JOHN MILTON AND THE CONSENT THEORY TRADITION

by

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(Under the Direction of Charles Doyle)

ABSTRACT

Resting on the notions of the individual, will, and choice, consent theory concerns itself with the legitimacy of government and authority as derived from the consent of the citizens. In order to consent to a government, the citizens must possess both choice and a full understanding of the terms to which they are consenting. Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Rawls all participate in the consent theory tradition. Analyzing both John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and prose works in light of their theories and the consent theory tradition reveals that knowledge serves as the basis for consent, for it produces the necessary choice and full understanding that must be present. John Milton’s works not only are relevant but also contribute to the consent theory tradition.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER

1  AN ADDITION TO HIS MANY TITLES ................................................................. 1
2  THEIR FALL INTO FREEDOM ............................................................................ 8
3  LACK OF KNOWLEDGE – LACK OF FORCE ..................................................... 21
4  MILTON’S PROSE, *PARADISE LOST*, AND CONSENT ..................................... 38
5  HIS CONTRIBUTION TO CONSENT THEORY .................................................... 49

BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................................................................................ 55
CHAPTER 1
AN ADDITION TO HIS MANY TITLES

What is freedom but choice?

- John Milton

Renowned as an English revolutionary, poet, and proponent of Protestantism, Milton and his works are often read outside the context of the revolution in political theory that took place at the same time. As Milton writes revolutionary propaganda both during and in response to the English Revolution, Thomas Hobbes writes *Leviathan* in its midst, marking the birth of the classical consent theory tradition. Milton should be identified not only as an English revolutionary, poet, and proponent of Protestantism, but also as a political philosopher, for his works not only belong to the classical consent tradition but also anticipate the work of a present-day consent theorist, John Rawls.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the great age of consent theory. Consent theory concerns itself with the legitimacy of government and authority as derived from the consent of the citizens. The theory rests on the notions of the individual, will, and choice that produce this consent – ideas rooted in Christian practical doctrine, which not only emphasizes the individual and the will but also defines consent in these terms. Christian practical doctrines were doctrines of “will and choice” (Riley 8). St. Augustine defines consent in terms of the will in *De Spiritu et Littera*: “consent is necessarily an act of will” (Gilbert 33).¹ In his

Quodlibeta, William Ockham writes, “no act is virtuous or violent unless it is voluntary and in the power of the will” (145). In Tracatus de Praedestinatione, Ockham advocates Christian liberty as a constraint on politics: “no one should be set a universitas of mortal men unless by their election and consent…what touches all ought to be discussed and approved by all” (23). Following from Ockham, Nicholas Cusanus justifies the necessity of consent with man’s freedom by nature (Riley 6). In Christian practical doctrine, the individual and the will emerge as ideas in the realms of both morality and religion.

However, consent theory moves the individual and the will from the moral and religious concerns addressed by the Christian practical doctrine to politics, for it “aims always at giving practical effectiveness to a common will regarding the fundamentals of human co-existence shared by the contractors” (Forsyth 39). Hobbes cites the will as “the essence of all covenants,” while later Rousseau observes, “since every individual is born free and his own master, no one is able, on any pretext whatsoever, to subject him without his consent” (Lev 309, TSC 117). The will effected by an individual and his consent serves as the foundation of political obligation to a government. In order to establish the legitimacy of a certain form of government, these consent theorists argue that men would consent to it. In pursuit of this aim, consent theorists construct a hypothetical State of Nature infused with inconveniences due to the absence of authority, providing the incentive for and creating the conditions under which man would voluntarily contract to create an authority (Boucher 13). The consent theorist then outlines man’s movement from this State of Nature into governed society created by the social contract. In his essay “Hobbes’ Contractarianism: A Comparative Analysis,” Forsyth outlines the common features of these theories: the social contract is an agreement between all of the individuals who compose it,

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2 Cited in Riley, Will and Political Legitimacy, 6.
3 Cited in Riley, Will and Political Legitimacy, 9.
establishing rule; natural endowments do not enable any individual to rule over any other; a contract is the only mechanism with the ability to bind those who are naturally free; and the contract is a simultaneous agreement that takes priority over all other agreements within society (37-39).

Of the three classical consent theorists, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Hobbes and Rousseau represent the two extremes. On the most fundamental level, they differ in their treatment of the will. Riley cites the will as the most problematic feature of consent theory; consent theory rests on the will, but will can be defined as either a moral faculty based on reason or a psychological faculty based on causes (10). While Hobbes defines the will in purely psychological terms, Rousseau “vacillates between the moral and psychological sense of willing” (Riley 98). Moreover, each seeks to legitimize a different form of government; therefore, then begin with a completely different construction of the State of Nature. Influenced by the economic and social devastation brought about by the Thirty Years War and The English Civil War, Hobbes seeks a remedy for chaos and argues for absolutism (Boucher 15). He constructs his State of Nature out of the war of all against all in which men’s hostile living conditions prompt them to contract into a state of absolute sovereignty to establish order. Rousseau, however, does not fault society for chaos but rather for man’s moral corruption. In Rousseau’s construction of the State of Nature, man is solitary, happy, and virtuous. Man moves into society only once he identifies needs that must be satisfied by other men. Rousseau posits their corruption as a result of their eventual dependence on one another. To alleviate this dependence and consequent corruption, he argues man consents to the general will, for it allows him to obey only self-prescribed laws by incorporating himself into the body, which both wills
and constructs the laws. Hobbes subordinates man’s will to the state, while Rousseau incorporates man’s will into the state.

As classical consent theory evolved from Christian practical doctrine, Milton’s works find their relevancy to the classical consent theory tradition in that they address both religion and politics, bridging the two traditions. After having been disappointed by the defeat of the English Revolution, Milton writes his epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, depicting the fall of man. It is important to note the manner with which Milton views Biblical texts to understand why the Revolution propels him to re-write the Fall. In *Milton and the English Revolution*, Christopher Hill notes: “Milton…accepted the Bible as the Word of God, and literal truth of its narrative; but he also believed that it contained fundamental truths about humanity” (341). More specifically, as it contains fundamental truths about humanity, the story of the fall “has something to say to God’s servants who had been defeated in the English Revolution” (Hill 344). Milton identifies a “moral inadequacy” in the revolutionaries as the cause for their failure and writes *Paradise Lost*, in response to this failure, because “the moral defects shown by Adam and Eve…illuminated the failure of the English people in the sixteen-fifties” (Hill 342). However, the Fall is a “Fortunate Fall,” for Adam and Eve’s disobedience leads the Son of God to volunteer himself as a sacrifice to atone for their sins, enabling Adam and Eve to enter into God’s grace with their acceptance of his will. Aside from moral inadequacy, Milton also recognized that the Revolution’s supporters had not fully internalized their cause, precipitating the Revolution’s failure. In light of the “Fortunate Fall,” “the conclusion is not despair: it is that the foundations must be dug deeper” (Hill 350). With the Restoration underway, the defeated revolutionaries were in a state of despair. In pursuing the Revolution, they believed they were God’s chosen people. However following from its failure, they felt as if “God had spat in their face” (Hill 348). Milton’s epic
not only addresses the moral defects leading to the failure of the Revolution but also the consequent despair – “To turn God’s Englishmen to God again, God’s ways must be justified to them” (Hill 348, 349). *Paradise Lost* bridges the two traditions, for not only does Milton select a religious medium as an avenue for political commentary, but he also justifies God’s ways to men in a manner similar to the way in which consent theorists justify a form of government.

Milton emphasizes Adam and Eve’s will much as Christian doctrine and consent theory do, for their will serves as their consent to God’s will. As Hobbes and Rousseau each work from the State of Nature to man’s consent as the basis for a legitimate sovereign, Milton works from the Garden of Eden, which possesses the qualities of a State of Nature, to Adam and Eve’s willing consent as justification of the ways of God to men. Analyzing the poem in light of the works of Hobbes and Rousseau draws attention to another factor inherent in the nature of consent. Both analyses lead to the same conclusion – knowledge serves as the basis for consent. It is only after Adam and Eve acquire the knowledge of good and evil that they willingly accept God’s will. In order to exercise their will in their acceptance of God’s, they must have real choice, in the postlapsarian human sense. Knowledge yields this choice. Acceptance of another’s will in the absence of fully understood alternatives is not consent, for the choice is absent. Moreover, an individual cannot exercise his will without this choice. Knowledge is a prerequisite for consent, for it yields these alternatives and enables an individual to exercise will. Riley observes: “Will is, or once was, commonly taken to be a term that intervenes between knowledge and action” (11). Consenting as a product of choice is an action, and in Riley’s observation, knowledge must be present before an individual exercises his will in the performance of this action. *Paradise Lost* dramatizes the necessity of knowledge to willing
consent, and thus finds a place in consent theory, for the work expresses an idea absent from classical consent theory.

Milton’s prose works further elucidate the idea of knowledge as the basis of consent. With knowledge and reason as the cohesive forces behind Of Education, Areopagitica, and The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, these works build an underlying argument for knowledge as the basis of political consent to sovereign rule. Emphasizing educational reform and the importance of knowledge in Of Education followed by Areopagitica, advocating freedom of the press as the means to full knowledge and truth, Milton expresses the necessary conditions for consent. Then, building from the necessary conditions for consent, Milton writes The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates arguing for the subjects’ right to rebel against a tyrant, for a ruler derives his sovereignty from the people and their consent. As the people empower a sovereign, they can revoke his sovereignty. However, the people must know they have the right to rebel to exercise it. When the people possess both knowledge of this choice and a constant flow of information, they remain in a constant state of judgment and determine when to exercise it. Milton anticipates the modern consent theorist John Rawls and his A Theory of Justice. Rawls offers the original position as the “fair” choice position for choosing the principles of justice upon which the basic structure of society should be based. In offering his vision of a well-ordered society, a society in which these principles are fully instituted, Rawls argues that public discussion and education are necessary to ensure the worth of liberty. In each of their works, both Milton and Rawls recognize the necessity of public discussion and education because the public must be informed to make choices and exercise their will through their participation in the government regulating that society.
Milton’s works bridge the tradition of Christian practical doctrine and classical consent theory and draw attention to the role knowledge plays in consent, which classical consent theorists fail to identify. In viewing his works as an argument for knowledge as the basis of consent, we see Milton’s works anticipating John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*, bridging classical with contemporary consent theory. In producing works so relevant to the consent theory tradition, Milton carves a place for himself in that tradition, adding “consent theorist” to his list of titles.
CHAPTER 2
THEIR FALL INTO FREEDOM

Introduction

In his epic Paradise Lost, Milton sets out to “justifie the wayes of God to men” through his portrayal of the events leading to “Man’s First Disobedience,” allowed men to fall into God’s grace, thus, affirming the reason for which men should obey God (PL 1.26, 1.1). Milton’s work suggests that this grace enabling man’s redemption from sin serves as the justification for the “wayes of God,” and his authority over man, and man’s obedience to that authority (PL 1.26). As the Miltonic conception of freedom is the willingness to obey God, in justifying God’s ways through his depiction of man’s fall into grace, Milton also portrays the way in which man realizes freedom. Milton moves through mankind’s creation, his disobedience, and ultimately his willingness to obey God. In man’s first disobedience, man falls to corruption, but it is from this corruption that man achieves both grace and freedom; for after having fallen, man must choose to obey God. This corruption, yielding man choice, enables man to realize freedom.

