

The universality of grace was a particularly pronounced theme among Arminian and Amyraldian theologians in the seventeenth century. According to Amyraldian theology, the grace of salvation is "universal and common to all men," but this grace only becomes effective if human beings fulfil the condition of responding to Christ in faith⁴⁵—and only the elect members of the human race can in fact fulfil this condition.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (St Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1958-86), 29:125.

⁴⁵ Moïse Amyraut, *Brief traité de la predestination et de ses principales dependances* (Saumur, 1634), 89-90.

In Amyraldian theology, then, the universalism of grace is in fact no more than a hypothetical universalism (*l'universalisme hypothétique*). In principle, God is gracious to all, but in reality his grace is received only by those for whom it has been specially predestined. Arminianism, in contrast, affirmed God's "serious intention to save all":⁴⁷ the gift of "Sufficient Grace" is "given to all Men"⁴⁸ and "denied to none."⁴⁹ According to *Paradise Lost's* theology, too, the grace of God is in the fullest sense universal grace (*gratia universalis*)—it is, as in Arminianism, not merely for all "diverse sorts" of people in general,⁵⁰ but "for all men and every man" (*pro omnibus et singulis hominibus*).⁵¹ It is the gift of God to all those human beings who have been corrupted and enslaved through the fall.

In the passage already quoted (3.227-33), the Son highlights God's readiness or "eagerness"⁵² to be gracious to his creatures, describing grace as the "speediest" of God's angels. To recall Sonnet XIX, of the "Thousands" who "speed" at God's bidding, grace is quickest. And this divine eagerness to save has as its object not merely the elect, but "all [God's] creatures." Grace is thus universal: it "visit[s]" and "Comes" to

⁴⁶ Amyraut, *Brief traité de la predestination*, 163.

⁴⁷ Simon Episcopius, *The confession or declaration of the ministers or pastors which in the United Provinces are called Remonstrants, concerning the chief points of Christian religion* (London, 1676), 201.

⁴⁸ Francis Gordon, *An essay upon predestination and grace* (Edinburgh, 1712), 33.

⁴⁹ Gordon, *An essay upon predestination and grace*, 35.

⁵⁰ The standard Reformed orthodox interpretation of the universality of grace was that God is gracious to all kinds of people, but not to each individual member of the human race. See for example Pierre du Moulin, *The anatomy of Arminianisme* (London, 1620), 248, who denies that "all" means "all ... particular men"; Sebastian Benfield, *Eight sermons publicly preached in the University of Oxford* (Oxford, 1614), 4, who argues that "all" refers to "all sorts of particulars, not each particular of all sorts"; and George Abbot, *The reasons which Doctour Hill hath brought* (Oxford, 1604), 19, who writes: "all intendeth many, or diverse of diverse sorts, not universally every one."

⁵¹ *Articuli Arminiani sive remonstrantia*, 2; in Schaff, 3:546.

⁵² Commenting on the theological structure of the divine colloquy in Book 3, Fowler aptly speaks of God's "eagerness (as it were) to save man" (Fowler, 153).

all those who through the fall are “dead in sins and lost.” This universal grace is the direct antithesis of the universal corruption of original sin, and of Satan’s plan to “Draw after him the whole Race of mankind” (3.161). Through the work of redemption, God will “save ... the whole Race lost” (3.279-80). The prevenient grace of God is for all. It is, as Arminius says, a grace which arises “from [God’s] general love towards all mankind.”⁵³

Further, according to *Paradise Lost* the effect of this prevenient grace is a universal liberation of humanity from the enslaving power of original sin. The liberty of indifference (*libertas indifferentiae*) which was lost in the fall is restored to all people through prevenient grace. As God the Father says of fallen humanity:

once more I will renew
His lapsed powers, though forfeit and enthralld
By sin to foul exorbitant desires;
Upheld by mee, yet once more he shall stand
On even ground against his mortal foe,
By mee upheld, that he may know how frail
His fall’n condition is, and to mee ow
All his deliv’rance, and to none but mee. (3.175-82)

Through sin, the “powers” of human nature have been lost and enslaved. But by his grace God “renew[s]” these “lapsed powers.”⁵⁴ He restores the freedom which human beings have forfeited, and liberates the will which has become “enthralld.” The act of God’s grace is, then, an act of radical renewal, in which the destructive effects of the fall are reversed, and the lost freedom of human nature is restored.⁵⁵ Substantially the

⁵³ Arminius, *Works*, 2:722.

⁵⁴ For a similar use of terminology, see the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 10.1; in Schaff, 3:624: the grace of regeneration involves a “renewing” of the “wills” of the elect.

⁵⁵ Dennis R. Danielson, “The Fall and Milton’s Theodicy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. Dennis R. Danielson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 156-57, rightly observes that

same position had been stated by Arminius, according to whom prevenient grace “raises up again those who are conquered and have fallen” and “establishes and supplies them with new strength.”⁵⁶ The *De Doctrina Christiana*, too, places great emphasis on the universal liberation of fallen human beings through grace. According to the treatise, regenerating grace “restores man’s natural faculties of faultless understanding and of free will,”⁵⁷ so that the “lost freedom of will”⁵⁸ is restored “to its former liberty.”⁵⁹ This is precisely the meaning of prevenient grace in *Paradise Lost*.

