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# The Conceptual Worlds of Milton and Goethe

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Graduate Faculty  
City College of New York

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*In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
English Literature*

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by

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July, 2012

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### *The Conceptual Worlds of Milton and Goethe*

This essay will analyze Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe's understanding of the world through an interpretation of *Faust* Part One and Two as well as John Milton's view of the world through an interpretation of "Paradise Lost". Both of these conceptual worlds, though similar in many regards, have remarkable variations in their understanding of the human experience, morality, and most importantly, the pathway to redemption. The primary reason for writing this essay is to examine how the works in question with over 100 years between their compositions serve as paradigms for the ideological shift in the conceptual understanding of the world between the mid-17<sup>th</sup> and the early-19<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

In its organization, this essay moves backwards discussing the more recent work *Faust* first, then it moves to the later work "Paradise Lost" where the comparisons between the two become more explicit. There was no intentional choice to use this backwards model. The essay is not concerned with a systematic or chronological process of ideological evolution that occurs during the time between the compositions of each work. Therefore, the order of the works in discussion has minimal effect on the main topic of the essay. Also, here there is no emphasis placed on *how* the conceptual worlds changed during the time period between each work, as tracing such a process would be an arduous topic better left for another essay. The purpose of this essay is to use critical interpretations of each work in order to highlight the ideological differences as they are presented in the conceptual worlds of each work. Using this approach, the essay then analyzes how each work read separately and in conjunction with one other provides a lens which unveils the conceptual world of the respective time period, as shown through literature.

## Conceptual world of Faust

Goethe's conceptual world of *Faust*, in essence, is a cyclical one; it is a world of continuous creation and destruction. Human beings partake in both acts, creating and destroying in their never ending pursuit for more. The world of *Faust* does not have a clearly defined system of morals, (as one may find within works whose frameworks are governed by the dominant contemporary religions that have texts and traditions that support and uphold their values.) This is more than likely because this work was written in an age dominated by empirical thought, where man's ability to reason and solve problems took precedence over God and religion. A preeminent man of reason as well as a student of the natural sciences, Goethe was not religious in the orthodox sense. He despised the practices as well as the teachings of the church and at best could be described as a skeptical Christian. Providing rationale to such frame of mind, in his essay *Goethe's Religion* Walter Naumann writes, "The faith in the revelation on which the Christian Church rests, had been gradually weakened by the rationalistic attitude of the eighteenth century. At the end of the century, many intellectually prominent men had lost that faith entirely, but they were uneasy or not at peace." (Naumann, 190). Goethe's loss of faith, or skepticism is most assuredly revealed in *Faust*; rather than God and his divine laws being the ultimate symbol of good in *Faust*, what defines good for Goethe, as well as what provides meaning to life is adhering to the 'creative force' through ones actions, by desiring to do more, better oneself, strive, and fulfill ones role of service in the natural progression of life. Needless to say, this belief lies in stark contrast to the traditional Judeo-Christian doctrines that are centered on man living for God.

In his book *Goethe's Key to Faust*, William Page Andrews relates: in a letter written to Frau v. Schiller on April 14, 1798 eight years before the completion of the preliminary version of

*Faust* Part I, Goethe describes what he calls the ‘creative force’, a force that controls all of life, “a force constantly giving itself forth in creative action, evolving itself and sustaining the life produced,” (Andrews, pp 12). Broadening this definition, the term *creative force* explicitly refers to how the natural world and its inhabitants are always in a perpetual state of metamorphosis, a process of evolution through either creation or destruction, sometimes with both processes occurring simultaneously. Neither creation nor destruction has any intrinsic moral value as both can lead to creation as well as to good, with the essence of good being God. Therefore creation and destruction are both equally essential processes within the ‘creative force’. In fact, destruction is even understood as a type of creation as well as a facilitator to creation, a topic that will be discussed in depth in the discussion of Mephistopheles. Aligning with Andrew’s belief, in his book *Goethe*, Henry Hatfield understands the conceptual world of *Faust* as a world of the eternal, in which the perpetual dynamics and processes of the universe, creation and destruction, occur at an incomprehensible speed. This creates a Ying and Yan-like dynamic, a world of darkness and light where each force is a part of a divine plan; hence: “Under the aspect of eternity, even the wildest tempests appear as parts of a divinely ordained plan...” (Hatfield, 139).

From a moral perspective, in *Faust* the ‘creative force’, is a part of what is good as it is governed by the ultimate representative of good, God. Likewise to Andrews and Hatfield (as well as many other critics), it is my understanding that in *Faust*, God operates as an overseer of his own divine workings. This makes sense as the Prologue presents Faust as a man who under God’s consent will be tempted by Mephistopheles. We see in this scene that not only does Mephistopheles need consent, but he is also limited in what he can do to Faust. God says to Mephistopheles: “As long as on the earth he shall survive, so long you’ll meet no prohibition.” (Prologue, 316-317). This segment of the play emphasizes the idea that all workings of the

universe are controlled and operate within a divine framework that is governed by God. In his essay, Naumann proposes an argument largely contrary to this; he writes:

God, for Goethe, is manifested and can be apprehended only in and through the existing universe. He does not stand outside as its Creator, as he does in the Christian philosophies... There is no God in Goethe's conception outside the working and living universe, which the pantheists call 'Nature,' comprising everything that exists.

(Naumann, 189-190)

For Naumann, God in *Faust* is not outside of the 'creative force', God *is* the creative force; he is at once creation and destruction, and the author of both. However, when applying Naumann's approach literally to *Faust* the structure of the play is at once undone. I contend that in *Faust* God *must* stand outside of the existing universe, because if he is both good and evil, creation and destruction, darkness and light, what is to be said of Mephistopheles? Has he no agency? The play would suggest otherwise, as Mephistopheles is most entertaining of all the characters and functions with a perceptible level of autonomy, though limited. In the Prologue God clearly wagers with a force outside of himself and viewed in its entirety, the entire play is based on a man who struggles with two opposing polar forces that negate one another. In no way can God be both. Naumann's approach views God and Mephistopheles as one. This belief negates the distinction between good and evil, thus making any attempt to differentiate the two and/or interpret the meaning/implications of Faust's actions from a moral perspective useless. The ending of the Part One becomes incomprehensibly inaccessible as the reader has no way of interpreting Faust being "saved"; moreover the purpose of the wager made in the Prologue becomes equally obscured. In sum, in using Naumann's approach, the topic of morality becomes irrelevant as there is no way to weigh individual responsibility and accountability. Yet, there is no doubt that the play is heavily invested in the topic of human morality, as Faust's wager is explicitly for his eternal soul, and the events that transpire throughout are essentially those

consisting of Faust's moral evolution, so to speak<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, in understanding God as entirely one with the existing world and all of its inhabitants, the play would instantly lose several layers of complexity in regards to the understanding of man and his role within the conceptual world of *Faust*.