Rousseau’s work possesses a similar purpose. Throughout his Discourses, Rousseau concentrates on the factors that lead men to corruption. In moving to On the Social Contract, he asserts that through this corruption, man becomes a master of himself and realizes his freedom, which he defines as the obedience to the law one prescribes for himself. Both Milton and Rousseau trace man’s progression from the State of Nature to society, his corruption, and his ultimate realization of freedom. This parallel between the structure of Milton’s and Rousseau’s works suggests the application of Rousseau’s theory to Milton’s epic. While Milton clearly asserts that man is free from the moment of his creation, for he is “free to fall,” the nature of his freedom changes, or at least the fallen reader’s comprehension of his freedom (PL 3.98).
Analyzing man’s fall to grace in light of Rousseau’s theory suggests that man was not, in fact, free in this sense before the fall but rather a slave. Before the fall, man is a slave to his inclination; however, falling to corruption enables man to become a master of himself and realize his freedom. The Rousseauean and Miltonic notions of freedom complement each other in that both require man’s willing obedience to law. The Rousseauean conception requires that man obey the law that he prescribes for himself. If man prescribes a certain set of laws to himself, he is willing to obey them. The Miltonic conception requires man’s willing obedience to God. If man prescribes God’s law for himself, then he realizes both the Rousseauean and the Miltonic conceptions of freedom. By realizing the Rousseauean conception of freedom, man can then realize the Miltonic conception of freedom. This reasoning suggests that Adam and Eve must fall in order to truly take hold of their freedom.

Rousseau’s Theory

Rousseau builds his theory from the State of Nature, a conceived state of man before his entering into society. In this State of Nature, man exists in solitude, which enables him to grow independent as well as “strong and robust” (DOI 106). Rousseau asserts that in the State of Nature, men derive their motivation solely from their dispositions and live in a state of both happiness and virtue.

In his Discourses, Rousseau concentrates his efforts on portraying man’s movement from the State of Nature into society. Rousseau attributes this move to “perfectibility,” the faculty enabling men to utilize concepts and reason in order to satisfy needs triggered by the passions. Rousseau links our passions to our understanding: “It is by their [the passions’] activity that our reason is perfected; we seek to know only because we desire to have pleasure” (DOI 116). This statement suggests that it is our disposition to seek knowledge. Our passions govern our
disposition as well as trigger our needs, so the passions trigger a need for knowledge. Because the passions also perfect our reason, we need knowledge in order to reason and make our choices. Thus, the acquisition of knowledge is a necessary condition for making choices.

Perfectibility causes man to move out of the State of Nature because man identifies needs that can only be satisfied by working with other individuals. Therefore, man moves out of the State of Nature into society. In his *Discourses*, Rousseau praises the State of Nature, where man lives an independent life of both happiness and virtue. Society, however, fosters dependency and the dissolution of equality: “From the moment one man needed the help of another…equality disappeared” (DOI 116). When one man needs the help of another, he enters into society, causing a chain of events leading to his corruption. Upon entering into society, we live in the eye of others, striving to maintain this good opinion, leading to inequality, vanity, competition, selfishness, suspicion, envy, and ultimately corruption. In society, man enslaves himself to the opinion of others. In short, man is free in the State of Nature, but perfectibility causes him to enter into society, and society both corrupts and enslaves him.

However, once Rousseau moves to write *On the Social Contract*, he re-evaluates the position of man in relation to his freedom in both the State of Nature and in society, adopting a different attitude toward both. Rousseau then praises society for enabling the true acquisition of freedom:

*To the foregoing acquisitions of the civil state could be added moral freedom, which alone makes man truly a master of himself. For the impulse of appetite alone is slavery, and obedience to the law one has prescribed for himself is freedom. (OSC 56)*

Man is then, in fact, a slave in the State of Nature, for his disposition rules him. Rousseau raises freedom above virtue. While society may lead man to his corruption, it “changed him from a stupid, limited animal into an intelligent being and a man” (OSC 56). Society yields man a great deal of gain, for “his faculties are exercised and developed, his ideas broadened, his feeling
enobled, and his whole soul elevated” (OSC 56). Harking back to the *Discourses*, it is our passions that cause us both to seek knowledge and perfect our reason. This suggests that while society corrupts man, man gains knowledge through corruption, enabling him to make such gains. It is through these gains that man becomes a master of himself and realizes the Rousseauean conception of freedom, obedience to the law one prescribes for himself. From this it follows that man must endure societal corruption in order to gain the knowledge that enables him to realize his freedom. Moving from the Rousseauean conception of freedom to the Miltonic conception of freedom suggests that in order for man to willingly obey God, he must prescribe God’s law to himself. He must choose to obey God. In order to make this choice, Adam and Eve must gain the knowledge that leads to their freedom.

**The State of Nature**

After Adam’s creation, God states, “This Paradise I give thee”; it serves as the State of Nature (PL 8.319). In Paradise, God provides Adam with “all things,” including command of all the animals, the trees bearing fruit, and the air (PL 8.363). Adam exists with all that he needs in a state of independence that renders him both strong and robust. Adam is pure, for he has neither committed sin nor been exposed to it. In Adam, God observes “A nice and subtle happiness” (PL 8.399). Speaking with Adam, God’s angel Raphael describes paradise as both “the Garden of bliss” and “this happy State” (PL 8.299, 8.331). Adam is not only happy but also free, for as God observes, “the spirit within thee [is] free” (PL 8.440). The paradise God sets before Adam acts much like Rousseau’s State of Nature in his *Discourses*.

**Adam and Perfectibility**

However, Adam finds a deficiency in himself “in degree, the cause of his desire by conversation with his like to help, or solace his defects” (PL 8.417-419). Adam’s passion
triggers this desire and eventual need. In order to satisfy this desire, Adam needs a companion. The faculty Rousseau describes as perfectibility enables Adam to conceptualize such a companion and reason the best way to acquire one. Therefore, he requests one of God. Acknowledging Adam’s good reason, God fulfills his request, “My image, not imparted to the Brute, Whose fellowship therefore unmeet for thee/Good reason” (PL 8.441-443). Adam’s perfectibility and consequent good reason cause him to find fault in his solitude as well as require a companion. Therefore, God creates Eve, and society is born. Much as Rousseau proposes perfectibility as the desire that moves man from the State of Nature to society, Adam’s perfectibility enables him to employ reason to satisfy his need triggered by passion, which causes him to move from the State of Nature into society. Only society can remedy solitude. Adam’s request for “his like to help” and God’s reference to Adam and Eve as “one Flesh, one Heart, one Soul” both foreshadows Adam’s eventual dependency upon Eve in society, which leads to his corruption (PL 8.418, 8.499). Adam’s fall to corruption begins with the faculty of perfectibility.

Eve and Society

In creating Eve, God introduces both society and societal concepts such as comparison to Adam’s environment. Once Eve enters Adam’s environment, Adam is no longer independent and solitary within nature. While both Adam and Eve co-exist within nature, they are no longer in the State of Nature. Their co-existence constitutes a society. They are married; they converse, eat together, and sleep together. Following Rousseau’s assertion that with society follows inequality due to man’s ability to compare, Eve’s faculties differ from Adam’s, so Adam begins comparing himself to her. He observes that he resembles God’s image more than she, which reflects this new ability to compare. Speaking with Raphael, Adam refers to her as “th’inferior in the mind” and yet also claims that she “seems wisest,” unexpectedly using the superlative
form (PL 8.541, 8.550). However, these references to Eve’s mental capabilities are contradictory. That he tempers wisest with “seems” suggests that he is aware that Eve causes him to speak against his better judgment; nevertheless, he does anyway. Adam’s comparisons reveal a sense of hierarchy and inequality, as well as the beginnings of faltering judgment set within this microcosm of society. Eve’s entrance into paradise serves as the creation of society, which brings about inequality by comparison – a societal trait identified by Rousseau that leads to corruption foreshadowed by Adam’s poor judgment.

As Eve brings inequality into paradise, she introduces vanity as well. She is a Narcissistic figure; her first action after birth is one of seeming vanity. Upon waking, she moves to the bank of a lake and observes her reflection: “A Shape within the watry gleam appeared bending to look on me, I started back, it started back, but pleas’d I soon returned” (PL 4.461-463). Her reflection holds her by “vain desire” (PL 4.466). Adam informs her that she stares at an image of herself, but she is an image of him. He praises the physical traits derived from his own, for God has created her from “his flesh, his bone” (PL 4.483). Because she desires her own image, she also desires him. Adam takes delight “of her beauty,” a physical attribute derived from his own (PL 4.497-498). Adam and Eve serve as mirror images of each other, characterizing their “conjugal attraction” in part by something like vanity (PL 4.493). Rousseau also places vanity within the realm of societal concepts leading to man’s corruption. Eve’s birth introduces society and, in turn, inequality and vanity as well into paradise, which follows Rousseau’s conception of the chain of events leading to man’s corruption.

**Adam and Knowledge**

Both Adam and Eve are characterized by the quest for knowledge. One of Adam’s first inclinations is to ask God “how may I adore thee” (PL 8.359-360). Adam desires “to know of
things above his world” (PL 5.454-455). He questions the motion of the stars. Adam seeks knowledge; however, he is constantly discouraged from acquiring it. At the forefront is the Tree of Knowledge. Adam may eat from whichever tree he chooses; “But of the Tree whose operation brings knowledge of good and ill…shun to taste and shun the bitter consequence,” death (PL 8.323-328). While God’s angel Raphael serves as Adam’s teacher, he may only answer Adam “within bounds” (PL 7.120). Adam questions with “desire to know” and argues against this restraint of his knowledge, claiming that with more knowledge, he would be able to better adore and “magnify his [God’s] works” (PL 7.61, 7.97).