In the poem, the liberating act of God’s grace grants to all human beings the ability “once more” to “stand / On even ground.” The will’s liberty of indifference, in which it stands “In even scale” (10.47), has been lost in the fall. Instead of standing poised between good and evil with an equal possibility of either choice, the will is now inclined to evil, governed not by right reason but by “foul exorbitant desires,” and as such it is incapable of choosing the good. But this sinful and enslaving inclination of the will is countered and conquered by the grace of God. “[O]nce more” the human will is set free for the possibility of the good and the right, and is placed on the scales of indifferent choice. The Arminian theologian John Goodwin similarly writes that the grace of God enables human beings to decide “whether they will or no,” giving them a possibility of willing salvation, but also “a possibility . . . of nilling.”⁶⁰ And in the same way Arminius viewed prevenient grace as bringing about a restoration of the liberty of indifference, in which the individual becomes capable both of “freely assent[ing]” to

“[a]lthough free will is impaired by the Fall,” prevenient grace “enables the fallen will to turn to God.”

See also J. Martin Evans, *The Miltonic Moment* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 132.

⁵⁶ Arminius, *Works*, 2:700.

⁵⁷ *CPW* 6:461.

⁵⁸ *CPW* 6:187.

⁵⁹ *CPW* 6:462.

⁶⁰ John Goodwin, *The remedie of unreasonableness* (London, 1650), 8.

grace and of freely “withholding his assent.”⁶¹ So too in *Paradise Lost*, prevenient grace places the human will’s power of choice back on the balanced scales, so that alternative decisions between good and evil become authentic possibilities.

This liberating work of grace is not described in *Paradise Lost* as a purification of human nature or a transformation of the sinful will, but as an upholding of human freedom: the powers of human nature are “Upheld by mee ... By mee upheld” (3.178-80). Human beings retain their “fall’n condition,” remaining sinfully “frail” (3.180-81). But in the midst of this frailty and fallenness they are “upheld” by the grace of God. The spatial metaphor here evokes the image of human creatures being suspended over the abyss by the hand of God. They are, in one sense, “fall’n,” and at each moment their natural tendency is to continue falling; but they are simultaneously upheld and preserved from falling. Reformed orthodox theologians commonly used this image to describe God’s providential conservation (*conservatio*) of created things. According to this Reformed view, the creation which came from nothing (*ex nihilo*) also possesses a natural tendency to return to nothingness; at each moment it must therefore be upheld by divine providence, and prevented from sinking back into the abyss of non-being.⁶² All created being thus exists “on the boundary of nothingness,” but, graciously, God “does not allow [it] to fall.”⁶³ As Thomas Boston writes, creaturely being “must be upheld by God as a ball in the air,” or it would return to non-being as naturally as the

⁶¹ Arminius, *Works*, 2:722.

⁶² On the Reformed orthodox concept of *conservatio*, see Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-77), 3/3, 58-90; and G. C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 50-82.

⁶³ Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, trans. Darrell L. Guder, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981-83), 1:515. See also Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 31-34.

ball falls to the ground.⁶⁴ And in the words of William Ames, “God *holds as it were in his hand* the creature, that it fall not back to ... nothing”,⁶⁵ for “[e]very creature would return to that state of nothing whence it came if God did not uphold it.”⁶⁶ For Reformed theologians, this aspect of God’s providence seemed a simple corollary of the idea of creation from nothing. As Robert Leighton writes: “If we believe that all things were produced out of nothing, the consequence is, that, by the same powerful hand that created them, they must be preserved and supported to keep them from falling back into their primitive nothing.”⁶⁷ In *Paradise Lost* the providence of God does not serve this ontological function, for in the poem’s theology creaturely being is derived not from nothingness but from the primal matter of God’s own being, so that it is the divine being itself, not nothingness, from which “All things proceed” and to which they tend to “return” (5.469-70). The image of the upholding of creaturely being is thus appropriated in *Paradise Lost* in the context of human freedom, instead of the context of human ontology. It is the freedom of human nature that is “upheld” by the grace of God. Human freedom since the fall has a natural tendency to evil, and it would necessarily fall towards evil except for the upholding grace of God. This grace returns the will to its primitive state of indifference; it preserves the will from its tendency to collapse into self-enslavement, and enables it “once more” to “stand / On even ground” with the self-determining power to choose between good and evil. In the words of the

⁶⁴ Thomas Boston, *Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, 2 vols. (Aberdeen, 1853), 1:188.

⁶⁵ William Ames, *The substance of Christian religion, or, A plain and easie draught of the Christian catechism* (London, 1659), 69.

⁶⁶ William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, ed. and trans. John D. Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 1.9.17. See also Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. A. S. McGrade and Brian Vickers (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1975), 5.65.5. E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1943), 13, notes that this view was widespread in the Elizabethan period.

