

The complex character of satan and his motivation

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



Satan's Reason

The character of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a different portrayal than traditional biblical teachings imply. The Christian tradition provides a dichotomist view of heaven and hell, good and evil, God and Satan. Milton's theology is different in that it forces the reader to think more critically about the character of Satan, and how he fits in with the story of the fortunate fall. Milton appeals to the fallen reader as well, by creating Satan as a more dynamic character. The reader sees him in several situations: at war with God, ruling in hell, and tempting Eve. While Satan does not appear significantly after the fall, he is a present figure leading up to Adam and Eve's temptation. Satan, as a character, is also easier to sympathize with in Milton's theology. He continues to exist in Hell, but experiences paradise. He is the most powerful of Hell, but weakest of Heaven. The overarching irony of *Paradise Lost* is that Satan should be seen as the opposition to God and all things holy, but yet he offers some of the most logical reasoning in the poem. Satan uses his own intuition to appeal to Adam and Eve's reason, which ultimately results in their fall.

Satan's affinity for logic and reason is first displayed clearly in Book II when Hell's council is deliberating on a plan of action to enact in order to fight back at God. There are suggestions for starting another war in Heaven, or sitting idly by and avoiding retaliation, but Satan's response to these suggestions is what displays his reason. He responds that both war and peace against God are useless. "For He ... still first and last will reign sole king, and of his kingdom lose no part by our revolt, but over Hell extend his empire and with iron sceptre rule"(323-7). He then counters with the

suggestion that God be attacked through his greatest creation: man. He characterizes man as “ created like us, though less in power and excellence”(349-50). Man is one of God’s original and prized creations, but is also much weaker than any of the fallen angels.

Satan is unique in the fact that he seems to be the only one of Hell’s council who learned from the loss to God in the great war. He notes that they have already been banished to Hell, and will be forced to live in servitude, so neither war nor peace is the answer to how the group should proceed. They instead set their sights on human beings because they will be much more easily defeated. While Satan displays a higher level of reasoning in this situation, it is used for the purpose of defeating the perfection that exists in paradise. Reason, in regards to Satan, carries a negative connotation that may also be seen as sneaky or conniving, which are both characteristics often attributed to Satan. When focusing on Satan’s reasoning in the previous section, it is important to take stock of Scott Elledge’s notes on reason. If reasoning is divided into two categories (discursive and intuition) which does Satan’s qualify as? It is more likely that Satan would, like angels, depend on intuition. If he is following the laws of his “ intuitive intelligence” (Elledge 464) instead of a logical process that leads to conclusions, then one would be led to believe that Satan follows the same line of reasoning that the angels, like Raphael utilize. If this conclusion proves true, it only strengthens the theory that Satan is created with the same variety and level of reasoning as angels, but not man.

The next situation in which Satan's reasoning may be examined is in his interaction with Eve in Book IX that leads to the fall. What makes this scene particularly relevant is that examination shows that Adam and Eve's reasoning is much different from Satan's innately, but when Satan appeals to Eve's discursive reason, suddenly, persuasion is much easier. As Book IX opens, the reader sees clearly Adam and Eve's use of discursive reasoning as they decided whether to complete the daily chores together or separately. When Eve is working to convince Adam that they should complete the tasks separately, she appeals to the logical part of his brain, as a means of persuasion. She suggests, " Let us divide our labors—thou, where choice leads thee, or where most needs"(214-15). Eve appeals to Adam's reason here because she tells him that the work load has grown, but the number of laborers has not. She makes a logical argument in saying that the work will be done more quickly if they each focus on a specific area, for him, in the woods, and her, in the flowers. Adam is hesitant first, fearing that God has warned them of dangers that lurk if they do not obey his commands. Eve's response to Adam's hesitation, though, is indicative of some much deeper reasoning. She says, " How are we happy, still in fear of harm?"(325). This question is one of the most important lines leading up to the fall, because it implies that Eve, and now Adam have questioned their happiness, and the perfection of paradise. She uses the appeal of discursive reasoning to make Adam question his own happiness, and the freedom that he is allowed in Paradise.

Finally, when Satan comes into contact with Eve, he also appeals to her discursive reasoning in order to persuade her to eat the forbidden fruit. She

marvels at his ability to speak as he occupies the body of a serpent. She asks, “ What may this mean? Language of Man pronounced by tongue of brute, and human sense expressed!”(553-4). First, Eve is amazed by the animal that possesses the ability to speak intellectually. She clearly places importance upon higher thinking and reasoning skills, as that is largely what divides her from the animals that she coexists with in the garden. Next, she assumes that this knowledge indicates that the animal is superior, and never considers its knowledge to be a threat. When Satan tempts Eve to eat of the forbidden tree, he does so in a manner which appeals to her logically. He says, “ Ye shall not die. How should ye? By the fruit? It gives you life to knowledge. By the threatener? Look on me, me who have touched and tasted, yet both live”(685-8). The way in which his reason works is literally. He says that he too ate of the fruit and gained its knowledge without repercussion of death. What Eve fails to see is that Satan’s literal appeal does not address the eventual death that she and Adam will face if they eat from the tree. Their warning from God only states that the punishment will be death. Satan knows that the literal and immediate death will appeal to Eve’s logical reasoning. If the serpent has not died immediately after consuming the forbidden fruit, then logically, the warning no longer applies.

In the end, the characters of Satan and Adam and Eve all utilize different kinds of reasoning throughout Milton’s Paradise Lost. Satan, like an angel, relies more on his own intuition of right and wrong, whereas Adam and Eve rely on a more literal, and logical kind of reasoning, which is discursive. This difference eventually hurts Man because Satan is intuitive enough to appeal to Man’s logic in order to persuade Eve to eat the forbidden fruit.

Works Cited: Elledge, Scott. *Paradise Lost: an authoritative text, backgrounds and sources*. 2nd ed. New York: W. W. Norton, 1993. Print.

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