As it is Adam’s inclination to ask, “how may I adore thee,” he praises and obeys God by disposition only. Furthermore, he knows nothing else, so his disposition to praise and obey God becomes an adaptive preference as well. Only in conversation with Raphael does Adam finally realize that he can, in fact, defy God; he asks: “But say, what meant the caution joind, if ye be found obedient?” (PL 5.512-514). Because Adam does not know he has the ability to defy God until after this conversation, he does not have a full choice in his obedience. If Adam does not choose to obey God but rather acts from his disposition and adaptive preference only, he neither prescribes God’s law for himself nor willingly obeys God. That he fails to fulfill both the Rousseauean and Miltonic conception of freedom renders him a slave. Adam fails to fulfill either of these conceptions; he lacks knowledge of his choice. Without knowledge of his choice, contrary to God’s observation, Adam is not free in the State of Nature but rather a slave.

**Adam’s Concession to Eve**

As they embark on their day’s work, Eve observes that their labor grows increasingly burdensome because of their inability to work efficiently together; thus, she proposes a division of their labor for the sake of efficiency. Her proposal requires that each of them labor alone in
paradise, a proposal which Adam resists partly on the grounds that he “guards her” from temptation (PL 9.269). However, this resistance disturbs Eve, for it suggests his doubt in her ability to withstand temptation. As Adam views her reaction to his resistance, he grows increasingly fearful that she may lower her opinion of him on the grounds of his doubt. Rousseau asserts that, in society, man defines himself by his conception of the opinions others hold of him, causing him to live in the eye of others. This living in the eye of others and its dictating man’s actions is a societal trait, which Rousseau identifies as one that leads man to corruption. In this exchange between himself and Eve, Adam does not want Eve to believe that he doubts her. That she does believe he doubts her causes Eve to become angry and dissatisfied with him. Adam’s concerns surrounding her opinion and fear of her dissatisfaction cause him to concede and allow Eve to part with him, venturing into paradise alone. Adam concedes because he lives in Eve’s eyes; this causes him to act against his better judgment. In doing so, Adam affirms Rousseau’s conception: society causes man to live in the eye of others, leading to his corruption. By allowing Eve to go, Adam opens the door the temptation that ultimately corrupts them both.

The Fall – A Product of Society

While succumbing to the temptation of the forbidden fruit is the source of Adam and Eve’s personal corruption, that they do succumb is the culmination of society’s corruption. Eve falls to temptation, for she is a product of society. Satan plays upon society’s ill effects and by-products, which Rousseau outlines as inequality, competition, vanity, selfishness, suspicion, and envy, in order to seduce Eve into tasting the forbidden fruit, culminating in society’s corruption. Satan first appeals to her dependence upon the opinion of others and her own vanity by telling her that, while she is presently seen by just Adam, she “shouldst be seen a Goddess among
Gods” (PL 9.546-547). In claiming that he approaches her in order to worship her, Satan further appeals to her vanity. He instills suspicion in her by claiming that the knowledge gained from tasting of the fruit may enable her to prevent death, the consequence of disobedience. For, if she only abstains from tasting due to fear of death and then suspects that she may avoid death, she will become suspicious of the consequential threat, doubting her reason for obedience. Satan, claiming both that God only deems the fruit forbidden to “keep ye low and ignorant” and that he himself has tasted the fruit but lives, suggests that he holds a higher position than Eve, which instills envy of both his knowledge and position (PL 9.704). Satan has the knowledge that she both desires and lacks, which raises Satan to a higher stature than hers. Satan encourages this envy: “look on me, mee who have touch’d and tasted, yet both live, and a life more perfet” (PL 9.687-689). He finally offers knowledge to Eve, for “causes import your need of this fair fruit,” offering it now as a “need” (PL 9.731).

In describing knowledge as a need, Satan stimulates Eve’s perfectibility, the faculty to which Rousseau attributes man’s ability to employ concepts in order to address fundamental needs. Eve finds fault in lacking such knowledge, for it renders her unequal; therefore it is a need. She employs reason in order to both remedy this fault and satisfy this need. Man’s disposition calls for him to satisfy needs. While in society, but only on the verge of corruption, Eve is still ruled by both her disposition and inclination. The fruit appeals to her “eager appetite” as “with desire inclinable now grown to touch or taste” (PL 9.740-742). Not only would the fruit satisfy her need of knowledge but upon acquiring the knowledge, she could remedy inequality as well. As Eve deems the fruit the “Cure of all,” her perfectibility enables her to reason that this fruit will satisfy all of her needs; consequently, she succumbs to the temptation (PL 9.776). She
succumbs to the temptation as a product of society, for Satan employs social concepts to stimulate her perfectibility and seduce her into corruption.

Upon her fall to temptation, Eve decides to seduce Adam on the basis of the same social concepts Satan has employed to seduce her. Eve’s ability to reason utilizing such concepts reflects her corruption. Her first social thought is, “But to Adam in what sort shall I appeer?” (PL 9.816-817). Her concern now lies with his opinion and the way in which he will view her with her newly acquired knowledge. She wishes to remain desirable. That she contemplates keeping her knowledge a secret reflects her fall to both selfishness and competition; for in keeping the knowledge to herself, she may be rendered “more equal” or even “superior” (PL 9.825). However, suspicion eventually overtakes her, since she may, in fact, die as a consequence to her action. If she dies, she fears Adam may request a new Eve to wed. She envies both this possible new Eve for her having Adam and Adam for his continued life without her, enjoying his new Eve. Only after the fall does Eve finally reveal her dependency upon Adam; for before the fall, it was she who proposed the division of labor requiring that they part ways. Due to this dependency, she resolves to share the knowledge with Adam, for “with him all death could I endure, without him no life” (PL 9.832-833). Having fallen to corruption, Eve departs to corrupt Adam as well. She reveals her dependency on him by declaring herself “depriv’d thy presence, agonie of love till now not felt” (PL 9.857-859). Just as Satan appealed to her suspicion, Eve instills suspicion in Adam as well, claiming that the fruit did not have the ill effects upon her that were originally threatened. She appeals to envy, claiming that the fruit has “endu’d [the serpent] with human voice and human sense, reasoning to admiration” (PL 9.871-872). Lastly, she appeals to competition by revealing that her knowledge places her above him and that in order for them to become equals, he must also taste the fruit. Since Adam
determines this situation “remediless,” Eve’s fall is a problem that cannot be solved through the faculty of perfectibility (PL 9.919). While Eve appeals to all of the illeffects of society, Adam decides to partake in the fruit, depending on her: “How could I live without thee?” (PL 9.908).

Affirming Rousseau’s assertion that man’s corruption is founded on the dependency fostered by society, both Eve’s decision to share the fruit and Adam’s decision to partake of the fruit are grounded in their dependency upon each other. Each is coaxed into falling with appeals to characteristics of society that lead to its corruption; but ultimately, their dependency upon one another is the root cause. The faculty of perfectibility causes Adam to leave the State of Nature and leads Eve to her fall. Eve’s dependency upon Adam leads her to share the fruit, and Adam’s reciprocal dependency causes him to taste it. Adam and Eve’s course of corruption follows Rousseau’s outline of man’s corruption: state of nature, perfectibility, society, dependency, and finally corruption.

**Loss and Gain**

After tasting the fruit, Adam and Eve “find we know both Good and Evil, Good lost, and Evil got…which leaves us naked thus, of Honour void, of Innocense, of Faith, of Puritie” (PL 9.1071-1075). They finally acquire the knowledge that they have been implicitly seeking since their creation. This knowledge enables them to evaluate their positions, for having gained this knowledge, they also gain a standard against which to measure their former bliss and future consequences. With knowledge, they now realize what they have lost. They now know what it is to disobey God. Adam speaks to Eve: “I know not whence possess’d thee; we had then remained happie, not as now, despoild of all our good, sham’d, naked, miserable” (PL 9.1137-1139). Adam acknowledges the State of Nature, affirming that he did not know the bliss to which he was privileged until gaining this knowledge. They fall into a “vain contest” trying to
assign blame, which serves as both a competition and exercise in vanity (PL 9.1188). They lose their happiness and virtue; and in God’s judgment, they lose both their immortality and their place in paradise.

Rousseau argues that while society corrupts man, it yields him gains:

that if the abuses of this new condition did not often degrade him beneath the condition he left, he ought ceaselessly to bless the happy moment that tore him away from it forever. (OSC 56)

While Adam and Eve fall to society’s corrupting effects culminating in their decision to taste the forbidden fruit, their corruption yields them a great deal more. In seducing Adam to taste the fruit, Eve describes her new acquisition, “opener my Eyes, dimm erst, to dilated Spirits, ampler Heart,” affirming what Rousseau describes as “feelings enobled,” even if we do not find her “enobled” (PL 9.875-876, SC 56). In falling to temptation, Adam and Eve acquire the knowledge through which they may realize the effects Rousseau foretells: “his faculties are exercised and developed, his ideas broadened” (OSC 56). Lastly, Rousseau asserts that society affords man “his whole soul elevated,” which the orthodox Christain “felix-culpa” confirms.

By falling to corruption and temptation, Adam and Eve fall into grace. Their fall serves as the catalyst for the events that will enable the elevation of men’s souls to Heaven. By tasting the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve implement original sin. However, in order to redeem man and atone for his sin, the Son of God volunteers to live the life of a man and die for all men. With his death, the Son of God elevates of all men’s souls to Heaven. This elevation raises men’s souls above their original position in paradise in order to join God. Rousseau’s theory and the felix-culpa act as parallel concepts.
Conclusion

Milton’s *Paradise Lost* read in light of Rousseau’s theory suggests that man must fall and acquire knowledge in order to realize the Rousseauean conception of freedom and, consequently, the Miltonic conception of freedom. While God may observe Adam as free in the State of Nature and Adam and Eve as free before the fall, as he claims them to be “free to fall,” by Rousseau’s theory they are not free but rather slaves to both their disposition and adaptive preferences (PL 3.98). In such a state, they cannot – at least in the fallen reader’s conception – conform to the Miltonic conception of freedom either, for praising and obeying God in accordance to disposition and adaptive preference does not reflect a willingness to obey God. They know nothing else, and thus, have no other choice. However, by falling to societal corruption, both culminating in their decision to taste the forbidden fruit and causing their subsequent corruption, Adam and Eve acquire knowledge and learn the consequences of their own actions. Through the acquisition of knowledge, Adam and Eve gain choice. In gaining choice, Adam and Eve also gain their freedom. They realize the Rousseauean conception of freedom, for they now have the ability to obey the law to which they subscribe. They may either obey God or not obey God, and having this choice renders them masters of themselves. It is the choice to obey God, yielded to them by their fall, that confirms Adam and Eve’s willingness. Their realization of the Rousseauean conception of freedom both enables and affirms their realization of the Miltonic conception of freedom. Adam and Eve fall not only into grace but into freedom as well.
CHAPTER 3

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE – LACK OF FORCE

Introduction

Much as Rousseau’s consent theory serves as an appropriate gloss to Milton’s *Paradise Lost* due to similar manners with which both Rousseau and Milton trace man’s progression from the State of Nature through society, Hobbes’s *Leviathan* also serves as an appropriate gloss to *Paradise Lost*, for Hobbes’s work follows the very same progression. However, while Rousseau’s theory argues that through the corruption man endures once he enters society, he becomes a master of himself and realizes his freedom as obedience to the law one prescribes for himself, Hobbes constructs an argument for absolute sovereignty as the optimal form of government, a form of government in which the sovereign commands obedience to the law he prescribes for the citizens. While Rousseau and Hobbes argue to different ends, both take the same approach. However, despite their very different argumentative agendas, both theories applied to *Paradise Lost* support the notion that knowledge serves as the basis for consent. Like Rousseau, as a consent theorist, Hobbes believes the legitimacy of sovereign rule derives from the people’s consent, and by conducting a thought experiment, he explores the conditions under which people would willingly consent to absolute sovereignty on the grounds that

> whosoever looketh into himself and considereth what he doth, when he does think, opine, reason, hope, fear, &c, and upon what grounds, he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts and passions of all other men upon the like occasions (Lev 8).