⁶⁷ Robert Leighton, *Theological Lectures* (London, 1821), 98-99.

De Doctrina Christiana, God thus graciously “gives us the power to act freely, which we have not been able to do since the fall.”⁶⁸

Universal prevenient grace, then, is not a grace which secures salvation, but only a grace which secures the *possibility* of salvation through the restoration of human freedom. As Dennis Danielson observes, “God’s grace explains how man’s repentance is possible ... but does not finally account for the fact that it actually takes place.”⁶⁹ Preserved from the enslaving power of original sin, the human will is upheld “on even ground,” able to choose or to reject the offer of salvation. Continuing his account of his gracious plan for fallen humanity, God thus says:

Some I have chosen of peculiar grace
Elect above the rest; so is my will:
The rest shall hear me call, and oft be warnd
Thir sinful state, and to appease betimes
Th’ incensed Deitie, while offerd Grace
Invites; for I will cleer thir senses dark,
What may suffice, and soft’n stonie hearts
To pray, repent, and bring obedience due.
To prayer, repentance, and obedience due,
Though but endevord with sincere intent,
Mine eare shall not be slow, mine eye not shut. (3.183-93)

Because of prevenient grace, salvation is a universal possibility. God’s “peculiar grace” specially singles out some individuals, but the divine “call” to salvation comes to all the “rest” of humanity. All are invited to respond to “offerd Grace.” Even the conversion of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* is a picture not of any work of “peculiar grace,” but of a universal human possibility, a possibility which is created for all by the liberating power of the prevenient grace of God.

⁶⁸ *CPW* 6:457.

⁶⁹ Dennis R. Danielson, *Milton’s Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 88.

While some Reformed orthodox writers denied that grace is universally offered,⁷⁰ most of them affirmed that all people are in some sense invited to partake of salvation. Johannes Wollebius, for instance, writes that even “the reprobate” are “called in earnest, and salvation is offered to them on condition of faith.”⁷¹ But the Reformed understanding of total depravity meant that the “condition” of such a universal offer of salvation could not be accepted by any except the elect, who are regenerated by the “absolutely irresistible” grace of God.⁷² In this Reformed view, then, the universal offer of salvation is reduced to a nominal offer, an offer which God himself knows cannot possibly be accepted except by the elect. In contrast, Arminian theology spoke of the same universal offer of salvation, but affirmed also that the operation of sufficient grace (*gratia sufficiens*) removes the effects of human sinfulness enough to enable all fallen individuals to accept this offer. As Simon Episcopius writes, God gives sinners grace “sufficient for their yielding Faith and Obedience, when he calleth them by the Gospel”;⁷³ and, in the words of Arminius, all fallen human beings are “excited, impelled, drawn and assisted by grace,” but their liberty of indifference means that “in the very moment in which they actually assent [to grace], they possess the capability of not assenting.”⁷⁴ This Arminian view of sufficient grace stands in continuity with God’s reference in *Paradise Lost* to the invitation of “offerd Grace.” Indeed, the theologically

⁷⁰ See for example William Prynne, *God, no impostor, nor deluder, or, An answer to a Popish and Arminian cavill, in the defence of free-will, and universall grace* (London, 1630), 2-3, who argues that the proclamation of grace is only for the sake of the elect, and is “intended unto them alone.” Similarly, see William Perkins, *The workes of that famous and worthie minister of Christ, in the Universitie of Cambridge*, M. W. Perkins, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1612-19), 1:113.

⁷¹ Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae*, 1.20.2.

⁷² Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae*, 1.28.1.

⁷³ Episcopius, *The confession or declaration*, 201.

⁷⁴ Arminius, *Works*, 2:722. For an example of Reformed orthodox polemic against the Arminian concept of sufficient grace, see du Moulin, *The anatomy of Arminianisme*, 358-422.

crucial term in God's speech is "suffice": God graciously reverses the effects of original sin to an extent that is sufficient for the salvation of all people.

Thus while the human mind had been darkened and blinded by original sin, God now graciously "cleer[s]" the minds of all fallen human beings. And while the will had been enthralled by sin, the hearts of all fallen human beings are now "soft'n[ed]" by grace. These metaphors of the enlightening of the mind and the softening of the heart were frequently used by post-Reformation writers. Richard Baxter, for example, speaks of God's "taking the hard heart out of us, and giving hearts of flesh,"⁷⁵ while Arminius writes that "the hardness of [man's] stony heart" is "changed into the softness of flesh" in conversion;⁷⁶ and Johann Heinrich Heidegger writes that God "illumines the reason to conviction of the truth."⁷⁷ In Reformed orthodox theology, such descriptions of the enlightening of the mind and softening of the heart could only refer to regeneration itself.⁷⁸ But in *Paradise Lost*, as in Arminianism, it is precisely the unregenerate heart that is softened by grace, in order to allow it to respond to the offer of salvation. And the response to the offer of salvation is "To pray, repent, and bring obedience due." When fallen human beings, liberated and enabled by grace, freely turn to God with such prayer, penitence and obedience, they become not merely recipients of universal grace, but partakers of salvation.