Though differing in opinion in regards to the separation of the Creator and his creations and of good and evil, likewise to my own understanding of the play, Naumann's conceptual world of *Faust* does acknowledge the value of human action. He writes: "To recognize the working of this universe, to be active in it- that is our duty" (Naumann, 189). In fact, this subject of action and its degree of importance in the play is one that many critics have written about. Andrews says: "The one and only way of happiness [in Goethe's conceptual world], as being the way of *service* (his emphasis) the functioning of the individual part in accord with the evolutionary tendency of all existence," (Andrews, Intro, xi). According to Andrews, man finds meaning in life through his actions that are a part of the creative cycle; man is good so long as his actions are in harmony with the creative cycle and do not remove him from it. Both Naumann and Andrews recognize God as part of and inseparable from the existing world. Therefore, performing human action equates to serving God. I agree with the idea that in *Faust* it is imperative man must act, because in the play actions are paramount, as they determine everything. However, the idea that human action is only measured by its effect on the eternal creation process is far too simplistic. This conception reduces the entire play to one that can be read in stages of action vs inaction, without any analysis of consequence, implications and/or the meaning of actions.

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<sup>1</sup> From a holistic point of view the events of the play compose what can arguably be considered a microcosm of the human experience.



Author Joseph-Francois Angelloz provides a different take on the role of action, one that further extends the former and in the process touches on my topic of interest, morality. Angelloz interprets from *Faust* that: “the goal of human existence is constructive activity in the service of mankind”. (Angelloz, 295). Rather than simply evaluating activity and inactivity solely in regards to their (respective) effects on the ‘creative force’, Angelloz attributes purpose and meaning to human actions in *Faust* providing a deeper more rich understanding of the play. In recognizing action as a “service”, the role man chooses to take in the creative process and the intentions behind his decisions become what shape his moral make-up. Therefore, in the conceptual world of the play, the significance and moral interpretation of a man’s life is composed by a combination of his choices and intentions, *and* in the larger sphere how his actions impact the overarching ‘creative force’. These are the factors that ultimately shape one’s reality, moral disposition, and (arguably) the eternal fate of one’s soul.

## **Human Desire**

In *Faust Part One*, Faust is a man who has given up on life. He is a professor who has striven to acquire vast sums of knowledge and as a result is learned, yet he suffers from a deep dissatisfaction with his life. His unhappiness results both from his obsession with acquiring knowledge of things beyond possibility and the years he has lost in this vain pursuit. He has studied philosophy, jurisprudence, medicine and theology, (Goethe, Night, 355). In many regards, Faust resembles Goethe, who beyond his great achievements as a writer, was also a scientist passionately involved in the studies of the natural sciences. Goethe studied colour theory, morphology, geology, mineralogy, and meteorology. Also, like Faust, Goethe was often

afflicted with restlessness, anxiety and periods of depression that resulted from his obsessive preoccupation with the future and his desire to possess knowledge of things inexplicable.

William Page Andrews says of Goethe:

Was not the young poet himself distressed by the passion for knowledge, and the martyrdom of doubt? Whence came the thought to him, to flee into a supernatural realm, to call to him the invisible powers? Was he not himself plunged for a long time in the visions of the *illuminati*; which even gave him the idea *that he would be able to invent a religion?*"

(Andrews, 6).

Author Calvin Thomas writes in *Goethe*:

The germ of the poem is despair of the intellectual life. At the time of his early musings on the theme Goethe himself had felt that despair acutely. He had tasted of good academic learning in the fields of law, philosophy, logic, ancient literature, chemistry, medicine, and had found it all very unrefreshing. It offered no nourishment for the soul.

(Thomas, 328-329)

Much of the dissatisfaction found in *Faust*, particularly in the earlier books is a reflection of the author, as many of the questions that troubled Goethe are addressed in the play. Though the degree of the author's personal investment in *Faust* is limited (and not of major importance in the purport of this essay), this connection is made for the reader because understanding the author/protagonist relationship is essential in understanding part of how *Faust* and *Faust* are shaped by Goethe's own struggles and ideological metamorphosis that took place over the many years he spent writing the play.

In the play Goethe makes it quite clear that studying is all *Faust* has really done, meaning he has not done anything practical or useful with his knowledge. *Faust* seeks knowledge as a means to happiness and personal satisfaction, yet it has the opposite effect. As a result of what he learns through his studies, he is eventually distraught by the realization that there are things he can never and will never learn or understand. *Faust* is brought to terms with his human limitations and he vainly seeks to break free. Angelloz describes *Faust* as seeking the *Streben*; the pathetic effort to extend his limits, (Angelloz, 289). We see this desire in *Night* where *Faust*

relates: “So that I may perceive whatever holds the world together in its inmost folds, see all its seeds its working power...I am not like the gods! Feel it I must. I’m like the worm that burrows through the dust.” (Goethe, *Night*, 382, 652). In this scene of despair we see that Faust’s desires exceed possibility, as he desires to be more than a man, to know all, see all, and be like a God. This moment also reveals something more; that is to say, in his pursuit of the *Streben* we also see that Faust’s desire is twofold. He seeks both knowledge and *experience* in their fullest sense. Thomas writes: “He dreams of putting off the trammels of the flesh, of becoming part of nature’s life-blood, of mystic illumination, and of divine activity.” (Thomas, 331). In the same vein, Angelloz writes: “[*Faust* is] the drama of the man who strives with all his powers for reintegration with the Infinite.” (Angelloz, 287). According to these similar understandings, the reasons why Faust has such impossible desires is because he attempts to view and experience life itself as a conceptual whole, whilst attempting to break free from his place within the order, the place of a man.

Ironically, it is implied by God in the *Prologue* that Faust’s desire to attain impossible knowledge and experience is a part of man’s developmental process. In other words these misleading desires that Faust has are *supposed* to afflict him. In the *Prologue in Heaven* God says to Mephistopheles: “Man errs as long as he doth strive,” (Goethe, *Prologue*, 317). Here, the word “strive” has several possible meanings. As mentioned earlier in this essay, partaking in Goethe’s conceptual world involves action as each individual must play his or her role in accordance with the natural order. Therefore, striving through one’s actions can be understood as a part of the creative force, as this is how man finds fulfillment and purpose. Yet, Faust does not strive through activity. Rather, he strives through his imagination as he merely wishes on the impossible. In fact, he is so far removed from the desires to perform physical and earthly action,

his “service”, that he contemplates suicide. Faust becomes idle and he operates as a counterproductive element to the ‘creative force’, as his participatory actions cease. Faust’s striving places him in a position of resistance and contention with the overarching ‘creative force’. Also, if analyzing such behavior in respect to the divine, Faust can be understood as evil; he desires to be like a God, thus his striving results in his straying away from God. In both understandings of the conceptual world, either the Pantheistic approach, or the approach where God is understood as overseer, Faust’s striving is understood as disruptive to say the least. Yet, as mentioned in the Prologue man needs to strive, as this paradoxical compulsion contributes to the ‘creative force’, and one’s discovery of God, and/or the eternal goodness. Therefore Man is faced with a predicament; he must strive through his actions to find happiness and meaning in life, but if unchecked, it is his striving that can also lead to an acute sentiment of unhappiness, and jeopardize the fate of his eternal soul.

Because of the predicament it creates, the human quest for fulfillment and happiness, striving, plays a particularly interesting role in *Faust*. In the Prologue, Mephistopheles has this to say about humans’ gift of reason which leads man to strive:

A little better would he live poor wight, had you not given him that gleam of heavenly light. He calls it Reason, only to pollute its use by being brutaler than any brute. It seems to me, if you’ll allow, Your Grace, He’s like a grasshopper, that long-legged race That’s made to fly and flying spring And in the grass to sing the same old thing. If in the grass he always were reposing! But in each filthy heap he keeps on nosing.