Hobbes proposes two conditions for true consent: consent must not be the product of disposition or of force. However, left unstated in Hobbes’s argument is that, to meet these two conditions, those consenting must possess knowledge adequate for choice. Hobbes reasons that men left to
their own reason will, inevitably, lead themselves into the State of War, a state whose conditions are so terrible that men will willingly surrender their rights to an absolute sovereign to both escape this State of War and enter into better conditions. This assertion privileges order over individual liberties and rights.

In order to argue for absolute sovereignty, Hobbes establishes the State of Nature, accounts for man’s moral psychology, and describes the events leading to the State of War. He establishes the State of Nature by defining it as “the time men live without a common power” and then opens his argument for an absolute sovereignty with a discussion characterizing in the nature of man’s desire (Lev 76). Hobbes proposes that man’s desire results from external stimuli, which cause direct activity towards a goal. This desire affects man’s judgment and dictates his voluntary action. Hobbes’s account of desire suggests that man is essentially a goal-oriented being; however, these goals are not reasoned but rather dictated by desire. Moreover, Hobbes asserts that man possesses “a perpetual and restless desire for power after power” (Lev 58). Power, as Hobbes defines it, consists of man’s “present means to obtain some future apparent good” (Lev 50). Synthesizing his conceptions of both power and desire, Hobbes declares: “The object of man’s desire is not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time, but to assure forever the way of man’s future desire” (Lev 57). Because of “a continual progress of desire from one object to another,” each of these objects serving only as means to the next, man strives to attain this assurance (Lev 57). While Hobbes does not explicitly characterize the State of Nature as a state stricken with scarcity, he must assume scarcity to foster man’s restlessness need to secure future goods. This scarcity, in conjunction with man’s desire, leads men to compete for power, resulting in “contention, enmity and war” (Lev 58).
As each man is both equal to and in competition with the other, Hobbes proposes that men grow distrustful of each other and, consequently, develop the incentive to strike first. He assigns equality to both man’s physical and mental abilities, thus disenabling any claims to goods on the basis of natural superiority. He describes this equality, noting, “the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest” (Lev 74). From lack of superiority arises distrust among men, for “if two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot enjoy, they become enemies” (Lev 75). As each man is equal to the other, the avenue for securing goods becomes “anticipation” that another man will try to acquire that which one desires. Hobbes evaluates this anticipation as rational in that it is “no more than his own conservation requireth” (Lev 75). Man’s rationality then leads him into the State of War, the war of all against all.

Hobbes describes the State of War as a state in which, “the life of man [is] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” (Lev 76). However, there is a discrepancy concerning the nature and continuity of this war, for Hobbes also notes:

War consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting, but in the tract of time wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known…;the nature of war consisteth not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto. (Lev 76)

In the State of Nature and War, there is no injustice; for without a common power, there is no law. Man cannot secure his own life in such a state; for while he does possess the right to self-defense and the means to aid the preservation of his own life, he has no assurance that another will not take it from him in war. This lack of security leads Hobbes to claim that men willingly consent to an absolute sovereignty in order to escape the State of Nature and State of War, for men would willingly move to any state with the potential to remove the threats posed by the State of War.

In addition to his portrayal of the State of War, Hobbes outlines two laws of nature, which further motivate man to move from the State of War to an absolute sovereignty. These
laws of nature are necessary for man’s self-preservation. The first law of nature, the “rule of reason,” requires that “every man ought to endeavor peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it;” peace is necessary for man’s preservation because of the absolute threat nature and the State of War pose to his life (Lev 80). From the rule of reason, Hobbes derives the second law:

that a man be willing, when others are so too, as far-forth as for peace and defense of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things, and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself. (Lev 80)

This second law requires that men surrender their right to defense in order to contract out of the State of War, which leads them to form a covenant. If one man suspects that another will not uphold his part of the covenant, it is void, for words without force are ineffective. However, “if there be a common power set over them both, with right and force sufficient to compel performance, it is not void” (Lev 84). Since men instinctively suspect each other, they require this common power set above them in order to escape the State of War. Moreover, the covenant creates this power: “the only way to erect such a common power…is to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or assembly of men, that may reduce their wills…unto one will” (Lev 109). To create this covenant and erect this absolute sovereign, the covenant must be simultaneous, for no man would lay down his right to self-defense unless every other does the same.

The State of Nature

Hobbes’s account of the nature of man’s desire requires that he assume scarcity as a characteristic of the State of Nature; however, Adam and Eve’s bountiful paradise, the Garden of Eden, does not conform to this assumption. In creating the Garden of Eden, God provides Adam and Eve with every necessity – “he caused to grow/All Trees of noblest kind of sight, smell, taste” (PL 4.216-217). The garden is a lush, pastoral setting in which Adam and Eve both reside
and rule. Adam observes “Among so many signes of power and rule/Conferred upon us, and
Dominion giv’n/Over all other Creatures that possess/Earth, Air, and Sea” (PL 4.429-432). In
the garden, Adam and Eve have “choice/Unlimited of manifold delights,” rendering them access
to food, water, and all things (PL 4.434-435). This free rein over the garden with all provided for
them would suggest a state that is, clearly, the antithesis of a scarcity; however having given
them all they need, God institutes “One easie prohibition” –

Not to taste that onely Tree/>
Of knowledge, planted by the Tree of Life./
So neer grows Death to Life, what ere Death is./
Som dreadful thing no doubt (PL 4.433, 423-426).

Adam’s recounting of God’s prohibition to Eve reveals both the limited (if not scarce) resource,
knowledge, in terms of the prohibition itself and the prohibition’s implications. Adam’s phrase,
“what ere Death is” suggests that he does not possess the knowledge to understand the
consequences of violating such a prohibition, for he has no familiarity with Death (PL 4.425).
With the prohibition, God withholds the knowledge necessary to understand the implications of
the prohibition.

Moreover, the prohibition serves as the external stimulus Hobbes describes, for Adam
and Eve would not conceive of a “thing” called knowledge without having been told that they
may not eat from the Tree of “Knowledge.” Both Adam and Eve accept the prohibition, but as
Adam demonstrates in the earlier remark, they do not truly understand the terms. While Eve
insists, “Unargu’d I obey; so God ordains,/God is thy law, thou mine to know no more,” she
proceeds to ask questions concerning the nature of the stars (PL 4.636-637). Questions serve as
an avenue through which to gain knowledge; therefore, asking questions either reflects her lack
of understanding of what knowledge constitutes or undermines her resolution to “know no
more.” In any case, her questioning suggests that she desires more knowledge than she had been
“naturally” endowed with. Of course, knowledge of physical reality (the stars, etc.) differs from knowledge of good and evil (morality). Yet, Eve fails to differentiate; after all, it is God who bestows the term knowledge equivocally! The narrator comments: “Blest pair; and O yet happiest if you seek/ No happier state, and know to know no more” (PL 4.774-775). Not only may the pair not eat from the Tree of Knowledge but also the angels may not answer all of their questions. Raphael hesitates to answer Adam’s question: “though what thou tellst/Hath past in Heav’n, som doubt within me move,/ But more desire to hear, if thou consent,” for fear that “The secrets of another world” may not be “lawful” to disclose (PL 5.552-554, 5.569, 5.570). Even after Raphael describes the events of the war, Adam “with desire to know” continues to pose questions concerning creation (PL 7.61). Both Adam and Eve demonstrate a desire for knowledge, yielding it, though perhaps not scarce, a good clearly in demand within the Garden of Eden. However, while Adam and Eve may pose questions, the extent of their knowledge is limited by God’s prohibition.

God’s ordinance over Eden prohibiting Adam and Eve from eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge in conjunction with his implicit instructions to Raphael forbidding them to divulge answers to all of Adam and Eve’s questions, as it may be extrapolated from the narrator’s apostrophe directed towards the pair as well as Raphael’s initial hesitation to an answer to Adam’s questions, would seem to place God in the position of a Hobbesian “sovereign” over Adam and Eve. If God is, however, such a sovereign over Adam and Eve, then the garden of Eden would not constitute a State of Nature as Hobbes conceives it, since Hobbes requires that the sovereign with whom the subjects contract possess the “power to keep them in awe” as well as the “force sufficient to compel performance” (Lev. 76, 84). Such a sovereign force suggests the sovereign should guarantee obedience from the subjects. Adam and Eve eventually disobey
the ordinance and eat the fruit from tree of knowledge; God does not excersize the necessary power to guarantee obedience, a guarantee that would imply absence of free will. The pair lack the knowledge sufficient to understand the force of both a sovereign and the consequences of disregarding a prohibition. Because of this lack of knowledge, God cannot be said to compel performance, stand as sovereign, or proclaim an ordinance. Without the force to compel, a sovereign cannot stand, and law cannot exist. With abundant resources necessary for life provided for Adam and Eve in the garden as well as God’s presence and ordinance in place, the garden of Eden seemingly fails to fit the criteria Hobbes outlines for the State of Nature, from which he builds the rest of his argument for an absolute sovereign. However, knowledge as a scarce resource, together with God’s lack of the force to compel failure Adam and Eve’s obedience, gives the Garden of Eden resemblance to Hobbes’s State of Nature.

