

The Use of Contraries:
Milton's Adaptation of Dialectic in
"Paradise Lost"

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IN THE "brief" epic *Paradise Regained*, Milton educates the reader by making him an indirect participant in a dialectic between Christ and Satan, a dialectic in which Christ unmasks the "weak arguing and fallacious drift" (*PR*, III, 4)¹ of the Adversary. I wish to suggest that in the "diffuse" epic *Paradise Lost* there are a variety of dialectical exchanges. This complex process enables the silent participant — the reader — to refine his vision so that he gradually can distinguish truth from falsehood, good from evil. It is a progression that Milton terms "knowledge in the making" (*Areopagitica*, YP, II, 554).

In *Paradise Lost*, instead of two figures (like Christ and Satan in *Paradise Regained*) there are multiple voices that bring forth the basic oppositions in which the epic involves us. One set of assumptions is argued by Satan, his followers, and postlapsarian Adam and Eve before their repentance.² Another is argued by the Father, the Son, Abdiel, the other good angels, prelapsarian Adam and Eve, and the epic "voice." The method uncovers oppositions as the "force for proof" that calls forth reason. It is a process of thinking in dichotomies, of examining "contraries, which are absolutely diagonally adverse to each other" (*Artis Logicae*, CM, XI, 281, 131).³

Milton's method can be compared to that used in the Platonic dialectic.⁴ Milton's stress on systematically analyzing contraries resembles Plato's belief that dialectical thinking is aroused by "things that impinge upon the senses together with their opposites" (*Republic*, 524d).⁵ The process causes the reader to advance from the darkness of falsity (like that in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave") to the light of truth. It is a movement from ig-

norance to awareness, from our "senses dark" when we are attracted to Satanic views to our appreciation of right reason. Rudolf Hirzel describes the Platonic dialectic as a series of circles, each of which touches upon the other, while being complete in itself. Such levels of contraries are like acts in a drama that draw the reader in as an active participant.⁶

In order better to understand the reader's response to the dialectical process in *Paradise Lost*, this essay proposes to examine the Abdiel-Satan debate (at the close of Book V and the beginning of Book VI), where Abdiel exposes the contraries in Satan's argument, and the contrasting debates in Heaven and Hell in which Milton treats separately the antithetical elements of the Abdiel-Satan dialogue.

In the Platonic dialogues, Socrates uses the method of argument by question and answer in order to reveal falsehood and progress toward the truth. For him the dialectical process consists of conversation between questioner and respondent (not necessarily a Sophist), who is expected to answer as briefly as possible.⁷ Socrates questions people who claim to have knowledge of moral terms, like Meno, whom he asks to define virtue. Socrates, as is his custom, points out contraries in the answer and makes suggestions that lead to new definitions and new questions.

For those who admire the dialectical process (like Alcibiades in the *Symposium*) Socrates is a wonderful piper — like the satyr Marsyas. Such people find that Socratic questioning troubles their soul. They are forced to be concerned about moral issues. They feel embarrassed in his presence and yet fascinated by the beauty of the experience ("I think," says Alcibiades, "of those former admissions, and am ashamed" [*Symposium*, 216c]). On the other hand, Sophists, who speak for fees and are primarily concerned with winning an argument, react differently to Socrates' constant prodding. In the Platonic dialogue the Sophist offers a definition that Socrates examines and questions. The definition is shown to be faulty; the Sophist attempts a second that is also unsuccessful; then a third or fourth, as Socrates continues to expose each as ridiculous. "The antagonist," explains James Geddes, "if modest, withdraws as softly as he can: but, if

insolent and proud of his fame for eloquence, he turns in a fury . . . and pours forth all the ill-natured language he is master of."⁸

Milton captures the nature of the Sophist's upset and fury in Satan as he debates with the logical Abdiel: the fiend rails at Abdiel — "fly, ere evil intercept thy flight" (V, 871); he views Abdiel "with scornful eye askance" (VI, 149); and finally threatens combat — "receive / Thy merited reward, the first assay / Of this right hand provok'd, since first that tongue / Inspir'd with contradiction durst oppose" (VI, 152-55). Milton has made Satan a caricature of Sophists like Protagoras, who artfully tries to rectify the multiple contradictions in his statements (*Protagoras*, 333e-34c), and Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, whose quibbles and distortions are easily disclosed as a useless game of tripping people: "Although one were to learn many or even all of such tricks, one would be not a whit the wiser as to the true state of the matters in hand" (*Euthydemus*, 278b).