⁷⁵ Richard Baxter, *Aphorismes of justification* (London, 1649), 8.

⁷⁶ Arminius, *Works*, 2:194-95.

⁷⁷ Johann Heinrich Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae* (Zurich, 1700), 21.27; cited in Heppe, 520.

⁷⁸ See for example the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 10.1; in Schaff, 3:624; and Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae*, 1.28.1.

II. The Conversion of Adam and Eve

This concept of universal prevenient grace, which is explicated theologically in Book 3, is portrayed dramatically in the conversion of Adam and Eve in Books 10 and 11.

When Adam and Eve stand praying at the opening of Book 11, the Son of God presents their prayers to the Father and intercedes on their behalf:

See Father, what first fruits on Earth are sprung
From thy implanted Grace in Man, these Sighs
And Prayers, which in this Gold'n Censer, mixt
With Incense, I thy Priest before thee bring,
Fruits of more pleasing savour from thy seed
Sown with contrition in his heart, then those
Which his own hand manuring all the Trees
Of Paradise could have produc't, ere fall'n
From innocence. Now therefore bend thine eare
To supplication, heare his sighs though mute;
Unskilful with what words to pray, let mee
Interpret for him, mee his Advocate
And propitiation, all his works on mee
Good or not good ingraft, my Merit those
Shall perfet, and for these my Death shall pay.
Accept me, and in mee from these receive
The smell of peace toward Mankinde, let him live
Before thee reconcil'd. (11.22-39)

This is a depiction of the Reformed orthodox understanding of the intercessory work of Christ, according to which the Son of God performs the “oblation of the persons of the redeemed, sanctifying their prayers, and all their services, rendering them acceptable to God, through the savour of his own merits.”⁷⁹ In the words of Stephen Charnock, Christ is “our priest in the court of heaven,” who “plead[s]” for human redemption, “both before the tribunal of justice and the throne of mercy.”⁸⁰ Responding to this intercession, the Father grants the Son’s request, and as a result Eve and Adam immediately

⁷⁹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 2:593-94.

⁸⁰ Stephen Charnock, *The Works of Stephen Charnock*, 5 vols. (Edinburgh, 1864-66), 5:101.

become aware that their prayer for grace has been answered. They find “Strength added from above,” and “new hope” that has sprung “Out of despaire” (11.138-39).

Beginning his speech, significantly, with a reference to faith, the newly-regenerate Adam marvels at the efficacy of prayer:

Eve, easily may Faith admit, that all
The good which we enjoy, from Heav'n descends;
But that from us aught should ascend to Heav'n
So prevalent as to concerne the mind
Of God high-blest, or to incline his will,
Hard to belief may seem; yet this will Prayer,
Or one short sigh of human breath, up-borne
Ev'n to the Seat of God. For since I saught
By Prayer th' offended Deitie to appease,
Kneeld and before him humbl'd all my heart,
Methought I saw him placable and mild,
Bending his eare; perswasion in me grew
That I was heard with favour; peace returnd
Home to my brest, and to my memorie
His promise, that thy Seed shall bruise our Foe;
Which then not minded in dismay, yet now
Assures me that the bitterness of death
Is past, and we shall live. (11.141-58)

This devotional meditation on prayer, repentance and grace forms a striking contrast and complement to the preceding speech of the Son. Both speeches, as well as the opening comments of the narrative voice, contain a subtle interplay of echoed words and phrases, which serves to highlight the paradoxical unity of divine grace and human freedom in salvation.⁸¹ Adam marvels that God responds to just “one short sigh of

⁸¹ Referring to the sequence of biblical episodes related by Michael in Books 11 and 12, Marshall Grossman, *Authors to Themselves: Milton and the Revelation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 167, notes that “[i]n the last two books of the poem, subtle juxtapositions, cross-references, and internal allusions replace local poetic effects.” As I note here, this effect operates from the beginning of Book 11, and is important in the theological portrayal of Eve’s and Adam’s conversion.

human breath” (11.147);⁸² but it is in fact the Son who pleads for the Father to “heare his sighs though mute” (11.31). Adam speaks of his prayer ascending, being “up-borne” (11.147); but the narrative voice has said already that “Prevenient Grace descending” has enabled Adam’s repentance (11.3), and that “the Spirit of prayer” has “Inspir’d” this repentance (11.6-7). Adam says that his prayer ascends “to the Seat of God” in order to obtain mercy (11.148); but the narrative voice has told us that the grace that anteceded Adam’s prayer came “from the Mercie-seat above” (11.2-3). Adam remarks that, in response to prayer, he perceived God “Bending his eare” (11.152); but it is the Son who pleads with the Father: “Now therefore bend thine eare” (11.30). In response to his prayer, Adam feels “peace” returning “to my brest” (11.153-54); but it is the Son who offers himself to the Father as a propitiation, saying, “Accept me, and in mee from these receave / The smell of peace toward Mankinde” (11.37-38). Adam says that his prayer has “incline[d]” God’s will (11.145); but the Father-Son colloquy makes it clear that God’s will is inclined by the intercession of the Son. Most importantly, Adam recognises that God has revoked the threatened sentence of death. The divine promise of the *protevangelium*, Adam says, “Assures me that the bitterness of death / Is past, and we shall live” (11.157-58). Yet the death sentence has in fact been redirected, not revoked; only by being placed on the Son is it removed from humankind. It is the Son who now stands in place of Adam and Eve: “my Death shall pay,” he says, for their sinful deeds (11.36).⁸³