(Goethe Prologue 283-292)

Though using sophistry in his reasoning, Mephistopheles is spot on in his metaphorical analogy. Faust is indeed tortured by his providential gifts of reason and intellect. In his quest for knowledge Faust pollutes or misuses his ability by desiring things that he should not, desires that if fulfilled will remove him from the creative cycle. Mephistopheles uses a false pretense of empathy in implying that this insatiable compulsion to both be and do more is not Faust’s fault

but rather, God's; yet this is wrong; having free-will and the gift of reason, man is made responsible for his own actions. Faust is merely confused and thus made slightly vulnerable to Mephistopheles rhetoric. However, further examining the quote, a grasshopper leaps and sees the sun in glimpses and whilst in the air is given the momentary gift of flight; yet, this creature must eventually land and return to its realm, the ground. Likewise, Faust through his acquired knowledge and gift of reason is able to develop a falsely misguided sense of ascendance. Yet, just as gains this temporary feeling at the height of his leap, his academic pinnacle, he then descends as he comes to the realization of his limitations, and is deeply bothered by them. Metaphorically speaking, once Faust is exposed to the idea of higher knowledge (like the grasshoppers exposure to momentary flight), rather than continuing his movement or progression through activity, he becomes unwilling to return to the ground. He ceases his activity. Yet, we know the grasshopper must return to the ground not only to complete the physical motion of leaping but also to continue its progression through life. In an extract from *Wilhelm Meister's Travels* Goethe eloquently explains:

Every human being, from the earliest moment of his life, is first unconscious, then half-conscious, and at last wholly so: he finds himself forever controlled, limited in his position; but as no one knows the end and aim of his existence, or rather, as its secret is withheld by the hand of the Most High, he therefore only gropes about, grasps at, leaves hold, stands still, moves, lingers and worries, and so on in manifold ways, as all the errors which confuse us arise.

(Andrews, Intro, ix)

This quote explains how every man at some point in his life comes to terms with his limitations, but it is those men who become obsessively bothered and/or preoccupied with this realization that stray away from the right path. Therefore, God's gift of reason comes at a price; one is awakened to things that are great and beyond, but it is one's responsibility to remain involved in

earthly day-to-day affairs, whilst knowing that there are things beyond control, explanation and reach.

In Part One, Faust is unable to let go of his overly ambitious thoughts and as he becomes increasingly bothered by his limitations, he allows his mind to create the illusion of confinement. With his studies and within his study, Faust confines himself. We see this in *Night* when Faust describes his study.

Woe I am stuck and forced to dwell still in this musty, cursed cell? Where even heaven's dear light strains but dimly through the painted panes! Hemmed in by all this heap of books Their gnawing worms, amid their dust, while to the arches, in all the nooks, are smoke-stained papers midst them thrust, boxes and glasses round me crammed, and instruments in cases hurled, ancestral stuff around me jammed That is your world! That's called a world!

(Goethe, *Night*, 397)

Notice some of the words Faust uses, such as “stuck” “forced” “cursed” “hemmed” “crammed” “hurled” and “jammed”. His reflection on his study is internalized. He is a physically free man - Faust is not literally confined to his study- but in his own mind he is confined. Angelloz writes: “...shut up in his laboratory, he has known only lifeless theory and has never discovered the verdant tree of life”. (Angelloz, 289-290). Faust convinces himself that his study is the reality of his world in its totality. The reality is that the world is outside: it is everywhere. Yet, he feels trapped in the cell of his study as well as in the cell of his body. Even with his impressive knowledge, Faust is aware that like his books, he too will expire and cease to exist, that his knowledge, no matter how vast, does not grant transcendence or immortality. The dust, must, worms, and material objects of his study emphasize the imagery of worldly decay and stagnation, grimly reminding him of his own mortality. Paradoxically, in the above excerpt from *Night* the heavenly light that shines through the window can be metaphorically understood as both a sign of hope and a glimpse of the unreachable. It is at once both a symbol of the world that exists beyond Faust's study and the preoccupation that consumes him. It is a symbol of life itself, full

of possibility and splendor, as well as an agonizing reminder of a world that contains knowledge and experience that exceeds man's limitations.

Faust most assuredly knows, but refuses to acknowledge that the world of his study is not the real world. His preoccupation and self-delusion cause him to forget and/or fail to appreciate the limitless amounts of knowledge and experience that the real world has to offer. Arguably this denial results from his excessive knowledge that clouds his thoughts. Faust, falls into the trap that Mephistopheles tries to lure the reader into with his grasshopper analogy. The world is not a "filthy heap", as Mephistopheles describes nor is it a musty study, as Faust convinces himself. The world is filled with both the possibilities of boundless experience and opportunities for happiness, just as it is also composed as Faust sees it, a place of insufficiency, a place that is unknowable, and unattainable. The world is at once all of these places, but how man experiences life within it is based on perspective. The play presents Faust's delusion of confinement as one of the ways in which an individual's mind can become tainted through an unrestrained desire for knowledge, thus causing one to see the world as Faust does.

Mephistopheles feeds on Faust's confusion and uses it to his vantage; he insists that reason is the cause of Faust's unhappiness. Yet, as Joakim Reinhard writes in his essay *Goethe's Mephistopheles*: "The same devil that here mocks at human reason may be very well aware indeed that reason and science, when properly employed, will prove "man's highest powers". (Reinhard, 82). In this regard it is Faust's ability of reason that is his prime faculty, not merely in the sense of academic enlightenment but also in regards to its role in the salvation of one's eternal soul through its function of evading evil. In the *Prologue*, God hints at this in the line: "A good man, though his striving be obscure, remains aware that there is one right way." (Goethe, Prologue, 329). In this regard, though Mephistopheles plays a role in assisting Faust in

committing evil acts, acts that obscure the path to the “right way”. It is the gift of reason, that enables Faust to find his way back to the right path. This is why God accepts Mephistopheles challenge in the Prologue without hesitation. In the Prologue, Mephistopheles is convinced that if he is allowed to influence Faust and reveal to Faust the forbidden things he desires, he will be able to claim Faust’s soul. Yet, Goethe’s God knows, and (some critics suggest Faust knows as well) what John Donne stated in his Holy Sonnet XIV nearly two hundred years earlier: “Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend”. God knows that though Faust will be tempted by Mephistopheles and will even commit evil in excess, the sheep will find its way back to the shepherd because reason, a part of God, is in man. It is the very same gift of reason and intellect that can potentially lead man to stray (if misguided or abused) that has the power to lead him back once properly harnessed. This of course proves true in the ending of the play as Faust escapes the grasp of Mephistopheles, who is outmaneuvered by a man of Reason. Yet, it is worth noting that Faust *needs* the experience of Mephistopheles in order to find his way back to the right path through literally *experiencing* the fault in his ways, and learning from his mistakes. In this sense, evil operates as means with which to exercise Faust’s faculty of reason. Of course being a preeminent man of reason, Faust prevails. Having the divine gift or reason explains why, a man who sins throughout his lifetime, even as excessively and deliberately as Faust does in Part One of the play, is able to eventually find the path of light, as Faust does in the end of Part Two.