The Abdiel-Satan debate is a dramatic unit of adverse views. Satan expatiates on the meaning of justice and its loss at the moment of the exaltation of the Son. He moves from the point that the angels are "Equally free" to the false implication that they are all equal in merit, though "Orders and Degrees" exist (V, 792). He asserts: "and if not equal all, yet free, / Equally free" (V, 791-92). This brings him to the conclusion, "Who can in reason then or right assume / Monarchy over such as live by right / His equals, if in power and splendor less, / In freedom equal?" (V, 794-97). The conclusion echoes his earlier false assertion that he "Whom reason hath equall'd, force hath made supreme / Above his equals" (I, 248-49). Satan distorts the facts to imply that the angels and the Son are equals. He works with semblances. He uses rhetorical tricks and loose analogies to prove that things resemble each other, when in fact they are contraries.

Abdiel calmly responds to the Arch-fiend by questioning the meaning of injustice: "unjust thou say'st / Flatly unjust, to bind with Laws the free, / And equal over equals to let Reign" (V, 818-20). He inquires whether Satan counts himself "Equal to him begotten Son, by whom / As by his Word the mighty Father made / All things, ev'n thee" (V, 835-37). Satan dodges the

direct question and responds by claiming that he and the angels are self-begot. He offers as proof the fact that he did not see his creation: "who saw / When this creation was? remember'st thou / Thy making" (V, 856-57). That Satan is self-begot and that he did not see this happening are mutually exclusive. They are "opposites" that "cannot be attributed to the same thing" (*Artis Logicae*, CM, XI, 111).⁹

Early in the debate Satan asks whether the Son "can introduce / Law and Edict on us, who without law / Err not" (V, 797-99). Satan's assertion here of the absence of law in Heaven is contrary to his later appeal (when speaking to the fallen angels in Hell) to the "fixt Laws of Heav'n / [that] Did first create your Leader" (II, 18-19). The Fiend's statements here also are contradictory to a basic axiom of Heaven: freedom prevails through order, through obedience to law. In *The Reason of Church Government* Milton states: "God himselfe hath writ his imperiall decrees through the great provinces of heav'n." He points out that "discipline is . . . the very visible shape and image of vertue" (YP, I, 751-52). God's eternal laws bind God himself.¹⁰ Abdiel exposes Satan's faulty argument: "Shalt thou give Law to God" (V, 822).

The meaning of servitude and freedom in the dialogue becomes increasingly important. Satan defines the encounter between the faithful and his own followers as the combat of "Servility with freedom" (VI, 169). Abdiel explains: "Unjustly thou depriv'st it with the name / Of *Servitude* to serve whom God ordains" (VI, 174-75). He contrasts Satan's definition with the true nature of servitude. "This is servitude, / To serve th' unwise, or him who hath rebell'd / Against his worthier, as thine now serve thee, / Thyself not free, but to thyself enthrall'd" (VI, 178-81). Abdiel, by examining the contrast between service to God and servility, illuminates the nature of servitude, the internal Hell to which Satan is subject.

In the Abdiel-Satan debate, Satan exhibits pretenses, deception, and lying, while Abdiel uses reason to expose contradiction in Satan's argument. As the Miltonic dialogue progresses, the reader becomes a silent participant in this communal mode of inquiry. Milton, in *Artis Logicae*, explains that logic has two

parts, "the invention of reasons or arguments and the disposition of them" (CM, XI, 21). In the disposition of ideas, when axioms or syllogisms are formed, truth or falsity is discovered (CM, XI, 309). "Whenever one opposite is affirmed the other is thereby denied" (CM, XI, 113). Similarly, "an axiom is true when it speaks as the thing is; false when it does the opposite" (CM, XI, 309). This is the logical method that Abdiel uses in debate with Satan.