⁸² The “sigh” was a common way of describing prayer in the seventeenth century. See for example Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, 2.9.12: “The prayers of the godly are called in the Scriptures ... *Sighs too deep for words*.” The expression was a favourite of George Herbert’s: see for example his poems “Sighs and Groans,” “The Storm” (line 3), “Longing” (line 5), and “The Search” (line 17); in *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1941).

⁸³ According to Broadbent, *Some Braver Subject*, 267, the portrayal of contrition in *Paradise Lost* is dramatically and theologically flawed because, while Adam and Eve “as yet know nothing of the

Thus a richly ironic interplay of verbal echoes and allusions illustrates the two sides of regeneration: the divine initiative, and the free human response. Adam is aware only of the human role in initiating conversion through freely-willed prayer and repentance; but the reader is privy to the initiative of grace which has liberated Adam and Eve and enabled them freely to turn towards the God who has already turned towards them. All that Adam says, then, is true, but all that he says is qualified and deepened by the reality of the primacy of prevenient grace. As Summers perceptively remarks: “The ironies are touching. Everything that Adam says is true, but none of it is true in the sense which he imagines.”⁸⁴ At this point in the narrative, there is more to the grace of God than is dreamt of in Adam’s theology.⁸⁵ Still, the fact that Adam is unaware of the primacy of grace in enabling and inspiring his conversion dramatically highlights the sheer human freedom with which he experiences and chooses his conversion. For this reason, it is a mistake to read the dramatic conversion scene (in which everything depends on human freedom) as an experiential contradiction of the theology of conversion in Book 3 (in which everything depends on grace).⁸⁶ Rather, the dogma and drama of conversion must be taken together, so that both sides of this divine-human event are appreciated. In short, as Neil Forsyth observes, the “paradox of

crucifixion,” true Christian contrition must be motivated by the sufferings of Christ. But such a criticism fails to appreciate both the theological centrality of the Son of God in the conversion scene, and the fact that the graciousness of God is dramatically heightened by the reader’s awareness, and Adam’s ignorance, of the Son’s role.

⁸⁴ Summers, *The Muse’s Method*, 192.

⁸⁵ In discussing a different aspect of the conversion narrative, David M. Miller, *John Milton: Poetry* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), 146, also notes that the poem “maintains an eternal perspective for the temporal drama.”

⁸⁶ Such a reading is offered by Rachel Falconer, *Orpheus Dis(re)membred: Milton and the Myth of the Poet-Hero* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 163. According to Falconer, “the narrative action of Book 10 militates against ... [Book 3’s] interpretation of grace, both dramatically and theologically.”

Grace and free will” in the poem consists in the fact that “the freedom of Adam and Eve to repent is itself the experience of Grace”,⁸⁷ and, one might add, the work of grace itself consists in the restored freedom of Adam and Eve. Enabled by prevenient grace, they are lifted to a position of genuine freedom, in which their conversion is possible but not assured, and in which (just as in the first instance everything depends upon grace) the decisive movement towards God and “away from the abyss”⁸⁸ depends on the freedom of their own wills. This relationship between divine grace and human freedom is expressed in paradoxical rhetoric by God:

Man shall not quite be lost, but sav'd who will,
Yet not of will in him, but Grace in mee
Freely vouchsaf't. (3.173-75)

As Danielson notes, in these lines God affirms both that the human will “is decisive but not by itself efficacious,” and that “grace is absolutely necessary for salvation but does not overrule the human will.”⁸⁹ The freedom by which human beings may decisively “will” to be “sav'd” is itself grounded in grace.

III. Continuing Conversion

In *Paradise Lost* the conversion of Adam and Eve is, moreover, not simply a once-for-all event that confirms them in a regenerate state of being. On the contrary, their initial

⁸⁷ Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 293-94.

⁸⁸ Balachandra Rajan, *The Lofty Rhyme: A Study of Milton's Major Poetry* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970), 77.