The Path to Fruit and War

Serving as the external stimulus required to instill a desire for the fruit and, consequently, knowledge, God’s prohibition may first draw Adam and Eve’s attention to the Tree of Knowledge, but Satan provides the stimulus leading to both disobedience and the acquisition of knowledge adequate to appreciate the sovereign’s power. Satan learns, “From thir own mouths; all is not theirs it seems:/One fatal Tree there stands of Knowledge call’d,/Forbidden them to taste,” which supports the notion of knowledge as a scarce good (PL 4.513-515). Satan reacts with surprise both questioning the mandate and deeming it “reasonless” (PL 4.516). That Satan deems the ordinance unreasonable suggests disobedience is only reasonable, which echoes the theme inherent in Hobbes’s argument for the absolute sovereign – men left to their own reason lead themselves into the worst possible situation. In this situation, without their knowledge of
the fortunate fall together with the “reasonableness” of disobedience, Adam and Eve lead themselves into fighting and to the Fall’s consequences. Satan comments further:

| Why should thir Lord envie them that? Can it be sin to know,/  |
| Can it be death? And do they onely stand/          |
| By Ignorance, is that thir happie state,/          |
| The proof of thir obedience and thir faith?       |
| O fair foundation laid whereon to build/           |
| Thir ruin! (PL 4.516-522)                         |

Within the breadth of this soliloquy, Satan makes some key observations. If ignorance is, in fact, the basis of their happiness, then by acquiring knowledge, Adam and Eve would relinquish their happiness – a move that any reasonable person would deem as a move into a worse state. Moreover, if the forbidden fruit does serve as a means to test Adam and Eve’s obedience and faith, then it must also serve as a means to test God’s sovereignty as well; for if they are not obedient, then God is not sovereign – so Satan infers. Deeming failure of the test to be the pair’s “ruin” in conjunction with his observation that God’s ordinance is “reasonless,” echoes Hobbes’s position and foreshadows Adam and Eve’s actions with regards to the forbidden fruit – framing their disobedience as a reasonable act. In the absence of a sovereign, men follow their rational incentives, which produce the worst possible state of affairs.

Satan preys on man’s disposition to reason as well as the nature of desire by acting as an additional external stimulus to the prohibition. Satan clearly outlines his intent to function as such a stimulus in his statement, “Hence I will excite thir minds/ With more desire to know” (PL 4.522-523). He displays both his confidence in the nature of man and his desire as Hobbes describes it, “Yet happie pair; enjoy, till I return,/Short pleasures, for long woes are to succeed” (PL 4.534-535). He first intervenes as an external stimulus by approaching Eve in a dream. Satan poses the question: “is Knowledge so despis’d?/ Or envie, or what reserve forbids to taste?” (PL 5.60-61). Within the dream, he essentially questions God’s mandate for Eve. Eve
further recounts “the pleasant savourie smell/So quick’nd, that I, methought,/Could not but taste” (PL 5.84-86). Satan does, in fact, further stimulate her desire and heighten it to the extent that the prospect of tasting the fruit and acquiring knowledge is irresistible within the dream. Tempting Eve in the dream lays the groundwork for tempting her in a conscious state, for he stimulates her desire and brings her closer to the actualization of attaining both the fruit and knowledge she already seeks. Through temptation, he accomplishes his goal to heighten her desire.

Proceeding from an external stimulus to activate desire, there follows the continual progress of this desire. While the pair’s progress of desire does not constitute the pursuit of present means to future goods as Hobbes defines it, it does reveal that with each move towards knowledge, Adam and Eve’s desire for knowledge only deepens; their continual pursuit of knowledge takes the form of constant questions. Adam does not merely pose just one or two questions but rather continually asks them of Raphael. Upon hearing the answers to some questions, they raise others:

He[Adam] with his consorted Eve/
The story heard attentive, and was filled/
With admiration, And deep Muse to hear/
Of things so high and strange, things to thir thought/
So unimaginable (PL 7.50-54)

This observation embedded in the narrative reveals the nature of this continual progress towards knowledge, for the word “Muse” connotes inspiration. Receiving some knowledge only inspires and leads the pair to desire more. After learning about the battle in Heaven between God, Satan, and their respective armies, we explicitly observe Adam’s “desire to know” how the world began and, moreover, the reason why God created it (PL 7.61). Acquiring one piece of knowledge would seemingly be sufficient to satisfy the desire for knowledge; but rather than satisfy, it only
arouses further desire; for with “murmur heard new thirst excites” (PL 7.68). Adam’s pursuit of his individual rational desire, his desire for knowledge, only leads him to realize both the small amount he possesses and the great amount withheld from him. Raphael makes this asymmetry clear when he consents to answer Adam’s question concerning the beginning of the world, for he informs Adam of the permission, “I have [he has] receav’d, to answer thy desire/ Of knowledge within bounds” (PL 7.119-120). While Raphael may answer this question, it will only stimulate more questions, whose answers will only stimulate more questions. There is evidently a limit imposed on the types of knowledge Raphael may impart to Adam and Eve, and their questions will eventually reach this limit. Their desire for knowledge will no longer be satisfied; as Adam states: “but thy words with Grace Divine/Imbu’d bring to thir sweetness no satietie” (PL 8.215-216). Operating under such constraints, Adam and Eve will never “assure forever the way of his future desire,” for the two will always seek more knowledge (Lev 57).

With such limits and bounds set in place, disallowing Adam and Eve from attaining full knowledge, scarcity and desire lead Adam and Eve to take on a competitive mentality. In seducing Eve, Satan appeals to this competitive nature by offering himself as an example of a being who has eaten the fruit. Satan sets forth the proposition that he has committed the very act that Eve must commit in order to gain the knowledge she desires. He recounts his feigned experience of tasting the fruit:

   A goodly Tree farr distant to behold/
   Loaden with fruit…Grateful to appetite, more pleas’d my Sense/
   To satisfy the sharp desire I had/
   Of tasting those fair Apples, I resolv’d/
   Not to deferr…/
   All other Beasts that saw, with like desire (PL 9.576-592)

Satan’s story echoes Eve’s first temptation within the dream. Satan alleges a desire similar to Eve’s, and by feigned example, displays the ability to satisfy that desire. Moreover, he
fictionally recounts the effects of the fruit, “Strange alteration in me, to degree/ Of Reason in my inward Powers, and Speech” (PL 9.599-600). Satan’s supposed acquisition of both reason and speech reflects his acquisition of knowledge, the object of Eve’s desire. While Satan may try to appeal to Eve with flattery, she states, “Serpent, thy over praising leaves in doubt…But say, where grows the Tree” (PL 9.615-617). She acknowledges the serpent’s tactics; however, because the serpent appears to possess the knowledge she desires, she still inquires after the location. Eve displays the “continual progress of desire” inherent in man’s disposition, and acting from this disposition, she must follow Satan to the tree and take the fruit as the anticipated means to the satisfaction of that desire (Lev 57).

God’s prohibition remains the only source of hesitation keeping Eve from pursuing the fruit. The prohibition stands as a barrier, which if removed would allow Eve to follow her nature in pursuit of desire. That she follows Satan to the tree in response to his flattering tactics suggests that Eve might have pursued knowledge despite this barrier and without Satan’s coaxing. However, Satan removes this barrier for her by casting doubt on God’s authority to prohibit the fruit and, in turn, knowledge. While Eve does not yet have a true conception of death, it is the prospective punishment for tasting the fruit. Her lack of knowledge neutralizes the deterrent effect of the punishment. Satan undermines the weight of this consequence by standing before her alive and well, presenting himself as an example: “Mee who have touch’d and tasted, yet live” (PL 9.688). Satan entirely dismisses the consequence, rejecting “Those rigid threats of Death; ye shall not die” (PL 9.685). He even offers a pseudo-logical syllogism, which appeals to Eve’s reason: “God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just;/ Not just, not God; not feared then, nor obeyed” (PL 9.700-701). To further assure Eve that God may not hurt her, Satan tricks her by offering a false explanation of death, claiming that death could only yield her
equal status with the Gods. She cannot question this claim because of her ignorance. Satan seduces Eve with sophisticated reason and seeming truths, which in conjunction with the nature of man’s desire, make the fruit irresistible. Following her nature, Eve forfeits her innocence in order to acquire knowledge.

The acquisition of knowledge eradicates any possible competition between Adam and Eve for knowledge; however, Eve’s loss of innocence introduces a new scarce good into the Garden of Eden. Innocence replaces knowledge. As Adam still possesses his innocence, she distrusts his future actions. She fears that he will take a new wife, a new “Eve,” who still retains innocence and immortality. She assumes a competitive attitude with this prospective “Eve,” who does not even exist. She must despoil Adam’s innocence in order to secure him as her “Copartner” (PL 9.821). If she does not, he will choose the new “Eve.” Her new object of desire shifts from knowledge to Adam as a husband. She must compete with this new “Eve,” yielding the incentive to strike first. While the Hobbesian incentive to strike first is motivated by competition between equals, here it is motivated not by an equal but rather this new “Eve,” who is both inferior in knowledge and superior in innocence. As this new “Eve” does not yet exist, Eve’s strike is preemptive. In order to secure Adam as her husband and dissuade him from taking this new “Eve,” Eve resolves to take away Adam’s innocence by giving him the fruit. This indirect approach to secure the object of Eve’s desire prevents future competition between the new “Eve” and herself.

In approaching Adam, Eve echoes the arguments presented by Satan in seducing her. She presents the effects of knowledge and claims for the fruit “Op’ning the way, but of Divining effect/ To open Eyes, and make them Gods who taste” (PL 9.865-866). She then draws attention to the fact that having tasted the fruit, she is still, in fact, alive, undercutting the influence of
God’s prohibition and threat of death as a consequence. That Adam declares “Certain my
resolution to Die” in response to Eve’s argument suggests it is not strong enough to instill
sufficient doubt in God’s prohibition for Adam to render it void (PL 9.907). However, his
resolution to die does result from his desire for Eve: “How can I live without thee” (PL 9.908).
Continuing, Adam then reveals doubt in God’s authority, claiming “Not God Omnipotent, nor
Fate, yet so/ Perhaps thou shalt not Die” (PL 9.927-928). This doubt reveals both his ignorance
and the consequent lack of deterrent force in death as a punishment. Adam misconstrues the
nature of death due to his ignorance, much as Eve does in her seduction: “Death is to mee as
Life” (PL 9.954). Doubting God’s authority affords Adam the ability to taste the fruit, possess
knowledge, and retain Eve. Eve’s success in Adam’s seduction secures for both of them their
desired objects; however just as Eve loses her innocence in tasting the fruit, Adam loses his
innocence, setting the stage for Hobbes’s conception of competition in the Garden of Eden.