## Role of Mephistopheles

Backtracking slightly, because Faust's confusion is so strong in the early scenes of the play, he seeks escape. Faust uses his self-perpetuated unhappiness to rationalize his desires to escape reality, as well as to abandon his role of service within the 'creative force' of life. In order to gain this escape, Faust seeks the aid of Mephistopheles. In introducing himself to Faust, Mephistopheles self-describes, "Part of that power which would the evil ever do, and ever does the good," (Goethe Study 1335). In Goethe's world, the devil is a symbolic representation of aimless destruction and negation, a self-fulfilling evil. Yet, Mephistopheles is a conundrum as his destruction and evil ultimately perpetuate creation and goodness. In fact, in regards to the universal understanding of this conceptual world, there can be no such thing as aimless destruction, as even destruction has a purpose. Though he operates as a force of destruction and evil, Mephistopheles actions and his influence eventually lead to good; thus, he too shares a role of service in perpetuating the 'creative force'. In the study, Faust does not comprehend Mephistopheles opening riddle at first, but Mephistopheles elaborates, "But I'm part of the part which at the first was all, part of the darkness that gave birth to light" (Goethe Study 1349). In this statement Mephistopheles reveals (perhaps unknowingly) that he too is a part of a divine plan, the he is just as much a "servant"<sup>2</sup> as Faust. This understanding of evil explains Goethe's understating that there is such thing as necessary and/or purposeful evil that ultimately leads to the creation of good.

One of the perplexing effects that Mephistopheles has on *Faust* is that he serves as a stimulant. In the scene titled *Night*, Faust has become increasingly distressed in his study, to the point at which he is about to commit suicide in order to escape his mortal life. In *deus ex*

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<sup>2</sup> God refers to Faust as his servant in the *Prologue* ln. 299

*machina* fashion, the sound of bells and a choral song prevent him from drinking the poison. Though spared, his mood does not change and he remains wallowing in idle thought. This is where Mephistopheles becomes useful to God. Mephistopheles (or evil) is used as a tool; he is inserted into the play and becomes God's worker who "stirs" things up for Faust. This works because Mephistopheles is compelled to do the devil's *work* as he operates as a force; and despite being the source of evil, he provides man with much needed motivation. In his book Thomas writes:

It is he who supplies the motive power without which man would soon come to complete stagnation... His function in the divine government of the world is to incite men to action by holding before them the lure of pleasure, of satisfaction. (Thomas, 338).

In concordance with this sentiment Hatfield writes:

From the lord's point of view, which is essentially that of the poem, Mephisto's activities are a part of the plan of the world; he is the gadfly, we recall, the unconscious instrument of the good, and paradoxically, of Faust's ultimately salvation. (Hatfield, 148).

Thomas and Hatfield assuredly derive their analyses from the Prologue where God says to Mephistopheles: "Mankind's activity can languish all too easily, a man soon loves unhampered rest; Hence, gladly I give him a comrade such as you, who stirs and works and must, as devil do." (Goethe, Prologue, 342-343). In the above excerpts Thomas uses the words: "the divine government of the world" and Hatfield the words: "the lord's point of view...that of the poem". Both of these understandings of the play reiterate the idea of divine governance, where God freely allows events to occur, and forces to operate, yet paradoxically, everything is still limited. In describing Mephistopheles, Thomas writes that the devil has a "function" and Hatfield describes the character as an "unconscious instrument". In both cases the devil of the play (and of Goethe's conceptual world) is simply a force, or instrument that operates under the system of divine governance, the lords will.

Henry Hatfield postulates that another part of the reason why God lets Mephistopheles intervene is because He knows that human susceptibility to err, regardless of the extent (of the mistake), is not only necessary but also simply a part of life. Hatfield writes: “While it does not suggest that error is good in itself, it does imply that error is inseparable from activity, as friction is from motion; if Faust ceased to err, he would be essentially dead.” (Hatfield, 139-140) This understanding of error does two things it reestablishes the purposeful functioning’s of the metaphorical devil (who is at once error, destruction, and evil) within the overarching conceptual framework. That is to say not only is error a facilitator to human activity and motion, it is also quite literally what *moves* the ‘creative force’ (at least in regards to man). *Faust* illustrates that in life we are supposed to stumble along the way, a constant cycle of falling and picking oneself up. Necessary evil is what keeps Faust from becoming hazardously bored and/or restless; it is what motivates him. Mephistopheles insertion into the play not only gives the play it’s vitality, but it also quite literally gives Faust life, as before the devils arrival his life has become so stagnated that he is on the verge of suicide. However, as soon as Mephistopheles comes in contact with Faust, Faust is at once reawakened. For the reader, this effect is literally felt as the language of the text becomes revitalized and livelier. As the force of Mephistopheles takes over, Faust begins to operate with a renewed sense of purpose, though misguided at first. Mephistopheles cannot be given any sincere credit for his assistance in Faust’s reawakening, since he makes it a point to emphasize that assisting in good is never his intention. Yet, the devil nevertheless unintentionally plays a vital role in ensuring that man actively continues in his pursuits, pursuits which ultimately lead to creation and good.

Though it is not entirely apparent in Part One, the latter half of Part Two makes explicit the role of action in the conceptual world of the play. Action is what leads to Faust regaining his

sense of purpose. Over the course of time spent with Mephistopheles Faust becomes progressive and active, whereas in the opening of the play he was complacent and idle, only taking part in the world of his Study, a world of fruitless learning, inactivity and unnerving dissatisfaction. We see Faust's dispositional change in the language used in the scene Midnight:

What I have planned, I hasten to fulfil; Only the master's word has weight and might. Up from your couches, vassals, every man! Bring happily to sight my daring plan. Seize shovel, spade! With all your tools lay on! The work staked out must with all speed be done.

(Goethe Midnight 11501)

The mood here lies in stark contrast to the earlier scene in Faust's Study. Here there is much revealed about Goethe's understanding of what it means to be a human being. The words, "plan", "fulfill", "up", "seize", "lay on", "work", "speed", and "done" all suggest progression and action; something is in the process of being accomplished; man is attempting to *do* something. This act of doing and partaking is in essence what drives Goethe's cyclical world that is always changing. Goethe states: "The harmony of the individual part with the trend of the whole is, in his view, also the basis of all morality; morality being the action which is in accord with the immutable law or trend of existence." (Andrews, 20). It is through action that man becomes in sync with the creative force, and ultimately finds purpose and happiness. Faust eventually comes to this enlightened frame-of-mind, but it comes at the expense of him committing evil acts in the process. Faust's learning process, its consequences and their implications, evokes questions concerning morality, the next topic of discussion.

## Morality in Faust

Though I have emphasized that destruction itself is not intrinsically evil and that it actually has a purpose and upside, what makes Mephistopheles evil is that he destroys and partakes in evil acts as ends in themselves, and that he consciously has no desire to positively contribute to and/or facilitate the creative process. Therefore, from a moral perspective, because destruction is necessary, as it is simply a part of the life process, Mephistopheles can only be labeled as evil because of his *intentions* rather than the *effect of his actions*. As mentioned in earlier, the good and creation that emerge from the devils' heinous actions and destructive activities are merely byproducts, not his intention. In fact, the only reason good persists despite Mephistopheles incessant evil is because God presides over the conceptual world, and ensures that it good prevails. The same logic used for Mephistopheles morality applies to Faust but in a slightly different fashion. In applying a moral lens, in the larger sphere Faust is evil because he ceases to act and chooses to remove himself from the life cycle. It is neither the partnership/experience with Mephistopheles nor the atrocities committed with the aid Mephistopheles that make Faust evil, rather it is his intentions. Through Faust, we learn that human morality within the play, not unlike many modern conceptions of morality, is tied to intentions, rather than actions. Most contemporary religious followers would agree that the decisions we make and the intentions that guide them are what determine the ultimate fate of our souls and our moral standing before others and, most importantly, before God. In the larger conceptual world of the *Faust*, this is no exception. The decisions Faust makes and their intentions are the sole determinant in the moral shaping of his character. Yet we also learn that in the play there is a smaller world, the real world, where not only is Faust affected by his

decisions, but these decisions also have a direct effect on the lives of others. We see this in the tragedy of Gretchen (also known as Margaret).