⁸⁹ Danielson, *Milton's Good God*, 86. See also Stephen M. Fallon, “*Paradise Lost* in Intellectual History,” in *A Companion to Milton*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 333.

experience of conversion is only the first step in a dynamic and lifelong process.⁹⁰ As Georgia Christopher notes, “faith” in *Paradise Lost* is “not a steady state, but one of fluctuating growth in which ‘subsequent grace’ repeats with variations the paradigm of ‘prevenient grace.’”⁹¹ Michael tells Adam:

thy Prayers are heard, and Death,
Then due by sentence when thou didst transgress,
Defeated of his seizure many dayes
Giv’n thee of Grace, wherein thou mayst repent,
And one bad act with many deeds well done
Mayst cover. (11.252-57)

Adam’s repentance is not a completed work. The “many dayes” of life that are granted him are days in which he must continue to “repent” of his sin, and to live out this repentance with “many deeds well done.” Reformed orthodox theologians, with their emphasis on God’s eternal decree, on the decisive event of justification, and on the inability of believers to fall away from grace, tended to view conversion as a single event which fixed forever the spiritual state and destiny of the individual.⁹² In contrast, however, the Reformation theologians had viewed conversion as a process which

⁹⁰ In recent theology, this view of conversion has been emphasised by Helmut Thielicke: see for example *The Evangelical Faith*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974-82), 1:192, where Thielicke speaks of the initial event of regeneration as the point at which “our becoming commences.”

⁹¹ Georgia B. Christopher, *Milton and the Science of the Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 182.

⁹² On the Reformed orthodox doctrine of the perseverance of the saints (*perseverantia sanctorum*), according to which it is impossible for the regenerate elect to fall from grace, see G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, trans. Robert D. Knudsen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), especially 39-80. The *De Doctrina Christiana* presents a theology of perseverance which relies formally on the Reformed orthodox position, but which introduces an Arminian emphasis on conditionality. Thus according to the treatise all those who are elect and regenerate will “PERSEVERE TO THE END,” but only “SO LONG AS THEY DO NOT PROVE WANTING IN THEMSELVES, AND SO LONG AS THEY CLING TO FAITH AND CHARITY WITH ALL THEIR MIGHT” (*CPW* 6:505).

continues throughout the Christian life. In the first of his *Ninety-five Theses* (1517), Luther had declared that “[w]hen our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent,’ he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance”;⁹³ and Calvin similarly believed that repentance is not a single event but “the goal towards which [believers] must keep running during the whole course of their lives,” so that regeneration is accomplished not “in a moment, a day, or a year,” but only by a long process.⁹⁴ In this respect, Arminian theology remained close to Reformation thought by conceiving of conversion as a dynamic process; Episcopius, for instance, regards grace as “carry[ing] on ... saving conversion gradually unto the end.”⁹⁵ In Arminianism the unstable nature of this dynamic process is highlighted most strikingly in the teaching that believers can fall away from grace: “so long as we are in this world, he that now standeth should feare least he fall.”⁹⁶ So too, in *Paradise Lost* the human beings who have experienced conversion remain always subject to the possibility of falling again. Affirming the vital importance of the influence of grace, God the Father says of regenerate humanity:

He sorrows now, repents, and prays contrite,
My motions in him: longer then they move,
His heart I know, how variable and vain
Self-left. (11.90-93)⁹⁷

⁹³ Luther, *Works*, 31:25.

⁹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.3.9.

⁹⁵ Episcopius, *The confession or declaration*, 207.

⁹⁶ Thomas Browne, *The copie of the sermon preached before the Universitie at St. Maries in Oxford* (Oxford, 1634), 51.

⁹⁷ The syntax of line 91, “longer then they move,” poses considerable interpretive difficulties. Fowler unravels the passage thus: “I know his heart will outlast these [motions] to good, and I know how variable and vain it will become if left to itself” (Fowler, 569); and, more simply, Verity: “I know man’s variableness after my influences cease to work in him” (Verity, 617). But the problem with these glosses, I suggest, is their implication that the motions to good will in fact eventually expire. That the motions will cease to “move” the human heart seems purely hypothetical, so that the lines might be glossed: “I know how variable and vain his heart would be if my motions ceased to move it, and left it

Reformed orthodoxy and Arminianism alike attributed human conversion to such divine “motions.” According to Arminius, by the “motion of the regenerating Spirit” fallen human beings are brought “to confess their sins, to mourn on account of them, to desire deliverance, and to seek out the Deliverer”;⁹⁸ and the Reformed writer Joseph Alleine speaks of the Holy Spirit implanting in the human soul “good motions,” which are “the offers, and essays, and calls, and strivings of the spirit.”⁹⁹ But according to *Paradise Lost*, the “motions” of grace are involved not merely in the initial conversion of human beings, but in a sustained process of conversion. The human will of the regenerate believer relies constantly on these “motions”—if the liberating influence of grace were to withdraw, the will would lapse back into enslavement. Even the converted will thus continues to be upheld by the grace of God; its freedom continues to be granted by grace, enabling it to turn to God anew at each instant. Thus not only the beginning but also the continuation of the regenerate life depends on the human will’s cooperation with, and response to, the liberating work of grace. Such a view of conversion as a dynamic process in reliance on grace had been stated by Arminius, who “ascribe[d] to grace THE COMMENCEMENT, THE CONTINUANCE AND THE CONSUMMATION OF ALL GOOD.”¹⁰⁰

In *Paradise Lost*’s third book, God the Father highlights the progressive nature of conversion, while laying primary emphasis on the decisive role of the human will:

to itself.” In his proposed amendment of this passage, Bentley thus gets the sense right: “My Motions in him: SHOULD THEY CEASE TO move, / His Heart I know how variable and vain” (Bentley, 351).