In the debates in Hell and Heaven, Milton treats separately the opposing elements of the Abdiel-Satan dialogue: the juggling and distortion in Satan's council and the art of reasoning well in God's. Satan's discussion with his followers takes place in Hell, where the flames offer "No light, but rather darkness visible" (I, 63), an image that gives force to the lack of illumination, physical and mental, for Satan and his followers. Satan's interchange with the fallen angels moves along levels of ignorance rather than levels of knowledge. No one is concerned with or able to progress toward the truth. There is no Abdiel to expose the sophistry.

Satan's opening address to the Host in the council in Hell shows the method that is reflected throughout the devils' interchange. The fiends engage in rhetorical tricks to win arguments. They are like lawyers who "persuade men by the art which they possess, not teaching them, but making them have whatever opinion they like" (*Theaetetus*, 201a). Satan flatters the Host: "Powers and Dominions, *Deities* of Heav'n" (II, 11; italics added). His superlatives surpass those God employs in his address to the unfallen angels: "Thrones, Dominations, Princdoms, Virtues, Powers" (V, 601). God, however, is merely being accurate in his description of the magnificent angels in Heaven. In contrast, Satan uses flattery to spur on the fallen angels in Hell. Disregarding differences between fallen and unfallen states, Satan builds upon semblances. He not only appeals to the angels' sense of previous glory but also orients them toward a belief that their revolt has made them more glorious (a device he later uses with Eve). Satan follows flattery with specious argument: "For since no deep within her gulf can hold / Immortal vigor, though opprest and fall'n, / I give not Heav'n for lost" (II,

12-14). That the angels are immortal is true, but that "no deep" can hold them is as false as the fiend's belief that Heaven is not lost for the fallen or that the rebellion in Heaven was a "dubious Battle" that "shook" God's throne (I, 104-105). The narrator cautions the reader that the Arch-fiend never "Had ris'n or heav'd his head, but that the will / And high permission of all-ruling Heaven" (I, 211-13). But there is no corrective voice in Hell to expose such contraries to the Sophists.

Satan maintains: "I give not Heav'n for lost. From this descent / Celestial Virtues rising, will appear / More glorious and more dread than from no fall" (II, 14-16). The first assertion — "I give not Heav'n for lost" — is contradicted by the Adversary's dark vision that can never afford him a glimpse of Heaven's light or truth, but only makes his own darkness visible. It also is contradicted by the Hell that burns within Satan wherever he goes, preventing him from experiencing joy, even in Paradise. In addition, as supreme irony, the fiend's statement on the *felix culpa* — "From this descent / Celestial Virtues rising . . ." — applies not to himself or his Host but to his enemies, Adam and Eve. They, indeed, through God's grace, will rise "More glorious . . . than from no fall."¹¹

The effect of Satan's oratorical skill is that listeners do not examine the argument for logic. Once Satan has his audience following him, he tends to introduce one contrariety after another but is never questioned. He calls Heaven "The happier state" than Hell, but implies that strife and envy exist in Heaven, not in Hell: "where there is then no good / For which to strive, no strife can grow up there / From Faction" (II, 30-32). This contradiction — based on the false premise that envy and strife exist in Heaven — predisposes the devils to favour Hell over Heaven and to think of Hell, not Heaven, as the "happier state." Satan calls himself the "Leader" (II, 19) and then follows with the assertion: "none sure will claim in Hell / Precedence" (II, 32-33). The falsity in the fiend's argument is dramatized (for the reader) at the close of the debate when the Adversary despotically silences all rivals to his leadership, lest they win "cheap the high repute" (II, 472) that he desires. Satan shows sophistical deception as he convinces the Host that freedom can be achieved

by relying on him. Following the fiend's address, the angels "Towards him . . . bend / With awful reverence prone; and as a God / Extol him" (II, 477-79).