Faust consciously chooses to join the devil with the intention of fulfilling his selfish desires, and he seduces Gretchen through the aid of Mephistopheles, which fittingly requires deceit and treachery. His interest in Gretchen is driven by his lustful desires. As a result of his ill intentions and his use of Mephistopheles, during her brief time spent with Faust, Gretchen is beset with a host of unfortunate events. Faust kills her brother, condemns her by impregnating her before marriage, tricks her into poisoning her own mother, and plays an indirect role in the death of their infant child; the end result of Faust's meddling is that Gretchen is put to death. This series of unfortunate events are a direct result of Faust's decisions, and he is made painfully aware of this in the final scenes of Part One. Here he begs for Gretchen to escape the prison cell with him in an attempt to escape the chaos he has unleashed: "Gretchen! Gretchen!... Hurry! Unless you hurry, we must pay for it dearly," (Goethe, *A Prison*, 4460, 4482). It is quite ironic that Faust begs for Gretchen in this scene. After joining forces with Mephistopheles, a symbol of treachery, evil and destruction, here Faust displays a level of naively unbecoming to his learnedness when he foolishly expects to have a positive outcome: that he and Gretchen could simply escape. Though Faust does not directly intend to cause harm to Gretchen or to any members of her family, because he chooses to use Mephistopheles' help, and his intentions in doing so, he becomes directly responsible for her fate. This illustrates that in the world of the play there is a correlation between ill intentions and their negative outcomes. In looking at the play as a whole, it can be reasonably assumed that Goethe is more interested in the sequential correlative nature of events as opposed to the individual negative outcomes Faust produces. We gain little from judging/evaluating Faust based on the harm he causes to Gretchen and her

family. This is something that I myself struggled with in trying to weigh the moral makeup of Faust as I attempted to understand the character from an ethical approach. However, we gain much more from *Faust* in understanding the processes which lead to the cycle of destruction: one ill intention after another; as well as the processes that break this cycle: change in disposition and well-intended, earnest intentions.

In Book Two there is another incident where Faust comes to terms with the fault in his decision to use Mephistopheles assistance. This occurs when Faust attempts to relocate the poor old man and woman and they are instead killed. In his essay Reinhard relates:

It is true that his intention is to have the poor man and woman placed somewhere else in a better house, yet when Mephistopheles and his three ruthless helpers set fire to the hut, and the other people perish, Faust is constrained to acknowledge that he himself is not altogether blameless.  
(Reinhard, 92)

Both the tragedy of Gretchen, and the incident with the old couple reveal that Faust cannot be excused for his actions, especially since although he is influenced by Mephistopheles his hand is never forced. Also given his extensive knowledge and ability to reason he is perfectly aware that leaving things in the hands of the devil is not the wisest of decisions. His use of evil comes at the price of Gretchen's life and those lives of every member in her immediate family as well as the lives of the old couple. These instances demonstrate Goethe's understanding of the communal nature of the world; not only are human beings an integral part of nature in the larger sense, meaning they occupy a key role within the 'creative force', but also we share the physical world with others whether we choose to acknowledge this or not. Therefore, our decisions and intentions not only play a role in shaping our lives and our moral disposition, but they can also affect the lives of others. In a conceptual world that is at best obscure in its understanding of God, this one element of universal interconnectedness gives human actions and decisions an indisputable measure with which to judge one another, and hold each other accountable for.

## Interpreting the end of Faust Part Two

In his time with Mephistopheles Faust is allowed to participate in an imaginative world of endless, empty and fantastical experience. He loses appreciation for both the value of human life and human experience. Instead of accepting reality and trying to make the most of his time on Earth, he tries to escape from it. He says to Mephistopheles: “What can the world afford me now?...I but with horror waken with the sun, I’d fain weep bitter tears, because I see another day that, in its course, for me will not fulfill one wish- not one...” (Goethe, Study, 1548,1554). Faust, is of course wrong, as the world has much to afford him, but he does not learn this until his time on earth comes close to its end in Part Two. In Part Two, Faust is able to find both meaning and direction for his life. Toward the latter half of Part Two Faust eventually has enough of Mephistopheles’ world and begins to desire reality, the same reality that he once believe had “nothing to afford him”. We see this transformation in an excerpt from Act V:

“...A fool! who thither turns his blinking eyes and dreams he’ll find his like above the skies. Let him stand fast and look around on earth; Not mute is this world to a man of worth. Why need he range through all eternity/ Here he can seize all that he knows to be. Thus let him wander down his earthly day; when spirits spook, let him pursue his way; let him find pain and bliss as on he stride, He! Every moment still unsatisfied.”

(Goethe. Midnight 11443)

After his quest for a moment of complete satisfaction does not yield the results he expected, Faust finally realizes that he has been wasting his time idly dreaming of the impossible and seeking knowledge and experience beyond both limitation and reality. Here in this excerpt we see that Faust reaches a moment of epiphany, where he suddenly understands that life is about reality, and that in life man experiences both “pain and bliss”; that there are things Man can know and things that Man will never know that he need not fret over. Faust acknowledges that both the things he needs and the desires he has must remain within the natural realm where he



can “seize all that he knows to be”. Naumann describes this newfound understanding as an experience of “reverence”, he writes: “ ‘Reverence’ is what Goethe calls the attitude which enables a person to find new faith in the world that surrounds him and to expect from it a meaning for his life.” (Naumann, 197). Faust is able to find meaning in his life through the very act of living. Elaborating on this point Thomas writes:

Looked at in the large ‘Faust’ is Goethe’s confession of faith in the goodness of life. I mean the worthwhileness of man’s life on earth, considered as its own end, its own reward...so man’s life on earth could not depend for its meaning or its warrant on anything outside itself.

(Thomas, 325, 347)

Using the combined approaches of both authors Naumann and Thomas, provides a lens from which one is able to interpret the *understanding* that Faust discovers. Faust realizes that not only were his desires misguided but the very purpose and value of his life is to live, that living is his reward. This new perspective is something that Faust was unable to discover in Part One, which is why he was deeply unsatisfied. However in Book Two of the play, despite knowing that he may never be fully satiated, the now changed Faust nearing the end of his life comes to the understanding that there is much satisfaction to be had in the limitless possibilities of experience and breadths of knowledge the natural world has to offer. Yet, in order to experience the happiness that results from such possibility one must actively participate in the ‘creative force’ whilst keeping all things in perspective, never becoming overly preoccupied with the dissatisfactions that inevitably arise as one comes to terms with one’s human limitations.