As both Adam and Eve forgo their innocence for the acquisition of knowledge, innocence
becomes the scarce good in the Garden of Eden as well as the object of Adam and Eve’s desire,
leading them to competition. Upon their taking the fruit, “Began to rise, high Passions, Anger,
Hate,/Mistrust, Suspicion, Discord,” a list rhetorically similar to Hobbes’s account of man’s
movement within the State of Nature characterized by scarcity prompting competition, mistrust,
the incentive to strike first, and finally the war of “every man against every man,” characterized
by “continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man [is], solitary, poor, nasty,
brutish, and short” (PL 9.1122, Lev 76). Adam and Eve’s competition for innocence takes the
form of blaming each other for their fall in hopes to retain innocence. They neglect the fact that
lack of guilt is not the equivalent to innocence; however, they operate under this premise. Rather
than competition leading them into the State of War as Hobbes describes, their competition
simultaneously constitutes the State of War; for in fighting each other as the only inhabitants of the garden, they enter into a war of “all against all”. While they may not physically fight, they do verbally fight, engaging in hostile argumentation. Hobbes acknowledges, “War consisteth not in battle only…but in the known disposition thereto” (Lev 76). Their verbal competition is a state of war.

Adam instigates the “war” by assigning blame to Eve: “Would thou hadst heark’n’d to my words, and staid/With me…We had then/Remained still happie” (PL 9.1134-1138). Eve’s retort takes Adam’s argument one step backwards in time, blaming him: “why didst not thou the Head/Command me absolutely not to go,” suggesting that if Adam had kept her with him, then Satan would not have seduced her nor would she have, in turn, seduced Adam (PL 9.1154-1155). She clearly states the inference: “Hadst thou bin firm…Neither had I transgress’d, nor thou with mee” (PL 9.1160-1161). Adam, then, re-assigns the blame to her, claiming, “I warn’d thee, I admonish’d thee, foretold/The danger” (PL 9.1171-1172). Their accusations, which place blame, function as both a war for innocence, to which “appeer’d no end” (PL 9.1189).

Establishment of God as Sovereign and Peace

Adam and Eve enter into the State of War such as Hobbes describes in his account of the State of Nature. However, the only remedy he prescribes is the submission to a greater power through the social contract. In order to contract, establishing this power and thus ending the war of all against all, Adam and Eve must “by some voluntary and sufficient sign or signs” surrender their right to self-defense to the sovereign (Lev. 81). In doing so, Adam and Eve consolidate and cede all of their power to the sovereign by accepting the sovereign’s ability to condemn each to death. As no man will surrender his right to defense unless the others surrender theirs as well,
the contract must be simultaneous. This contract and establishment of a sovereign, Hobbes asserts, stands as the only means to peace.

Milton’s depiction of their competition suggests that Adam and Eve’s fight is, in fact, endless much like the State of War Hobbes describes. Just as they move through the steps Hobbes describes into the State of War, Adam and Eve also move through the steps to contract with God in order to break from the State of War and establish peace. Through eating the fruit and acquiring knowledge, Adam and Eve truly learn the consequences of their actions as well as the nature of death. Only through this understanding can they surrender their right to defense and accept condemnation to death. By accepting God’s punishment for their disobedience, Adam and Eve end the State of War and establish (or, at least, acknowledge) God as sovereign. By accepting death as their punishment and consenting to its justice, they accept God as sovereign.

The Son enters the garden to accuse both Adam and Eve of disobedience, at which point they still refuse to accept blame and try to establish themselves as innocents, shifting their competition to their appeals to the Son. Adam blames Eve: “Shee gave me of the Tree, and I did eat” (PL 10.143). Eve blames Satan: “The Serpent me beguiled and I did eat” (PL 10.162). However, the Son does not accept their appeals but rather addresses the guilt of each one. In addressing Adam, the Son acknowledges that Adam took the fruit because of Eve’s influence; however, he draws attention to the fact that Adam still takes the fruit and, in doing so, allows Eve to rule him. The Son addresses Eve in a similar manner by proclaiming she is “unable to transfer/The Guilt on him who made him instrument” (PL 10.165-166). As the Son judges each, he pronounces their condemnation to death. In undermining both Adam’s and Eve’s arguments for innocence, he eradicates innocence as the object of competition, forcing each to accept guilt.
Both Adam and Eve reveal this acceptance in their lament following God’s judgment. Adam
deems himself “the sourse and spring/Of all corruption,” while Eve wishes the judgment “from
thy[Adam’s] head removed may light/On me” (PL 10.832-833, 10.934-935). Eve observes that
“both have sin’d,” which both reveals her acceptance and an end to their competition: “Between
us two let there be peace” (PL 9.930, PL 9.924). God’s intervention through the Son forces
Adam and Eve to accept guilt, which enables them to establish peace.

As Hobbes posits, only by contracting to establish a sovereign will man alleviate the
State of War and establish peace. Adam and Eve’s acceptance of guilt, the acknowledgement of
their sin, serves multiple purposes. This acceptance begins the redemptive process made possible
by the Son, for he sacrifices himself both atoning for their sin and enabling them to enter the
Heaven. Moreover, it establishes peace and reflects their acceptance of God as their sovereign –
the necessary condition for peace in Hobbesian terms. By accepting guilt, Adam and Eve
acknowledge the prohibition as legitimate; otherwise, they would not be guilty of violating it.
By accepting guilt, Adam and Eve also accept condemnation to death. By accepting death,
Adam and Eve surrender their right to self-defense.

While God as an omnipotent being may pronounce death as a punishment whether or not
Adam and Eve acknowledge or accept the punishment, they do accept it. In placing blame with
one another in their “war,” they attempt to retain their innocence, which serves as the means to
avoid the consequences of guilt for having tasted the fruit, death. As placing blame serves as the
means to avoid death, it acts as a mode of self-defense. Once they cease to compete for
innocence and defend themselves by accepting guilt, they surrender their right to self-defense,
acknowledging God’s power. This acknowledgement eradicates doubt in either the prohibition
or the consequences of disobedience, which renders God their sovereign. In surrendering their
right to self-defense, Adam and Eve empower God with the “force to compel,” for in doing so, they both recognize and acknowledge God’s power, which he chooses not to exercise in order to uphold their free will (Lev 84). Adam and Eve’s acceptance of guilt and God as sovereign is an act of free will; it is voluntary, a condition Hobbes sets forth in his criteria for a valid contract. Without having been prompted, Adam and Eve “prostrate fall/ Before him reverent, and there confess/ Humbly our [their] faults” (PL 10.1087-1089). Adam and Eve empower God with this ability to enforce, now, with full knowledge of the consequences, as demonstrated by Adam’s reference to death as the return to “dust, our final rest and native home” (PL 10.1085).

Conclusion

Without having disobeyed God’s prohibition, Adam and Eve would lack the knowledge necessary to understand the consequences of disobedience. Without this knowledge, Adam and Eve have no incentive to either fear or obey God. Without this incentive, God would, in the Hobbesian sense, lack the ability to compel obedience. Because Adam and Eve do not recognize God’s ability to compel obedience, God does not compel obedience, and, evaluated in Hobbesian terms, does not stand as a legitimate sovereign. Thus, knowledge becomes the necessary condition for God’s legitimate sovereignty. Adam and Eve’s progression from the State of War to the establishment, or rather their recognition, of God as an absolute sovereign reflects Hobbes’s assertion that the only remedy for the State of War is the establishment of an absolute sovereignty. Moreover, their progression glossed by Hobbes’s argument reveals that legitimacy, even for an absolute sovereignty, hinges on knowledge. In order for subjects to create a social contract in which they consent to establish a sovereign, they must have full knowledge of the terms to which they are consenting. Knowledge is not only a necessary condition for a legitimate sovereignty but also the consent which establishes it.
CHAPTER 4
MILTON’S PROSE, PARADISE LOST, AND CONSENT

Introduction

Before composing his great epic, Paradise Lost, Milton writes Of Education, Areopagitica, and The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, which convey the ideals of education, free and open discourse, and sovereignty derived from the people. Milton’s Paradise Lost and prose works contribute to the consent theory tradition because, chronologically, the evolution of these ideas within his prose builds into an underlying argument for knowledge as the basis of consent to sovereign rule. Moreover, his epic poem illustrates the ideals anticipated by his prose works and their underlying argument for knowledge as the basis of consent, to some extent paralleling both the Hobbesian and Rousseauian analyses; Adam and Eve’s consent to God as their sovereign rests on their acquisition of knowledge.

Of Education

In June of 1644, Milton writes his proposal for educational reform in his letter to Master Samuel Hartlib, entitled by editors Of Education. Referring to his proposal as one of the “greatest and noblest designes,” Milton’s work conveys with enthusiasm the merits of education as the means to enhance knowledge – a goal leading to “the enlargement of truth, and honest living, and with much more peace” (OE 229). As education leads to knowledge, knowledge to truth, and truth to God, educational reform takes priority not only for the betterment of man and his relationship to society but also for his relationship to God. Milton expresses this two-fold
purpose of education, suggesting the consequences of poor education as well as the benefits of reformed education: without education “this nation perishes;” however, with education we can “repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him” (OE 229, 230).

As the Miltonic conception of freedom is the willingness to obey God, and education serves as the means to enhance man’s relationship, the willingness to learn and acquire knowledge yields the willingness to obey God and therefore man’s freedom. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve’s attitudes toward God after having acquired knowledge reflect the process Milton outlines in *Of Education*. Adam’s comment suggests that education strengthens obedience to God: “Greatly instructed…Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best,/And love with fear the onely God, to walk/As in his presence” (PL 12.557-563). Knowledge not only strengthens their obedience to God but also presents Adam and Eve with choice, moving their obedience from the realm of disposition to willingness – consent to God as sovereign. Moreover, the acquisition of knowledge enhances Adam and Eve’s love for God, for their praise shifts from an act of disposition to an act of willingness resulting in exclamations such as, “To God more glory, more good will to Men” (PL 12.477). Milton seeks educational reform in order to correct the “many mistakes which have made learning generally so unpleasing and so unsuccessful,” in order to foster a love of learning, yielding the effects portrayed throughout *Paradise Lost* (OE 231).