⁹⁸ Arminius, *Works*, 2:17.

⁹⁹ Joseph Alleine, *A sure guide to heaven, or, An earnest invitation to sinners to turn to God* (London, 1668), 92. See also Joseph Hussey, *The glory of Christ unveil’d* (London, 1706), 705.

¹⁰⁰ Arminius, *Works*, 1:664.

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,
 And to the end persisting, safe arrive. (3.194-97)

Even for those who have been converted by grace, the goal of salvation is by no means assured. Human beings do not yet possess the security of salvation; they are on the way (*in via*) to eternal life, but are not yet “safe,” and have not yet “arrive[d].” Persistence is therefore necessary—a persistent choice to follow the internal light of conscience, a persistent exercise of freedom in which the human agent turns away from sin and towards God. In short, a moment-by-moment conversion is necessary if the individual is finally to “arrive” safely at the bliss of eternal salvation.

Hence the whole life of Eve and Adam, from the initial event of their conversion onwards, is to be—as was their Edenic life—an expression of the possibilities of contingent freedom. It is to be a journey of freedom, growth and development. For this reason, *Paradise Lost* ends with a vision of a future radically open to the possibilities of human freedom, a freedom that is upheld and “guide[d]” by the gracious providence of God, and at the same time “solitarie” in its ability to choose and to actualise the future:

Som natural tears they dropd, but wip'd them soon;
 The World was all before them, where to choose
 Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:
 They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
 Through *Eden* took thir solitarie way. (12.645-49)

The self-enslaving narrowness of sin is left behind, as the first human beings turn freely to face a world of choice and possibility.

CONCLUSION

This study arose from a conviction that characterisations of *Paradise Lost*'s theology as either "orthodox" or "heretical" were simplistic, and that the poem's theology of freedom in particular was more complex and more individual in its appropriation of diverse theological concepts and traditions than has been widely recognised. I therefore set out to resituate the poem in its post-Reformation theological context, in order to determine in detail the points of continuity and discontinuity between its theology and the theologies of the various post-Reformation schools. This re-contextualising of the poem's theology draws extensively on primary theological sources, while also engaging both with the large body of Milton scholarship and with recent post-Reformation theological scholarship. Beginning with an overview of the historical development of the theology of freedom, my study has followed the idea of freedom as it unfolds throughout the narrative of *Paradise Lost*, attempting progressively to tease out the complexities of the poem's theology, and to explore the ways in which it both draws on and reformulates diverse theological concepts and traditions.

I found that, in continuity with the anti-Calvinist polemics of Arminianism, the poem opens with a critique of Reformed orthodox views of God and freedom. The grotesque parody of Calvinist predestinarianism expressed by Satan and the fallen angels in Books 1 and 2 is depicted in *Paradise Lost* as a heresy which misrepresents God by claiming that he compromises his own freedom and negates creaturely freedom. The theology of freedom progressively articulated throughout the rest of the poem constitutes a vigorous and sustained correction of this Satanic theology. God is portrayed in the poem as a free being whose principal concern is the authentic freedom of his creatures. To this end he predestines the freedom of human nature, and allows this nature, as his own image in humanity, to predestine and to actualise its own future. Far from negating the freedom of his creatures, the God of *Paradise Lost* creates room for creaturely self-determination by withdrawing his own being from that of his creatures in the act of creation. Through this divine self-withdrawal the creature comes to be characterised by a God-like autonomy, so that even the self-limited creator himself cannot trespass into the sphere of free human decision. This radical depiction of creaturely freedom, while drawing on Arminian concepts of divine self-limitation, is sharply discontinuous with the more circumscribed understandings of creaturely freedom in post-Reformation theology.

In *Paradise Lost* the freedom of creatures is characterised above all by indifferent contingency: the ability to choose in a purely self-determined way between alternative possibilities. This view of an indifferent and contingent will is, I have attempted to show, the most significant and far-reaching point of continuity between the poem's theology and the theology of Arminianism. Like Arminianism, and in contrast to Reformed orthodoxy, the poem views human freedom as consisting essentially in the power to choose between alternatives. This contingent alternativity of

choice is not voluntaristically governed by the will itself but is intellectually governed by right reason, as it is in Arminianism and Amyraldism. Such an account of human freedom becomes the crucial theological underpinning of the poem's portrayal of the fall of Adam and Eve as an event which might not and need not have taken place. The narrative of the fall in *Paradise Lost* involves, then, an elaborate enactment of the Arminian theology of contingent freedom.

But while the poem's portrayal of the fall is broadly continuous with an Arminian view of freedom, its depiction of the fallen will stands, perhaps surprisingly, in forthright continuity with the Reformed orthodox notion of total depravity. The human will which was created free is shown through the fall to have become enslaved. True freedom, which consists in a contingent liberty of indifference, has been lost—not because God has negated it, but because the free human agents have themselves freely renounced this freedom, and in so doing have become enslaved to themselves. In this connection the poem adopts the theological concept of original sin, thus affirming that all human beings have become self-enslaved through the first decisive act of human disobedience.