Faust’s transformation that occurs in Book Two completes what Calvin Thomas describes as a learning process. He writes: “In other words, life itself is to clear up his confusion with regards to life and to show him how he can best--- unconsciously, of course, --- serve the Lord.” (Thomas 348). According to Thomas’ understanding, man is supposed to learn both how

to live and what is right/good from the life experience itself. Using this lens, *Faust* in its entirety becomes a learning experience where the reader bears witness to a somewhat didactic example of at once a moral, spiritual, and ideological metamorphosis of a human being. Beyond the basic underlying presumption that one learns as one ages, a general understanding of the life process, the implications of Thomas' belief add yet another layer of complexity to the play. Thomas implies that by living and taking part in the creative cycle one serves the Lord. Yet, in serving this Lord there are no guidelines or a set framework that governs how exactly one is to serve. This lies in stark contrast to the traditional Judeo-Christian religions that not only require that one serves the Lord but also prescribe canonical doctrines for how one is to do so. Therefore, Thomas paints an elaborate though loose understanding for exactly what it means for one to serve the Lord in *Faust*; I argue that this loose understanding largely reflects Goethe's own religious skepticism within the play, as the author attempts to paint a divinely ordained conceptual world whilst having it inhabited by men of reason who are free to make their own rational decisions for how to discover and conform to the ways of this unreachable, and unknowable God. *Faust* is a world where man needs to find the right way, which is at once God, happiness, meaning, and peace, yet there is no prescribed way for how to do so, it is simply up to man's reason.

## Faust as a “good man”

Goethe does not make it entirely clear as to what it is that has sparked Faust’s sudden change in Part Two. One argument is that the change is a result of his sudden acknowledgement of his mortality as he has aged and is nearing the end of his pact with Mephistopheles. However, a more compelling argument is that Faust finally conforms to Goethe’s system of morality just as he was intended to as proclaimed in the Prologue: “A good man, though his striving be obscure, remains aware that there is one right way,” (Goethe, Prologue, 329). This quote when taken literally is quite perplexing when applied to the play, because if one were to analyze the sequence of events in the play using a morality scale of sorts, it is not entirely clear how it could be possible that Faust is a “good man”. The bad outweighs the good as the entire play with the exception of the ending consists of a man who struggles to find happiness, lives a life of debauchery, and plays a direct role in the deaths of innocents. Yet, somehow in the end he has a sudden change of outlook commits one charitable act, and at once all past events are seemingly forgotten and his soul is saved.

The quote from the Prologue “A good man, though his striving be obscure, remains aware that there is one right way,” implies that a preordained “good man” will stray from the right path as he strives, but because he is good he will find his way back in the end as his inherent goodness can only guide him to the right path. However, according to the structure of the play, and likewise Goethe’s understanding of morality, human goodness is not entirely determined by predestination or *innate* character traits. Either a man eventually learns through his experience and reasoning and finds the right path *and* actively treads it, or he does not and is not considered “good”. So in a nutshell, according to Goethe’s thought provoking ending in Part Two it is not the inception of the life cycle that determines the eternal moral disposition of man,

nor is it the middle process, but it is the end of the mortal life cycle; it is the summation of how much that man has learned, his actions, and most importantly his earnestness and his final intentions that determine his “goodness”. In his essay Reinhard elaborates on this point in describing why Mephistopheles loses the bet to God: “...for over a man whose entire mind has become imbued with the love of his neighbor, whose every thought is a wish to further the happiness of others—over such a man no devil, no armies of devils, have any power.” (Reinhard, 93). Charged as they are, Reinhard’s words contain a key message: even a man who has committed many sins and can justifiably be labeled as evil by others has the ability to save himself through earnest and good intentions. Elaborating on Reinhard’s message, it is simply not enough for a good man to merely remain aware of the right way and have good intentions; he must *act* accordingly with conviction thus having his actions reflect the ideals of what he believes is the right course of living. Since it is stated in the Prologue that a good man remains aware that there is a right way, a man must simply act on what he knows and feels is right, and in doing so he will both find and become good. Thus, by consciously acting with resolve on what one knows to be right all confusions will be clarified, and all mistakes will be purged as they are for Faust.

It might seem odd for us to label Faust as a good man, because it leaves the dangerous suggestion that there is no limit as to how much a man can err and yet still be saved and redeemed, through *self*. Note in Reinhard’s charged words in the previous paragraph he focuses on the now, what Faust is now committed to doing in the end of the play (helping drain the marsh). Yet, there is no mention of the past, the Faust who was responsible for the deaths of others. However, this radical approach to Faust’s morality is not all-together different from the Catholic belief. The idea that such a man like Faust can be saved is somewhat in concordance

with the Catholic understanding of confession and repentance. According to Catholicism, man can regain the grace of God (save his eternal soul) through partaking in earnest confession that is received by a priest who has the authority from God to perform such a rite. Regardless of the gravity of his sins, if this ritual is performed in earnestness man is forgiven. The key difference in *Faust* is that Goethe as mentioned earlier was not a Catholic (at least not openly) but rather a man of reason, which is why Faust is able to save himself through his own actions and reasoning, even after committing grave sins. In Catholicism salvation comes through God; on the contrary, for Goethe, a man of empirical reasoning, salvation and redemption come through experience, and ultimately self.

In understanding Faust as “saved” using either the understandings of saved by final intention, or saved by action hence rejoining the conceptual world, it is important to note that Faust’s life can be measured using two degrees. Thomas writes: “The blessed state is not a reward of particular merit but a stage of progress. This can only mean that Faust’s earthly life was good in the sight of the eternal, albeit some of it was bad in the sight of men.” (Thomas, 326). The danger the ending of the play presents if misinterpreted is that it is only the end of one’s life that matters. That is to say, all prior mistakes or sins up until the point of death become irrelevant when one is at death’s doorsteps. All one has to do is have a sudden change of heart like Faust does, and one is saved. However, what Thomas writes is key; the blessed state is “a stage of progress”; man has to eventually learn what is good. Yet, the wrong acts that are committed as part of this progression are not to be overlooked or seen as unimportant. Hence Faust is saved, but he is not necessarily a good man, in the eyes of man. The deaths of Gretchen and her family as well as the old couple *do* in fact matter, because their lives are just as valuable as Faust’s. Yet, because of the very framework of the play one is almost invited to overlook

these matters. The play itself focuses on one man, and it focuses on the larger sphere; it is in sum the examination of a human life in regards to the conceptual world of the author. The play is at best minimally concerned with the interrelations and moral laws of man. Therefore, from such a broad point of view the deaths of the innocents appear minor because the play is centered on Faust and his development. Yet, it is no intention of the author to suggest that Faust's actions are permissible. Rather, Goethe's intent is simply to show how one can make such mistakes, redeem oneself and find salvation. In fact it is necessary for the structure of the play that Faust commits his mistakes, because as mentioned earlier in the Prologue all men will err in their striving. With this in mind, it can be argued that Goethe uses Faust and all his imperfections as a didactic example to show how one can drastically lose ones way in life, and then make amends.