Milton also cites educational reform as a preventative to uphold a nation, suggesting that education eradicates the “poor, shaken, uncertain reeds, of such a tottering conscience” in society and molds them into “stedfast pillars of the State” (OE 235). His suggestion implies that as one acquires knowledge, one also acquires the sense of certainty necessary to uphold a nation and its
government, for doubt instilled and left to reside within the people leads them to falter in their beliefs. If that doubt lies in the nation and its government, the people will fail both the nation and its government. Milton conveys this idea in *Paradise Lost* with Adam and Eve’s tasting the forbidden fruit. Since Adam and Eve do not acquire full knowledge until after their seduction, their knowledge before their fall consists only of God. This lack of full knowledge enables Satan to prey upon Eve’s doubt concerning the effects of the fruit as well as the nature the promises consequences for tasting it; so Eve to disobeys. In seducing her, Satan approaches Eve and verbally rejects the validity of the ordinance, “Those rigid threats of Death; ye shall not die” (PL 9.685). Satan then moves to offer himself as an example of a being “who have touch’d and tasted, yet…live,” further contradicting God’s ordinance (PL 9.688). Due to Eve’s ignorance, Satan instills a sufficient degree of doubt in Eve to cause her disobedience, for she does not possess the knowledge to counter Satan’s claims. Eve then, in turn, uses similar tactics to seduce Adam. Before his temptation, Adam expresses his doubt in death as the punishment for disobeying God’s prohibition in his conversation with Raphael in his statement: “though what thou tellst/Hath past in Heav’n, som doubt within me move” (PL 5.553-554). When Eve tempts him, Adam, again, expresses his doubt in the ordinance as well as his ignorance concerning the nature of death: “Perhaps thou shalt not Die…Death is to me as Life” (PL 9.928, 9.954). As Adam and Eve falter in their judgment and disobey God due to ignorance enabling doubt, ignorant people within a nation may falter in their judgment, doubt, and disobey their government to such a degree that the nation eventually deteriorates and falls. Full knowledge secures the certainty to prevent such faltering.
From his proposal for educational reform intended to cultivate a love of learning that renders knowledge and truth, Milton moves to write *Areopagitica* in November of 1644. *Areopagitica* calls for an end to censorship, for:

> it will be primely to the discouragement of all learning, and the stop of Truth, not only by disexercising and blunting our abilities in what we know already but by hindering and cropping the discovery that might bee yet further made in religious and civill Wisdome (Areo 271)

Full knowledge renders the intended ends to Milton’s educational reform; thus, censorship only defeats the purpose of education, stunting it by filtering information. To meet the intended end of his educational reform, Milton must ensure free and open discourse and strive for an end to censorship. Censorship hinders society because it hinders not only education but also reform, for “when complaints are freely heard, deeply considered, and speedily reformed, then is the utmost bond of civil liberty attain’d” (Areo 266). Without such complaints, reform cannot take place; the complaints call attention to the areas of society which need reform.

Within *Areopagitica*, Milton holds that only through free and open discourse does the truth emerge. With the presence of censorship, those judging the acceptable and unacceptable works sent for publishing “leave us a pattern of their judgment”; however, their judgment may be wrong (Areo 293). Those judging may, even if they do not intend to, filter the truth. The judges intend to censor only blasphemous works, but “the knowledge of good is so involv’d and interwoven with the knowledge of evill, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discern’d” that the judges could easily misjudge the truth (Aer 287). Moreover, once such judges deny publishing rights of a work that holds truth or forbids the reading and circulation of such a work, the truth that work holds may be lost forever, for “revolutions of ages doe not oft
recover the losse of rejected Truth” (Aer 272). If censorship holds the potential to dismiss the truth, then censorship undermines the goal of education as Milton presents it within Of Education, for Milton does not subscribe to the belief that man has already found the truth but rather believes that man still searches for it – that to discover the truth, man must build on the knowledge he possesses to acquire more. The act of censorship inhibits the ability to “be still searching what we know not, by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it” (Aer 318).

Not only does censorship stunt education and the discovery of truth, but it also eradicates choice; for by leaving a pattern of judgment, censors choose the appropriate and inappropriate material for the other members of society. In a censored society, men may no longer judge a work for themselves and evaluate the merit of its content. They must accept another man’s past judgment. Moreover, members of that society cannot choose appropriate works for themselves, for those deemed inappropriate by others are no longer available. Milton holds that each man possesses the capability to choose his own reading material and judge it accordingly. Milton cites an anecdote in which the apostle Paul receives a vision from God in order to convey this idea, for within the vision, God confirms the his judgment: “Read any books what ever come to thy hands, for thou art sufficient both to judge aright, and to examine each matter” (Aer 285). Faith in man’s judgment leaves “the choice to each man’s discretion,” for God “trusts him with gift of reason to be his own chooser” (Aer 285, 286). By inhibiting choice, censorship destroys reason, “for reason is but choosing” (Aer 296).

In Paradise Lost, the manner with which Raphael answers Adam and Eve’s questions in search of knowledge serves as a form of censorship, for he appears to have limits on the information that he may reveal. For example, when Adam asks about the war in Heaven,
Raphael hesitates both he answers, questioning whether or not it is lawful for him to tell the story. As God proclaims the ordinance disallowing Adam and Eve from eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, the knowledge of good and evil is not available to the pair. Because God prohibits Adam and Eve from full knowledge with the ordinance, Raphael’s responses to the pair’s questions reflect the restriction – enabling him to impart only limited information. The narrator advises the two to “know to know no more” (PL 4.775). Moreover, Satan deems the ordinance “reasonless,” for the ordinance denies Adam and Eve the ability to choose the knowledge to which they have access, which reflects Milton’s argument in Areopagitica.

Before their fall, Adam and Eve praise God; however, because they know nothing else, they praise and obey him due to their disposition to do so. Once Adam and Eve fall to temptation and taste the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, they acquire not only the knowledge of good and evil but an alternative to their disposition yielding choice. After having fallen, Adam observes: “God made thee of choice his own, and of his own/To serve him” (PL 10.766-767). Acquiring the knowledge of good and evil yields Adam and Eve the choice to accept or reject God as their sovereign, transforming the pair from beings of disposition into beings of choices. Moreover, the pair’s decision to both praise and obey God after having fallen confirms the Presbyter’s vision in Areopagitica; for after having acquired the knowledge of good and evil, the pair evaluate their state of affairs consequent to their disobedience, their former state yielded by obedience, and still decide to obey God. Echoing the assertion Milton proposes in Areopagitica that knowledge of good and evil is interwoven, Adam exclaims: “O goodness infinite, goodness immense!/That all this good of evil shall produce,/And evil turn to good” (PL 12.469-471). One cannot separate the knowledge of good from that of evil because from knowledge of evil arises knowledge of good. Due to this nature, Milton proposes in
Areopagitica the potential for “the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth” as yet another reason to prohibit censorship (Areo 288). By acquiring the knowledge of good and evil and experiencing their state of disobedience, the pair confirm their former state as the better state, and thus resolve to obey God with full confidence in their decision, for their knowledge eradicates the former doubt that led them onto the fall. While Adam and Eve cannot recover their state before their fall, their experience does teach them that it is better to obey God than to disobey God. Adam and Eve’s acquisition of knowledge not only yields them choice and enables them to uncover truth but also confirms their decision.

The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates

In The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, Milton outlines the conditions under which a nation’s subjects have the right to rebel against their ruler. Milton opens by attributing a lack of reason to men who remain loyal to their rulers rather than rebel upon enduring unjust acts. This opening establishes a stream of continuity throughout Of Education, Areopagitica, and The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates:

If Men within themselves would be governed by reason, and not generally give up their understanding…But being slaves within doores, no wonder they strive so much to have the public state conformably govern’d to the inward virtues rule. (TKM 347)

“Reason is but choosing,” Milton writes in Areopagitica. Therefore, his opening in The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates suggests that because men are not governed by reason, they do not possess a sense of choice (Aer 296). Referring to men as “slaves” furthers the concept of this suggested lack of choice; moreover, Milton suggests that men continue in their state because it is their disposition to do so. If men continue in the status quo due to their disposition rather than by choice, there is an absence of consent.
Milton recounts his conception of man’s move from the state of nature to government in order to argue that the subjects have the right to revolt against a “Tyrant” (TKM 351). He first asserts, “all men naturally were borne free,” but following the fall of Adam and Eve, men unite to protect themselves from “mutual injury, and joyntly to defend themselves against any that gave disturbance or opposition to such an agreement” (TKM 351, 352). However, in order to secure this union, the men need an authority empowered with the ability to punish those who violate the bond. Milton draws attention to the fact that before men establish an authority figure, the power of that authority lies in every one of them. Because each one possesses this authority, men establish an authority figure by empowering a single person with that very same power—“thir intrusted power, that justice which else every man by the bond of nature and of Cov’nant must have executed for himself and for one another” (TKM 352). In creating this authority, the men create a covenant to obey only the laws they create or to which they consent; moreover, “if the King or magistrate prov’d unfaithfull to his trust, the people would be disingag’d” from their obligation to him (TKM 352). Having given his account of the transition from the state of nature into a governed society, Milton concludes:

It being this manifest that the power of Kings and Magistrates is nothing else, but what is onely derivative, transferred and committed to them in trust from the people to the Common good of them all, in whom the power yet remaines fundamentally, and cannot be tak’n from them, without a violation of thir natural birthright (TKM 353)

Because the ruler derives his power from the people “both originally and naturally” and his purpose lies in serving the public good, the people must judge their ruler’s performance and determine whether they are subjects to a lawful ruler or a tyrant (TKM 355). If the subjects judge their ruler to be a tyrant, who fails to serve the public good, his failure in service disengages the subjects from adhering to the Covenant.
Milton’s argument for the subject’s right to rebel requires that the subjects possess both knowledge of their choice to rebel and the ability to judge their ruler’s performance. If the subjects lack awareness of choice, their consent may only derive from their disposition, for they would not know of another possibility available to them. Because the ruler’s performance, as judged by his subjects, either holds the subjects to or disengages them from the Covenant, the ruler cannot forever secure consent, for judgment of the ruler does not take place in only a moment but spans a continuous period of time. Since judgment must constantly take place, Milton requires that a consensual government must be secure at all times. Knowledge and the ability to judge serve as the necessary conditions for Milton’s consensual government:

No understanding man can bee ignorant that Covnants are ever made according to the present state of persons and of things…If I make a voluntary Covnant as with a man to doe him good, and he afterward prove a monster to me, I should conceive a disobligement…his after actions release me; nor know I a Covnant so sacred that withholds mee from demanding Justice on him (TKM 367-368).

The knowledge yielded by the educational reform described in Of Education as well as the free and open discourse in Areopagitica must be available for the people to reasonably judge their rulers. The knowledge made available by educational reform raises awareness of choice; Milton calls for political studies “to know the beginning, end, and reasons of politcall societies” (OE 235). The knowledge of choice leads to reasoning, for reason is choosing. As the people must constantly judge their ruler, the knowledge of a ruler’s actions must be available to the people for judgment. In order to reach a true judgment, the people’s knowledge cannot be construed by censorship; therefore, censorship must be abolished. If the people intend pursue their decisions to keep or depose a ruler, the people must also be steadfast in their decisions, a quality Milton attributes to proper education. The conditions Milton advocates in Of Education and Areopagitica serve as the necessary conditions for acceptance of The Tenure of Kings and
Magistrates, an outline for a consensual government framed in an argument for the subject’s right to rebel against a tyrant.