Underlying all Satan's statements in the interchange in Book II is the proclamation that there is no justice or freedom in Heaven, that God "holds the Tyranny of Heav'n" (I, 124) and obtains glory by having those beneath him "bow and sue for grace / With suppliant knee" (I, 111-12). In the interchange in Hell the only question Satan poses is the method of revenge — "Whether of open War or covert guile" (II, 41).¹² His definitions of the nature of justice, freedom, and goodness remain unchallenged. The Host readily accept all Satan's explanations. They reiterate his views and base their own arguments upon them. They see no justice in their punishment for disobedience because they view obedience to God as "Subjection" (II, 239). Worship paid to such a leader is "vassalage" (II, 252). The Lord is "Our envied Sovran" (II, 244), who tyrannically "Reigns / By our delay" (II, 59-60), asserts Moloch, who wants to proclaim open war. Belial, "with words cloth'd in reason's garb" (II, 226), argues for watchful waiting so as not to unleash the wrath of God, the fury of the tyrant's "afflicting Thunder" (II, 166). And Mammon, "the least erected Spirit that fell" (I, 679), proclaims Hell superior to Heaven that is under God's tyranny. He speaks of "preferring / Hard liberty before the easy yoke / Of servile Pomp" (II, 255-57). Each of the devils shows sophistry in making "the worse appear / The better reason" (II, 113-14).

In the council in Hell the fiend is similar to the Sophist Thrasymachus, in the *Republic*, who argues for injustice in the name of justice.¹³ Socrates argues against injustice and points out that "the tyrannized soul," like the tyrannized city, teems "with boundless servility and illiberality, the best and most reasonable parts of it being enslaved, while a small part, the worst and the most frenzied, plays the despot" (*Republic*, 577d). We see such a city in Hell and such a tyrannized soul in Satan and each of his followers. The devils work out sophisticated arguments by dodging crucial issues and jumping quickly from one subject to the next. They all exhibit a fixed line of vision that equates service

to God with servility and equates freedom with opposition to God. Satan's exclamation (in soliloquy) "Evil be thou my Good" (IV, 110) epitomizes the orientation of the fallen who fail to appreciate contradictions in reasoning and are "in wand'ring mazes lost" (II, 561).

Milton begins *Paradise Lost* in Hell, where we hear the rhetoric of Satan and the Host. It is a world of semblances and shadows, a "darkness visible." This calls to mind Plato's cave, one of the great metaphors for a confused state of being, where men, whose legs and necks are fettered from birth, look at shadows cast from the fire on the wall of the subterranean cavern. In Plato's Allegory (*Republic*, 514a-17a), a human being is dragged periodically from the ignorant condition of the masses in order to look upon the sun itself and contemplate its nature. When he returns and tries to explain the truth to his fellow men, who are accustomed to the shadows or copies of reality, he is misunderstood and mocked. Milton parodies this upward movement toward knowledge by having Satan physically ascend from Hell to the light of the Sun. He, however, unlike Plato's inhabitant of the cave, shows a fixity of orientation. He never is able to see the true nature of the sun: "I hate thy beams" (IV, 37). His "mind is its own place," "for within him Hell / He brings, and round about him" (I, 254; IV, 20-21). When the fiend does return to Hell — after his travels to the Gate of Heaven and to Paradise — he obviously has not benefited from the light. His thinking has remained sophistical throughout. It is, therefore, appropriate that the Adversary's faulty reasoning, filled with contraries, leads him back where he began: prone in Hell. It also is appropriate that the sophistical thinker be metamorphosed into a "monstrous Serpent" (X, 514), one of the lowest of God's creatures. He becomes a concrete manifestation of the Platonic notion that virtue is mirrored in one's outer appearance.

