

Man and satan – kindred spirits in a chaotic universe

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



Perhaps the most seductive method of interpreting existence is through the bifocal lenses of morality. Whether in a religious or non-religious sense, almost every civilization, institution, and human has had its own demarcation of Good and Evil. Ironically, these various entities have so infinitely many variations of the moral code that it is futile to attempt to find unifying characteristics among them other than the essential ideas that make them moral codes. Fortunately, there are other ways to look at the world. Were it not for these alternative perspectives, it would be impossible to sort through the infinite value judgements and restrictions put on the human race by its various moralities, and the occasional brilliant individual who manages to transcend the moral system would necessarily be a perversion of man. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan is Milton's medium for depicting this brilliant, fiery independence from the restrictions placed on the human spirit by whatever religious or moral system may attempt define and constrain it. Satan is the aspect of humanity that strays from the path of God and ceases to see the universe in terms of Good and Evil. Similarly, while Satan may be responsible for humanity's fall, it is this very fall that makes us human as we understand the word today. It is in this way that Milton not only explains the ways of God to man, but at the same time makes it clear that these ways of God make us incapable of following the path he has laid out for us. When issues of religion and morality are put aside and the conflict between God and Satan is seen solely as a conflict between two separate entities, Satan is nothing more than a rebel who would relate with Cromwell, Milton, and other revolutionaries of the day in England. Instead of malice, hatred, and evil many of the qualities exemplified by Satan are admired by

humanity as some of the highest possible virtues. After his expulsion from heaven, Satan reflects upon his situation and demands of himself “unconquerable will,” (Book I, 106) “courage never to submit or yield,” (108) and his own personal “glory.” (110) It is important to remember that before Satan was the archfiend he was one of the most powerful angels in heaven. He is an exceptional character, with a will and an intellect capable of questioning and even fighting God, the highest power in the universe. While some may see Satan’s rebellion as a repugnant affront to everything good and holy, those who are not concerned with the good and holy would see Satan as an immense power to be feared with a will and courage worthy of true admiration. Furthermore, Satan is much more than a one-dimensional entity capable solely of pure evil. His introspection makes it clear that life as the lord of Hell involves more than just corrupting humanity and plotting revenge against God. In fact, while God is spared many human emotions such as doubt, loss, and the pain of defeat due to his omniscience and omnipotence, Satan does not have this convenience. While Satan possesses plenty of qualities that would be certainly evil, they are all undeniably human qualities. Because of this Satan embodies not only all the qualities that we, as humans admire and strive towards, but also all of the less pleasant human emotions that make him even more approachable and understandable as a character. Because Satan’s fall bears such remarkable parallel to the fall of man it is necessary to adopt a perspective that departs from the oppressive morality of God. The fate of the two are intertwined- to condemn Satan is to condemn man, and the harshest judgment would be brought down upon men who exhibit the highest level of independence,

passion, and philosophical integrity. Satan is a mirror off of which the essence of man is reflects, and does so brilliantly at times. More importantly, he shows us that man's essence is such that man is free to perpetually transcend his essence and reach for whatever infinite possibilities lay outside the boundaries laid down by even God himself. It is essential to accept Satan's existence in order to accept the state of man. For example, Satan's fall occurred at the first moment that he conceived of disobeying God's will, at which point his daughter, Sin, " a goddess armed," (Book 2, line 757) emerged from his head. This birth is identical to that of Athena, the Greek Goddess of wisdom. The significance is that Satan is not inherently evil. Instead evil was something that he created by exercising thought and free will. Furthermore, the fruit from the tree of knowledge is the cause of Adam and Eve's expulsion from Paradise. It is this parallel that provides an essential insight into the nature of the condition shared by all men. It is the ability to possess knowledge that provides man with a will that is free to depart from the path of God. " Reason also is choice." (Book 3, line 108) Really, man's fall occurred when God gave him free will. Regardless of any sin man may have committed, the moment man was free he no longer was merely another essence in the mind of God, but an individual capable of determining his own limitless essence. Paradise is the original state of painless oblivion in which man cannot make for himself a hell by thinking, and Satan is whatever force initially removes man from oblivion. Perhaps if man had the same omniscience as God he would understand the ways of the lord and keep from his renegade path. Nonetheless, there are some contradictions in the essential nature of an all-knowing, all-powerful, yet at

the same time judgement-casting being. If God is free, he is making decisions with no precedent and no laws to determine his decision. He would be paralyzed in Nirvana and existence would be, essentially, empty. On the other hand, God, in his total-knowledge of the universe, may be ruling over the fate of man with what he knows to be the immutable, universal laws of existence. Not only would this put God in the position of a mere errand jockey for some other arbitrary force, but God's role as creator of the universe would put the universe in a strange, flickering limbo state. All of these possibilities may be perfectly feasible when you think about some of the crazy things in this existence, for example gravity and Catholicism. Nonetheless, it is probably more reasonable to believe that the nature of God's existence is beyond the realm of human comprehension. Thus, by explaining the fashion in which man was expelled from Paradise, Milton makes it clear that man's salvation, soul, essence, and fate is up to him. We have lost the paradise of intimacy with God and the convenience of living within the scope of his omnipotence. We are alone and ignorant in a chaotic universe, where man's free will rules over God's intended essence. While the desire to seek comfort and guidance towards salvation from God may be strong, the most we can know in terms of understanding the ways of God is that we have been cast from Paradise and in the end, we will have to choose if salvation is even what we want. And maybe salvation is what we need after all. Without God's guidance or promise, maybe the real answer is to accept this reality, now, with the knowledge that it is impossible to condemn something as brilliant as the human spirit, and it is better to be free in any Hell than a slave in Heaven.