In his book titled *The Philosophy Of Goethe's Faust*, Thomas Davidson aptly identifies what I believe is perhaps Goethe's fundamental purpose in writing *Faust*. Davidson proposes: “[Goethe] would make it evident that disbelief in a controlling power of life, and the consequent idea of an unlimited freedom to pursue happiness as an aim in itself, is a fatally destructive mistake, from which error most of the miseries of mankind can be shown to arise.” (Davidson, intro, ix). Davidson's words combine many of the ideas already discussed including the idea that man is responsible for self, his actions as well as the role he chooses to play in the creative process. One of the most important ideas in the world of *Faust* is that each man must discover an aim for his life. In realizing that the world is governed by a “controlling power” each man must strive to find his place of service within this system. To seek pleasure and happiness without an aim would lead to unhappiness and as it would have no true purpose. It is clear in the conceptual world of the play that everything must have a purpose, and it is through fulfilling ones purpose that one finds happiness.

## Conceptual World of “Paradise Lost”

While the world of *Faust* is a cyclical one, the world of “Paradise Lost” is temporal. Therefore, there is no understanding of the world as a never ending creative process, but rather there is a clearly defined beginning and end. In this epic poem, time for man begins after the fall and ends on the Day of Judgment. While Goethe is primarily concerned with cyclical process of nature and the natural order, Milton is concerned with morality. In Milton’s world, man’s ultimate goal is to live out his mortal existence in such a prescribed manner that will enable him and future generations to find happiness through maintaining the right relationship with God. This is done by remaining as close to God as possible during one’s mortal existence, through following and upholding His will. Rather than an abstract sense of a “controlling power of life”, as in the case of *Faust*, in Milton’s conceptual world there is a more definitive system of divine justice that governs how the world operates, as well as the relationship between God and his creations; and man must conform to this order or risk jeopardizing his eternal life.

The laws of divine justice in “Paradise Lost” are simple and straightforward: If Milton’s conceptual world is to be understood from a hierarchal perspective, God is the creator as He has no natural superior, and by His very definition, He is at once, all powerful, all knowing and all that is good. Accordingly, everything that God creates is good and all of His actions are good. God and the laws of divine justice are one, therefore he is literally incapable of producing anything evil, or committing any evil actions. The universal rules that are set in place in regards to morality, sin and transgression are neither created nor enforced by God in the same way that a king or ruler can create and enforce his earthly laws. Man’s laws are created by man and they

can be easily changed or adjusted; they can be just or unjust, practical or irrational and they can be enforced/upheld either through direct consent of the people or through tyranny. Unlike the laws of man, which can be arbitrary, Gods laws embody who He is, are an extension of his goodness and are always a part of the divine plan. They cannot be changed just as God cannot change. His laws are always in the best interest of man, and are structured in such a way as to guide man back to God, and if followed will grant man eternal joy. God's rules are explained to man by Raphael as seen in Books V, VI, and VII and by Michael in Books XI and XII but they are not enforced as man has free will and is not obliged to comply; man has the choice to either abide or transgress. For Milton, human goodness is measured by one's ability to remain faithful to God through obeying and conforming to the laws of divine justice, through one's actions. In *Faust* human morality and goodness are also determined by man's decisions, their intentions and the role man occupies in the natural creative cycle. Yet, the difference is that in *Faust* morality is irrespective of God and/or a divine system of justice. In *Faust* the conception of goodness and the ideals of morality are shaped by humanity, whereas in "Paradise Lost" these ideals are established by God. These differences aside, what is important is that in both works decision is involved; man must be able to choose good.

On the other end of the spectrum, evil in "Paradise Lost" is what God forbids. Because God is good, anything that is in opposition to God or contrary to his will is evil. Therefore, what is evil is not so because God decides it is evil, but rather because God forbids it, it is evil. In other words, Milton's God does not freely/subjectively pick and choose what or what is not evil; only what is evil, can He forbid. As briefly mentioned earlier, all of Gods creations from their inception are good. However, after they are brought forth into the world these creations can become tainted and evil, as evil is a force that lingers both internally and externally and it can



corrupt, deceive, spread and manifest itself in several different ways. Because of its corruptive nature, for Milton evil represents a perversion of good. This is why one of the central themes in the poem is the idea that goodness is attained through paying a price: "...knowledge of good bought dear by knowing evil." (PL, IV, ln 222). Despite the problems and complications that evil presents, it is necessary, just as it is in the conceptual world of *Faust*; for Milton evil further augments goodness, and without the knowledge of evil, goodness is taken for granted and life itself loses some of its significance. This is explained by Brian Vickers in *The Oxford History of English Literature*: "Milton's concept of life 'in this world of evil' is one of struggle and testing: any praise for 'well doing' would be destroyed if people were protected from temptation. Human beings are responsible for their actions, as are nations." (Vickers, 196). Vickers words accurately sum up the purpose of evil according to Milton's conceptual understanding. Because he is constantly exposed to as well as susceptible to evil and temptation, man is placed in a position where he has to choose and think carefully about his actions, and their consequences; he is obliged to play a ceaseless balancing act in an attempt to have his "good" outweigh his evil. This struggle of course being necessary as the very measurement of man's worth in the larger sphere of the poem is determined by his degree of goodness, his relation to God.

For Milton, avoiding evil is a difficult ever-demanding task. What makes this moral balancing act particularly challenging is the fact that evil is manifested in many ways. Two of the primary ways are, it is either self-begotten or it is awakened through external temptation. Describing the former, in his preface C.S Lewis describes: "What we call bad things are good things perverted. This perversion arises when a conscious creature becomes more interested in itself than in god, and wishes to exist on its own. This is the sin of Pride", (C.S Lewis, 66). As we know, this is a part of what leads to Faust's downfall as he desires to be "like a God" in Part

One. This sin of Pride is also what leads to Satan's and man's downfall in "Paradise Lost" as these characters have aspirations that exceed their permissible limitations. Though it is the most consequential form of evil in "Paradise Lost", pride is merely one of the many types of internal evils that lurk within. This type of evil the 'self-begotten' presents a constant struggle as it never fully abates and always runs the risk of having the individual commit evil actions. The second type of sin, the 'external', is the kind that Satan metaphorically represents in his use of enticing persuasion that first entices then deceives first the Seraphim and then Eve in the Garden. In this regard, the use of Satan replicates the use of Mephistopheles in *Faust* who seduces Faust and with the opportunity of endless pleasures.

In "Paradise Lost" one thing is constant, the topic of morality. The plot of this poem is chiefly concerned with the right and wrong relationship to God and the most profound changes in the poem are those related to change in moral status. In creating this sort of work, Milton is very particular in establishing a clear distinction between good and evil. This is best executed through the character Satan, and I argue that Satan is made example of in order to show the reader what it means to be as far away from God as possible, how evil operates, and how easy it is to fall prey to the ever prevalent and seductive sin. Like Mephistopheles in *Faust*, Satan is used as a point of view- as a metaphorical embodiment of the forbidden things that we may at times desire. Analyzing Satan's character, and reading him the way Milton intended him to be read, provides the reader with a didactic reference for how to understand the all-important *divine justice* and live in accordance with this understanding.. Therefore, paying close attention to how Satan operates in the poem is essential in understanding how Milton's' world operates.

## Age of Skepticism

In the earlier books of “Paradise Lost” Satan is presented as a kind of lure for the reader. By this I mean, his characterization, especially in Books I and II is purposely meant to evoke feelings of empathy and understanding. He is magnificently described, given a surplus of heroic attributes and bestowed with desirable qualities that make him quite appealing. As a result of this portrayal, in his essay *A Defence of Poetry*, Percy Bysshe Shelley has this to say about Milton’s Satan. “Nothing can exceed the energy and magnificence of the character of Satan as expressed in ‘Paradise Lost,’” (Defence). The brief excerpts from Books I and II provided below that describe Satan support the rationale that explains how Shelley could have made such a claim:

To set himself [Satan] in glory above all his peers,  
He trusted to have equaled the most high,  
If he opposed; and with ambitious aim,  
Against the throne and monarchy of God...  
(PL, Book I, 39-42).