The debate in Heaven, in Book III, is the antithesis of the interchange in Hell. There are two logical speakers, in contrast to the debate in Hell where all are sophistical. The dialogue in Heaven affords us an enlarged presentation of the art of reasoning well which Abdiel displays in Books V and VI. We see an upward movement in the dialogue in Heaven, where there is no

distortion, no false thinking. Possible contraries are examined calmly by the Father and the Son as they progress toward a definition of justice. Their questioning shows acute perceptivity, a pattern of unravelling contraries, a constant forward course toward truth.

In the interchange in Heaven Milton uniquely adapts the dialogical form to his own purposes, as he essentially casts both questioner and respondent in the Socratic role, each progressing toward the elimination of contraries, in an upward movement toward awareness. At the onset the Father strictly defines justice in Old Testament terms of retribution, as he foretells the Fall of man: "For Man will . . . / . . . easily transgress the sole Command, / Sole pledge of his obedience: So will fall / Hee and his faithless Progeny: whose fault? / Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of mee / All he could have" (III, 93-98). Milton's God lays stress on the fact that Adam and Eve are "Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (III, 99). "They *themselves* decreed / Thir own revolt, not I" (III, 116-17; italics added). The definition of justice in these lines has been criticized for being most severe. Marjorie Nicolson observes: "God's first speeches are shocking to our sensibilities. He suddenly emerges to come down to our own level, speaking . . . [like] a somewhat querulous schoolmaster." For Douglas Bush, "the trouble lies in the somewhat legal character of Christian theology itself and in the inevitable effects of dramatization."¹⁴

The dialogue in Heaven focuses on the meaning of justice, as the Son questions the Father's statements. The seeds of the Son's questioning of the Father's justice are anticipated — but not developed — in the Father's speech, which concludes with the statement: "Man therefore shall find grace, / . . . in Mercy and Justice both, / Through Heav'n and Earth, so shall my glory excel, / But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine" (III, 131-34). The Son picks up on the promise of grace. In fact, at first He seems not to be debating with the Father but rather reiterating His promise. However, following His praise of grace for mankind, the Son clarifies the meaning of justice by questioning the Old Testament definition, which the Father stressed in the earlier part of the speech. He questions the justice of destroying

Adam and Eve because they disobeyed; he inquires whether retribution would create the greatest goodness, whether the Old Testament conception of justice is indeed valid.

Michael Lieb has shown¹⁵ that the Son's questioning of the Father's initial definition of justice resembles Moses' challenge of God's justice in Exodus 32 when the Israelites broke God's commandments and practiced idolatry at the very time that Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the Laws: "And the Lord said unto Moses . . . thy people . . . have corrupted *themselves*. . . Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them" (Exodus, 32: 7-10).¹⁶ Moses asks: "Lord why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people . . . Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains . . . Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people." We are told that God indeed "repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people" (Exodus, 32: 11-14).

S. R. Driver explains that the Hebrew idiom 'repent' often attributes "to God the feelings or emotions of a man. God is thus said to 'repent' . . . when, in consequence of a change in the character and conduct of men, He is obliged to make a corresponding change in the purpose towards them which He had previously announced."¹⁷ In dialogue with Moses, God is said to repent, that is to turn from destroying the Israelites. In contrast, Milton's God always has grace in mind (III, 131-34). This is emphasized by the fact that, at the completion of the Son's argument to save mankind, the Father observes: "All hast thou spok'n as my thoughts are, all / As my Eternal purpose hath decreed" (III, 171-72). Milton uses a dialogue form similar to that which exists in Exodus, in order to make manifest for a fallen audience the process by which God (presumably instantaneously) arrived at His conception of justice. Milton comes as close to the dialogue as theological decorum will permit in the dramatic interchange. He adapts the dialogue form to portray the "play-acting [or drama] of the persons of the godhead," (*De Doctrina Christiana*, YP, VI, 213)¹⁸ so that we can glimpse the Deity in terms of human purposes.

The Son sets up a series of oppositions that equate destruction with evil and creation with God's goodness, as he urges the Father to save man.