In his poetic account of Adam and Eve’s fall, Milton does not establish the necessary conditions, knowledge and free and open discourse, for Adam and Eve’s consent to God as their sovereign until the fall. The knowledge of good and evil establishes the conditions for choice followed by consent; thus, Adam and Eve cannot consent to God as their sovereign until after their “disobedience,” the acquisition of full knowledge. Until the acquisition of full knowledge, they obey God due to their disposition. While God imparts to each of them the ability to reason and choose, they do not truly have a choice because they are unaware of their choices, ignorant of the nature of the consequence, death, and lack the knowledge necessary to make choices with confidence. Both Adam and Eve judge their state of affairs throughout Paradise Lost; however, without a standard against which to measure before the fall, their judgments are only a reflection of their disposition. For example, before the fall, Adam judges Eden as a state of “happiness,” deems the prohibition, “This one, this easie charge,” and refers to death as “Som dreadful thing no doubt” (PL 4.417, 421, 426). Lacking full knowledge, Adam not only doubts God’s prohibition but also his personal judgment referring to death as “life” (PL 9.954). After falling to temptation and acquiring knowledge, Adam judges their state as “despoild/of all our good, sham’d, naked, miserable” (PL 9.1138-1139). Their state before the fall becomes the standard against which to measure their state after the fall, and their state after the fall becomes the standard against which to measure their state before the fall, which affirms Adam’s first judgment. Knowledge provides these standards for judgment as well as the choice between the two states – two components necessary for consent. With these components in place after the acquisition of knowledge, Adam and Eve then consent to God as their sovereign.
Conclusion

Milton’s *Of Education*, *Areopagitica*, and *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* build on one another as they describe both the necessary conditions for and an outline of a consensual government held together by knowledge and reason as their cohesive themes. Writing *Of Education* to promote educational reform and express the importance of knowledge and *Areopagitica* to advocate an end to censorship, an impediment to full knowledge and truth, Milton creates two works expressing the necessary conditions for consent. Building on these works, Milton writes *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* arguing for the subjects’ right to rebel against a tyrant on the grounds that the ruler derives his power from the people and their consent to his rule, which yields them the power to revoke it. However, the people must possess the knowledge of this choice and the knowledge preventing them from ignoring this choice due to the disposition. Furthermore, they must remain in a constant state of judgment, which requires a constant flow of information and opinions upon which to make these judgments, for consent must remain secure not only for a moment but the entirety of the sovereign’s rule. As applied to *Paradise Lost*, these prose works reveal that the necessary conditions for Adam and Eve’s consent to God’s rule are absent until after the acquisition of knowledge; thus Adam and Eve must acquire knowledge in order to consent. Knowledge yields Adam and Eve choice, for it renders the standard against which to measure their state of affairs and transforms them from beings motivated by their disposition to beings motivated by choice. Because knowledge creates this choice and choice creates the possibility for consent, Milton’s *Of Education*, *Areopagitica*, and *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* parallel the conclusions to both the Hobbesian and Rousseauian analyses of *Paradise Lost* – knowledge serves as the basis of consent.
CHAPTER 5

HIS CONTRIBUTION TO CONSENT THEORY

In producing works that both address religion and politics and incorporate consent as an underlying theme, Milton bridges not only classical consent theory with the Christian political doctrine from which it emerges but also classical consent theory with modern-day consent theory, anticipating the work of John Rawls. Analyzing Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost* in light of the consent theories propounded by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Hobbes supports the notion that knowledge is the basis of consent to authority. The Rousseauian analysis of *Paradise Lost* reveals that knowledge is a necessary component to consent, for it both yields choice and prevents consent derived from disposition. The Hobbesian analysis of *Paradise Lost* reveals that while knowledge creates the choice necessary for consent, the mere presence of choice is still insufficient to effect true consent without the knowledge to both understand and judge the terms of this consent.

Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in complex ways often illustrates the ideas presented in his prose works *Of Education, Areopagitica*, and *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, which taken as a whole, build into an argument for knowledge as the basis of consent. Advocating educational reform and an end to censorship, *Of Education* and *Areopagitica* outline the means to the knowledge necessary for consent. In *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, Milton outlines the citizen’s right to rebel against a tyrant, for just as citizens consent to his rule, they reserve the
right to revoke their consent; however, the knowledge acquired from an educational system as well as a community characterized by the uncensored free-flow of ideas presented in either public debate or written documents serves as the basis from which citizens judge the authority to which they consent.

In advocating both education and public discussion, Milton anticipates the work of the modern consent theorist John Rawls. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls offers the original position as a precise account of a fair choice position for the principles of justice regulating the basic structure of society. Rawls takes consent theory beyond the realm of consent to a government with authority over society and expands it into consent to the structure of society from which institutions, including government, emerge. Rawls’s *Theory of Justice* demonstrates that not only government but also justice must be the product of agreement. Justice must necessarily regulate the basic structure of society to ensure the fair distribution of goods as well as its members’ equal opportunity to realize their goals and share these goods. Rawls establishes impartiality and equality in the original position with the veil of ignorance and veto rights held by each of the choosers. In the original position, the choosers select the principles of justice, which Rawls defines as “the principles that free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamental terms of their association” (10). Rawls argues for two principles of justice that emerge from the original position:

First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others. Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all. (Rawls 53)
Rawls proceeds to argue for the manner in which these principles of justice regulate the basic structure of society by outlining his vision of a “well-ordered society,” one “effectively regulated by a public conception of justice” (Rawls 4).

In outlining his vision of a “well-ordered society,” Rawls discusses the major social institutions, which include “the political constitution and the principal economic and social arrangements” (Rawls 4, 6). Addressing political justice, Rawls acknowledges that a political constitution is an example of imperfect procedural justice, an example of a circumstance where just procedures may still result in unjust outcomes; therefore, a just constitution must protect the most extensive scheme of liberties possible, a scheme which protects the individual as consistently possible with the whole as possible:

the constitution is to be a just procedure satisfying the requirements of equal liberty [the first principle of justice]; and second, it is to be framed so that of all the feasible just arrangements it is the one more likely than any other to result in a just and effective system of legislation (Rawls 194).

A just constitution results in both a representative government and the protection of individual liberties in the form of rights. The principle of equal liberty necessitates “equal participation,” which “requires that all citizens are to have an equal right to take part in, and to determine the outcome of, the constitutional process that establishes the laws with which they are to comply” (Rawls 194). Rawls further clarifies equal liberty as required by equal participation in stating that “its meaning, its extent, and the measures that enhance its worth” (Rawls 196). Equal participation means that each citizen’s vote holds equal weight in determining the outcome of elections, each citizen has equal access to public office, and each elected official represents an equal number of people. The extent of liberty refers to “the degree to which the constitution is majoritarian,” and in order to secure the greatest extent of liberty, Rawls advocates “bare-majority rule...for all significant political decisions unimpeded by constitutional constraints”
Having provided an account of the worth of liberty, Rawls then advocates measures to enhance the worth of liberty. These measures essentially mirror the measures advocated by Milton in his prose works; Rawls builds them on his first principle of justice. As Milton is a proponent of education and argues for educational reform in his *Of Education*, Rawls is also a proponent of education and argues for public funding of education, yielding equal access to education for all citizens. As Milton argues for “freedom of speech and assembly, and liberty of thought and conscience” in his *Areopagitica*, Rawls comments that, now, “a democratic regime presupposes” them; moreover, they are “not only required by the first principle of justice” but also “necessary if political affairs are to be conducted in a rational fashion” (Rawls 197). Not only should each citizen have the right to express his opinions in a public forum but each should also have access to these forums.

Rawls argues for equal access to these forums as the “means to be informed about political issues…how proposals affect their well-being and which policies advance their conception of the public good” (Rawls 198). Milton writes that citizens must be in a constant state of judgment to determine whether they will continue to consent to their government, and suggested in *Of Education* and *Areopagitica*, both educational reform and free public forums yield the knowledge required to render these judgments. In line with Milton’s argument, Rawls advocates equal access for citizens as the means to gain the knowledge to judge the manner with which citizens cast their votes and participate in government. While Milton, in his *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, argues that citizens may revoke their consent by rebelling against a tyrant, Rawls argues that citizens may express their discontent with a public official, essentially
revoke their consent, by voting him out of office. In either case, both Milton and Rawls advocate measures that enhance the citizens’ ability to judge through the acquisition of knowledge. Knowledge is required not only for choice but also for judgments made pertaining to choice, the exercise of an individual’s will, and consent. Knowledge is the basis of consent.

Milton’s contribution to society extends beyond his participation in the English Revolution, the dissemination of radical ideas through his prose works, and the artistic impact of his poetry. His works are relevant to consent theory. Consent theory is grounded in practical Christian doctrine, which not only emphasizes the individual and free will but also defines consent in these terms. Consent theory simply shifts the focus from morality and religion to politics. Milton’s works address both religion and politics. *Paradise Lost* emphasizes Adam and Eve’s will much as non-Calvinist Christian doctrine did and as consent theory would, for the characters’ will serves as their consent to God’s. Milton works from the Garden of Eden, the ultimate State of Nature, to their willing consent to justify the ways of God to men. Milton’s contemporary Hobbes and later Rousseau each works from the State of Nature, with obviously different conceptions of the State of Nature, to man’s consent as the basis for legitimate sovereignty. The Hobbesian and Rousseauean analyses of *Paradise Lost* suggest that, as post-lapsarian readers must understand the matter, only after Adam and Eve acquire full knowledge can they exercise their will and consent to obey God, for their knowledge yields the choice necessary for consent. The acquisition of knowledge both ensures an understanding of the terms to which they consent and guards against consent derived from disposition.

Emphasizing education, an end to censorship, and choice, Milton’s *Of Education*, *Areopagitica*, and *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* support these analyses, for they also construct an argument supporting knowledge as the basis for consent. Milton’s *Of Education*
and *Areopagitica* pertain to the means to knowledge, while *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* provides the reason for which this knowledge is the basis of consent. Knowledge is required in order to not only consent once but also to remain in a constant state of judgment determining whether or not a citizen continues to consent to that authority. Milton’s works are not only relevant to classical consent theory but to contemporary consent theory as well. In his *Theory of Justice*, John Rawls argues that public discussion and education are both necessary to ensure the stability and the worth of liberty. Milton anticipates Rawls, for both acknowledge that an educated public is requisite for liberty because the people must be informed to make choices and exercise their will through their participation in government. Both the relevancy of his works to consent theory and his anticipation of contemporary consent theorist John Rawls carve Milton a place in consent theory for his comprehension of knowledge as the basis of consent.
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