

Alex Pepe  
Mrs. Pomerantz  
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## Intelligence Lost

John Milton's epic poem Paradise Lost ultimately fails to imbue an intelligent reader with religious vivacity due to its insistence on the logical fallacy that knowledge is considered evil in the eyes of God. The mere suggestion of it runs a jagged crack throughout the foundation of the story, and it ultimately crumbles under both the contradictions, as well as the implications posed by such an inane suggestion.

There seems to be a general theme throughout the story, right down to the geography of the Garden of Eden that suggests that knowledge is a factor of evil. The Garden's two tallest trees are a Tree of Life and a Tree of Knowledge. The first time these trees appear, it is made quite clear what Milton's stance on knowledge truly is: "And all amid them stood the Tree of Life, High eminent, blooming Ambrosial Fruit of vegetable Gold; and next to Life our Death the Tree of Knowledge grew fast by, Knowledge of Good brought dear by knowing ill" (Milton 90). Right off the bat, knowledge is considered the exact opposite of life, compared side by side with death. And, right off the bat, this viewpoint is met with a contradiction: God gave Adam and Eve free will. Free will entails thought; thought is the product of intelligence, which implies one has used knowledge to achieve daily living. If this connection is correct, that means that the Tree of Knowledge is an odious monument to free will, completely going against what God was trying to accomplish upon creation of the Garden and Life. Without knowledge, there is no intelligence; without intelligence, there is no thought; without thought, there is no free will.

Thus, another contradiction of this story is presented: God gave man free will to do as he pleased, but cursed man with damnation when that free will was exercised. Thus, one may think

all he likes, but when one learns something, he is damned to Hell. The use of one of God's gifts leads to damnation. The implications of this are rather dire, for it means that everyone who has ever had a thought in their head are the people populating Hell, including John Milton himself for having the capacity to write such a poem. On the other side of the coin, those who have never used their brain for anything, religious or otherwise, are those populating Heaven.

So then, a question is posed: Why did God deign to give man free will if that will cannot be exercised without the penalty of damnation? The answer is simple: control. God knew of the connection between free will and knowledge, but wanted to have control over its distribution. Thus, when Adam becomes curious about his surroundings, he is rebuked by Raphael: "Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid, leave them to God above, him serve and fear; Of other creatures, as him pleases best, wherever plac't, let him dispose: joy thou in what he gives to thee, this Paradise and thy fair Eve: Heav'n is for thee too high to know what passes there; be lowly wise: think only what concerns thee and thy being" (Milton 189). Essentially, Raphael just told Adam to mind his own business. Is this any way for an angel to treat someone in the quest for understanding his surroundings? Apparently, Adam should only be concerned with what God tells him to be concerned with, what God tells him to think, and what God tells him to do to best worship God. By a long shot, this does not fall within the parameters of the definition of free will.

Well then, if free will is all about control, then how did Adam and Eve end up falling from grace themselves? The answer lies in the Tree of Knowledge, and Satan's main role in this story. Satan convinces Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge under the reasoning that knowledge of good and evil makes it easier to do good (222), and then Eve starts to question why God has forbidden the Tree of Knowledge after all: "Thy praise hee also who forbids thy

use, conceals not from us, naming thee the Tree Of Knowledge, knowledge of both good and evil; forbids us then to taste, but his forbidding commends thee more, while it infers the good by thee communicated, and our want: for good unknown, sure is not had, or had and yet unknown, is as not had at all. In plain then, what forbids he but to know, forbids us good, forbids us to be wise?" (Milton 223). And there at last is free will thinking in its full fruition: Eve's line of thinking is strewn with unanswered inquiries as to why a tree named Knowledge is forbidden, and whether God forbids them to be wise, or forbids them to know what pure good itself is. Thus, in order to learn, she exercises her free will to eat the apple, and falls from grace.

God never expected man to obey his order to not eat from the Tree of Knowledge. God speaks of man in this way himself: "For man will heark'n to his glozing lies, and easily transgress the sole command, sole pledge of his obedience, so will fall hee and his faithless progeny: whose fault? Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of mee all he could have; I made him just and right, sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (Milton 63). Thus, God has given man the free will not to life, but to fall. His sole rule was not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, but if man has free will, he will inevitably eat from the Tree at some point or another. Man was damned from creation, and it doesn't seem like something a just and caring God would intentionally create.

This is because Milton does not think of God as just and caring. God denounces free will and reason himself, and by naming the Tree of Knowledge as he does, he denounces knowledge as well. He denounces it directly, too: "What pleasure I from such obedience paid, when Will and Reason (Reason is also choice), useless and vain, of freedom both despoil'd, made passive both, had serv'd necessity, not mee. They therefore as to right belong'd, so were created, nor can justly accuse thir maker, or thir making, or thir Fate; as if Predestination over rul'd thir will,

dispos'd by absolute decree or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed thir own revolt, not I: if I foreknew, foreknowledge had no influence on their fault" (Milton 64). God essentially states that he prefers those without knowledge or will or reason, thus stating that he prefers those without thoughts in their head. This can explain why he punishes Adam and Eve as harshly as he does, with sin and death (Milton 241), as well as the pain of childbirth (Milton 240) and the changing of seasons (Milton 253). He punishes them for daring to think, as he would for anyone that thinks. Thus, knowledge is evil in his eyes, intelligence is evil in his eyes, thought is evil in his eyes, and the creation he imbued with free will is damned to hell unless they do not exercise that free will.

No intelligent reader would ever agree that knowledge is evil, the idea that it even could be is ludicrous. Thus, with all the contradictions littering John Milton's Paradise Lost, the story just seems that much more fantastical than real. It does nothing to convince a reader of its merit, and relies solely on religion to make its point for it. According to it, Hell would contain all of the thinkers and philosophers, while Heaven would contain all of the unintelligent people who have never had a thought in their lifetimes. To an intelligent reader, Hell sounds like the more attractive destination.