Balancing this view of the universal enslavement of sin is the poem's emphasis on the universal liberating operation of divine grace. By the grace of God, the poem asserts, all human beings, enslaved by the fall, are liberated from the tyranny of sin. Their wills are returned to a state of contingent indifference so that they are again able to choose freely between good and evil. While this theology of universal grace is in some respects continuous with Arminian and Amyraldian views of grace, it offers a more profoundly universalist vision in which salvation is not merely a hypothetical but a genuine possibility for every human being. Indeed, the poem's account of predestination in Book 3 strongly emphasises this point by denying the existence of any divine

decree of reprobation, and by reducing reprobation to a provisional and temporal event in which human agents freely reject the electing grace of God. This account of reprobation presents a radical departure from the formal structure of post-Reformation predestinarian theology, in which divine predestination was consistently viewed as a double decree comprising both election and reprobation. The poem's theology thus exhibits genuine originality by universalising the grace of election and relativising the notion of reprobation in a way that strikingly emphasises the freedom of human agents. Because all human beings have been elected by God for salvation, and because all are recipients of liberating prevenient grace, no one is ever beyond the possibility of redemption. Indeed, although in continuity with the major post-Reformation traditions *Paradise Lost* affirms that some human beings will ultimately perish, the general tendency of its theology is in the direction of a thoroughgoing universalism. In the poem the fact that some people will finally perish is not, as in Reformed orthodoxy, a reflection of the nature of grace itself, but rather a reflection of the remarkable power of human freedom—a freedom which can even negate the electing grace of God.

I have also argued in this study that a consistent feature of *Paradise Lost's* theology of freedom is its emphasis on process and development. The first created human beings, endowed with autonomous freedom, are placed by God in an environment which calls for the creative exercise of choice, so that the being of Adam and Eve consists in a state of becoming, in a continuing process of decision and development. Eve's and Adam's Edenic life is characterised by an abundance of alternative possibilities and by the contingent liberty of indifference which enables them freely to actualise such possibilities. This openness of choice and possibility is tragically lost through the fall, and is displaced by a self-focused narrowness and a self-chosen poverty of genuine possibilities. But in *Paradise Lost* the same freedom is restored by

the grace of conversion. Through grace, the human self is turned back towards God and the abundance of choice which characterised prelapsarian existence is restored. In the poem this conversion is not, as in Reformed orthodoxy, a once-for-all event, but, as in Reformation theology and Arminian theology, a continuing process in which human beings progressively exercise their freedoms and actualise their futures in the face of alternative possibilities.

One of the most interesting features of the theology of *Paradise Lost* which has emerged in this study is the distinctive way in which the poem appropriates orthodox theological concepts, but presses them in a direction that is fundamentally opposed to post-Reformation orthodoxy. The poem's depiction of the fallen will, for instance, employs a Reformed orthodox view of the gracious liberation of the enslaved will, but it so universalises this concept of grace that the Reformed idea of enslavement is drastically undermined, and instead all human beings are viewed as free either to accept or to reject salvation. Similarly, *Paradise Lost's* portrayal of the freedom of God's creative act is continuous with Reformed orthodoxy's high view of divine freedom; but in the poem this markedly orthodox insistence on the freedom of God is developed so consistently and so rigorously that the result is an Arian conception of the Son of God in which the Father generates and exalts the Son through sheer freedom alone, so that the very existence of the Son—and thus also the existence of redemption—is rendered radically contingent. These features of *Paradise Lost's* theology illustrate the ways in which the poem draws on existing theological concepts but modifies or even transforms them so that the idea of freedom receives the greatest possible emphasis.

The theology of *Paradise Lost* is then not simply orthodox or heretical, nor is it merely an eclectic amalgam of existing theologies. In moving beyond such readings, the present study seeks to foster an enhanced appreciation of the complex and nuanced

ways in which Milton draws on the wide range of theological traditions available to him, while ultimately charting his own individual course. The theology he articulates in the poem is, in other words, itself a creative exercise and a forthright demonstration of human freedom. It is a uniquely personal, sharply focused and rigorously developed theology which is grounded in a profound commitment to the idea of freedom, and which seeks at every significant point to give expression to this freedom. The depth and the radicalness of this commitment to freedom constitute the most striking and most original feature of the poem's theology. More than anything else, this underlying commitment gives distinctive shape to the poem's theological structure, and determines the way in which diverse theological concepts and traditions are creatively reformulated into Milton's hard-won and highly individual justification of the ways of God to men.

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The bibliography which follows consists of all works cited or consulted throughout this study. For works published before 1920, only the place of publication is given. Where no place of publication has been found, I use the abbreviation s.l. (*sine locus*). For texts printed in collected editions, the following abbreviations are used:

ANF *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols.
NPNF *Schaff, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 14 vols.
PL *Migne, Patrologia Latina*, 221 vols.

(Thus the abbreviation “in *ANF* 1” indicates that a text is printed in volume 1 of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* edition.)

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