For *should Man finally be lost*, should Man
 Thy creature late so lov'd, thy youngest Son
 Fall circumvented thus by fraud, though join'd
 With his own folly? *that be from thee far*,
 That far be from thee, Father, who art Judge
 Of all things made, and *judgest only right*.
 Or shall the *Adversary thus obtain*
His end, and frustrate thine, shall he fulfill
 His malice, and *thy goodness bring to naught*,
 Or proud return though to his heavier doom,
 Yet with revenge accomplish't and *to Hell*
Draw after him the whole Race of *mankind*,
 By him corrupted? or *wilt thou thyself*
Abolish thy Creation, and unmake,
 For him, what *for thy glory thou hast made*?
 So should thy goodness and thy greatness both
 Be question'd and blasphem'd without defense.
 (III, 150-66; italics added)

The Son's statement, "That far be from thee, Father," indicates that the following are logically contrary to God's goodness: the rejection of Adam (III, 150-55); fulfillment of Satan's malice (III, 156-58); the drawing of the race of mankind to Hell (III, 159-62); abolishing mankind, God's creation (III, 162-64). Just as Moses argued that God not slay the Israelites, so the Son argues that the Father not destroy Adam and Eve. His words, "So should thy goodness and thy greatness both / Be question'd and blasphem'd without defense" (III, 165-66), echoes Moses' plea: "Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them" (Exodus, 32:12). This constant dialogical questioning is central to Milton's thinking. It is the poet's method of figuring forth the abstract, of giving substance to "what surmounts the reach / Of human sense" (V, 571-72).

The conclusion of the first level in this dialogue stresses tempering justice with mercy, and thus broadens the Old Testament definition. The ramifications, however, are not fully worked out. The Father asserts: "Die hee or Justice must; unless for him /

Some other able, and as willing, pay / The rigid satisfaction,
 death for death" (III, 210-12). He asks: "Say Heav'nly Pow-
 ers, where shall we find such love." Then He inquires: "Dwells
 in all Heaven charity so dear?" (III, 213-16). The Son responds
 by reiterating the Father's assertion that man shall have grace,
 explaining the significance of grace, that "Comes unprevented,
 unimplor'd, unsought." "And shall grace not find means," He
 asks; then He immediately proclaims His love for man: "Behold
 mee then, mee for him, life for life / I offer, on mee let thine
 anger fall; / Account mee man" (III, 228-38). His faith in the
 Father's goodness next causes the Son to conclude: "yet that
 debt paid, / Thou wilt not leave me in the loathsome grave"
 (III, 246-47). The Son's affirmation embodies the New Testa-
 ment focus on mercy as an integral part of justice. The reader
 appreciates that Christ's Incarnation and Crucifixion fully carry
 out the meaning of justice. The angelic choral repeats the point:
 "So Man, as is most *just*, / Shall satisfy for Man, be judg'd and
 die, / And dying rise, and rising with him raise / His Brethren"
 (III, 294-97; italics added).

Throughout *Paradise Lost* there is an emphasis on the art of reasoning well. The Father, the Son, Abdiel, the other good angels, and the epic "voice" continually uncover the absurdity of contraries in speeches by Satan, the other fallen angels, and post-lapsarian Adam and Eve. By depicting the Father and the Son as exemplars of right reason in Heaven and the devils as sophisticated thinkers in Hell, Milton intensifies the need to choose between good and evil, clarity and falsehood — dichotomies that are central to the dialectical process and are at the heart of the justification of the ways of God to men in *Paradise Lost*.

Critics have viewed *Paradise Lost* as an epic, a pastoral, a Biblical narrative, an Ovidian metamorphosis, a tragedy, a Divine comedy, an allegory, and most recent criticism has stressed its prophetic structure.¹⁹ The prophetic mode is, of course, different from the dialectical process. A strategy of allusiveness, a stress on inspiration, on unlocking visionary meanings, and on "teaching men to see not *with* but *through* the eye"²⁰ differs from the analytic process that advances by examining dichotomies, a process that uncovers opposites, instead of dealing in

"mysterious terms" and proleptic forms.²¹ However, it seems to me that in *Paradise Lost* these two processes work harmoniously. In *Artis Logicae* Milton speaks of "artificial" and "inartificial" arguments: the artificial "argues of itself" (CM, XI, 27), contains proof within itself, has the power of instructing man through reason. The inartificial, "Divine testimony," Milton explains is mysterious; it "affirms or denies that a thing is so and brings about that I believe; it does not prove, it does not teach, it does not cause me to know or understand why things are so, unless it also brings forward reasons" (CM, XI, 283). On a logical level, Milton exposes contraries as "force for proof" (CM, XI, 281), while on a prophetic level he invites "us to look forward to the Final Place of Rest."²² Milton was concerned with Adam and Eve's need "to choose / Thir place of rest" at the same time that he was confident that they were to do so with "Providence thir guide" (XII, 646-47). The need to "choose" emphasizes Milton's concern for the "true warfaring Christian" in a postlapsarian world, where we know "good by evill," where "that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary" (*Areopagitica*, YP, 514-15). The reference to God and His Providence shows Milton's faith in Divine prediction. Milton was preoccupied with "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (Revelation, XXII: 13), but he also was concerned with the present: with man's responsibility to stand as a rational and just human being in a postlapsarian world.²³

NOTES

- 1 *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957). Parenthetical references to Milton's poetry are to this edition. See Elaine B. Safer, "The Socratic Dialogue and 'Knowledge in the Making' in *Paradise Regained*," *Milton Studies*, 6 (1975), 215-26. Milton uses the terms "brief" and "diffuse" epic when speculating about his literary plans in *Reason of Church Government, Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe et al. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1953), I, 813, hereafter cited as YP.
- 2 After repentance, Eve no longer voices Satanic assumptions. The Father clears "thir senses dark" (III, 188). However, postlapsarian Adam and Eve still lack true right reason. "Since thy original lapse, true Liberty / Is lost, which always with right Reason dwells / Twinn'd" (XII, 83-85) explains Michael, who acts as a Socratic teacher for Adam, constantly helping him to correct and improve his understanding.

- ³ Parenthetical references to *Artis Logicae* are to trans. Allan Gilbert, *The Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank Allan Patterson et al. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1935), XI, cited as CM.
- ⁴ It is not unusual to connect Milton and Plato. Stanley E. Fish, *Surprised by Sin* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), p. 49, observes of *Paradise Lost*: "On one level at least the poem has the form of a Platonic dialogue, with the epic voice taking the role of Socrates, and the reader in the position of a Phaedrus or a Cratylus, continually forced to acknowledge his errors, and in this way moving toward a confirmation in the Truth"; see also Leon Howard, "'The Invention' of Milton's 'Great Argument': A Study of the Logic of 'God's Ways to Men,'" *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 9 (1946), 149-73; Irene Samuel, *Plato and Milton* (1947; rpt. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1965); Michael Lieb, *The Dialectics of Creation: Patterns of Birth and Regeneration in Paradise Lost* (Mass.: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1970). J. B. Broadbent, in *Some Graver Subject* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), p. 150, explains that the fiends "use rhetoric persuasively to put their own points of view, without regard for truth, as condemned in the *Gorgias*."
- ⁵ Parenthetical references to *Plato* are to Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heineman, 1914-39). Milton's art of thinking in dichotomies reaches back to the poet's early experimentation in "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," derived from the academic debate, the First Proclusion, "Whether Day or Night is the More Excellent." Such examination is a literary reflection of the disciplined training in logic and rhetoric that Milton and other Renaissance writers received at grammar schools like St. Paul's. It is a dialectical mode of inquiry that extends back to More's *Utopia*, Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*, and also to the medieval debate.
- ⁶ Rudolf Hirzel, in *Der Dialog: Ein literarhistorischer Versuch* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1895), I, 229-30, observes: "Sie bilden in ihrem Zusammenhang nicht eine gerade Linie; eher könnte man sie einer Reihe von Kreisen vergleichen, die einander zwar berühren, von denen aber doch jeder in sich abgeschlossen ist. Auch in dieser Beziehung verhalten sie sich wie die Akte eines Dramas."
- ⁷ See Paul Friedländer, *Plato* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958), I, 154-70; W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1962-78), IV, 108-09. Socrates did not write for posterity. I am referring to his depiction in the Platonic dialogues.
- ⁸ James Geddes, *An Essay on the Composition and Manner of Writing of the Antients* (1748; rpt. New York: Garland, 1970), p. 100.
- ⁹ C. S. Lewis, in *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1942), p. 95, states: "The property of a self-existent being is that it can understand its own existence; it is *causa sui*. The quality of a created being is that it just finds itself existing, it knows not how nor why."
- ¹⁰ Milton, in *De Doctrina*, explains that God, though omnipotent, does not exert power "in those kinds of things which . . . imply a contradiction: II Tim. ii. 13: *he cannot deny himself*; Tit. i. 2: *God, who does not lie*; Heb. vi. 18: *in which it was impossible for God to lie*" (YP, VI, 146).
- ¹¹ See Isabel Gamble MacCaffrey, *Paradise Lost as "Myth"* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), p. 65.
- ¹² Even the devils' discussion on method follows a plan "first devis'd / By Satan" (II, 379-80). Irene Samuel emphasizes in "The Dialogue in

- Heaven: A Reconsideration of *Paradise Lost*, III, 1-417," *Milton: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Arthur Barker (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p. 237, "In Hell the stage was in every way set."
- ¹³ For Thrasymachus, Justice is the will of the stronger (*Republic*, 338c).
- ¹⁴ Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Milton* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1963), p. 226; Douglas Bush, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century 1600-1660* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1952), p. 381.
- ¹⁵ Michael Lieb, "The Dialogue in Heaven Reconsidered," *Renaissance Papers* (1974), 39-50.
- ¹⁶ Biblical citations are to the King James Version.
- ¹⁷ *The Cambridge Bible: The Book of Exodus*, ed. S. R. Driver (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1918), p. 352.
- ¹⁸ Charles R. Sumner translates the Latin "drama" as "drama," in *Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank Allan Patterson et al. (CM).
- ¹⁹ Edward W. Tayler, in *Milton's Poetry* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1979) elaborates on the "proleptic" or "anticipatory" form of the epic that "resembling God's way with history, shadows its closure in its opening" (p. 191) and moves from "chronos, or Time . . . [to] kairos, which is Time comprehended under the aspect of Eternity" (p. 17). He expertly points to typological allusions of promise and fulfillment: a movement from Eden to "a paradise within," from Man to "greater Man," from Biblical history to Apocalypse. Michael Fixler, in "The Apocalypse within *Paradise Lost*," *New Essays on Paradise Lost*, ed. Thomas Kranidas (Berkeley, California: Univ. of California Press, 1969), pp. 150-51, suggests that Milton created *Paradise Lost* as an elaborate transformation of the Revelation of St. John. The seven visions of the Apocalypse give transcendent meaning to what Fixler terms seven visions in *Paradise Lost*. Joseph Anthony Wittreich, in *Visionary Poetics* (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1979), p. 36, examines *Paradise Lost* in terms of a visionary paradigm based on the Book of Revelation, a prophetic genre that possesses "structural principles founded upon certain expectations" that stretch backward to pre-existent time and forward to the everlasting future.
- ²⁰ Wittreich, p. 26.
- ²¹ According to Tayler, "the poet who seeks to render accurately his sense of double vision and duration in a world where the 'knowledge of good and evil' resembles 'two twins cleaving together' must deal in 'mysterious terms'" (pp. 102-03; italics added), proleptic forms that indicate God's guiding hand.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- ²³ In preparing this essay I was aided by a University of Delaware Faculty Research Grant.