...the unconquerable will...  
and courage never to submit or yield...  
(PL, Book I, 106-108).

Satan except, none higher sat, with grave  
Aspect he rose, and in his rising seemed  
A pillar of state; deep on his front engraven  
Deliberation sat and public care;  
And princely counsel in his face yet shown  
(PL, Book II 300-304).

Satan, whom now transcendent glory raised  
Above his fellows, with monarchial pride  
Conscious of highest worth, unmoved thus spake  
(PL, Book II, 427-429 ).

These are merely a few examples of how Satan is described in the earlier books and this type figurative language is littered throughout some of the later books as well. As one can see, this characterization is both excessive and elaborate and it serves its purpose in making Satan falsely appear as an honorable yet fallen foe. The way Satan is constructed speaks to the structure of the poem and the conceptual world itself; evil is in abundance, it is everywhere surrounding us, it is tempting and deceptive as it can be made to appear as good, whereas goodness is also present but is has a much more subtle presence, and it is something that we must actively seek. Arguably, Milton deliberately presents Satan as a fierce and magnificent adversary of God in order to demonstrate to readers how alluringly and elegantly evil can be manifested in this world. Yet, just as Satan is presented in such glorious fashion, throughout the course of the poem this guise is methodically unveiled and Satan is exposed for who he truly is, a deceiver. However, in reading the poem it can be easy for a reader to overlook the moments of revelation but they are there. Yet, the contrasting moments of truth are not as elaborate, and they are fewer in number making it hard for the reader to piece together the full portrait of Satan's character.

Returning to Shelley's interpretation concerning the magnificence of Satan, the comment he presents is useful because it plays right into one of the central themes of the poem. This is the idea that, in Milton's conceptual world, anyone can be tempted and deceived by Satan who is at once, a metaphorical representation of evil that exists in the world, and a representation of the evil that is within us all. In the poem, Satan is so effective because one of his prime talents is his ability to deceive; he deceives himself, he deceives his fellow seraphim, and he deceives man in the poem, and through Milton's rhetoric Satan attempts to deceive the readers only so that they can recognize their folly in almost falling for his trap.

Evil can present itself in many forms as demonstrated in the debate in Book I where the fellow fallen Moloch, Belial, Mammon, and Beelzebub portray variances of evil. However, there is a specific reason why the *deceptive* nature of evil is so prevalent in the poem. Written in the age of skepticism over one hundred years before *Faust* and the Age of Reason, “Paradise Lost” is written for the audience of its time. As Craig B. Brush describes in his book titled *Montaigne and Bayle: Variations on the theme of Skepticism*: the skeptic doctrines were first fostered by Greek philosophers, and then by the 16<sup>th</sup> century French Renaissance writer Montaigne. In the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century during the composition of “Paradise Lost”, Academic Skepticism a form of philosophical skepticism was a predominant ideology. Academic Skepticism “refers to the view that human beings are incapable by their nature of knowing anything with certainty.” (Brush, pp, 4-6). This understanding purported the belief in the instability of reason and even the unreliability of the senses. The ideals of Academic Skepticism are reflected in “Paradise Lost” as the poem in many ways is an exercise of the reader’s ability to reason. Milton uses Satan in particular in an elaborate as well as persistent attempt to constantly influence the reader’s perception. Satan proposes grand arguments delivered with infectious passion, yet the logic within Satan’s reasoning is unsound, and it is the reader’s task to realize this. Milton lets us reason things out while explicitly and implicitly providing explanations and logic that supports events that unfold within the poem, so that in the end the reader can freely form his or her understanding of poem while using the divine system of justice as a framework. Milton’s play upon the skeptic doctrines through both Satan and the very style of the epic is what C.S Lewis calls “the poet’s unremitting manipulation of his readers...” (C.S Lewis 41). This “manipulation of the reader” perhaps contributed to Shelley’s praise of the character Satan, and it is also what has caused (and continues to cause) many critics to misinterpret Satan as the fallen hero of the

poem, whilst overlooking his contradictions and the fallacy within his logic. To realize how both Satan and the structure of the poem manipulate the reader it is worth noting how the character Satan is presented and developed.

## **Satan**

Before he became Satan, Lucifer was one of God's greatest and high ranking creations: "for great indeed/ his name, and high was his degree in heaven;/ his countenance, as the morning star that guides/ the starry flock, allured them, and with lies/ drew after him the third part of heaven's host" (PL, V, 706-710). Satan was a magnificent Seraphim who had all that God could bestow upon him. This is shown in the first part of this quote where we see Satan presented as a grand figure. Yet, even with his splendid outward appearance and his esteemed title, after the conjunction "and" we see the truth about Satan, that despite his appearance and countenance, he is a liar. This pattern repeats itself throughout the poem with Satan's rhetoric: First we are presented with the façade, and then we are given the truth. Sometimes this truth is apparent and presented in conjunction with the façade, as demonstrated in the above excerpt. However, other times and more often than not, we have to unravel the façade ourselves.

A large part of what gives Satan such potency within the poem is his ability to appear as a moral being who reasons and makes his decisions as a rational man would. In his *Defence*, Shelley says of Satan: "Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God, as one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture, is to one in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy..." (Defence). The reason why Shelley makes such a claim is the same reason why he is enamored by Satan's magnificence; it is a result of misinterpretation. However, it is

not difficult to see how Shelley could have made such an assertion. Satan is quite the orator, and in catering to his audience filled with skeptics who would undoubtedly scrutinize every word uttered by Satan, Milton devotes much of his poetic energy in developing Satan's arguments in such a way as to make them appear sound and even noble in some instances. The problem arises, as Shelley's interpretation reveals, when one is unable to recognize this deliberate deception.

In attempting to understand how many critics have read Satan in the same light as Shelley, it is not a far stretch to see how Satan can be understood as a persevering character. Entertaining Shelley's notion, Satan can be read as a superior moral being because throughout the entire poem, he relentlessly pursues a purpose which he believes to be excellent. However, if one is to unravel Satan's true *purpose* and identify what it is that he really wishes to accomplish then one will encounter a problem: It becomes increasingly unclear how Shelley defines and uses the word *moral* in his *Defence*. To better explain this, I will briefly analyze Satan's purpose and intentions.

One of the main arguments raised by Satan is his questioning of God's right to rule and his manner of ruling over the seraphim's. In his argument in Book I, Satan repeatedly emphasizes to the fellow fallen that it is not entirely clear why God is the authority. In fact, the question of authority is what began the war in heaven, as Beelzebub reveals in the beginning of Book I:

O prince, O chief of many thronèd powers,  
That led the embattled seraphim to war  
Under thy conduct, and in dreadful deeds  
Fearless, endangered heaven's perpetual king;  
And put to proof his high supremacy,  
Whether upheld by strength, or chance, or fate...  
(PL, Book I, 128- 133).

In these lines we see that the rebellion against God is provoked and led by Satan in his attempt to challenge God's authority. Satan firmly believes that God is an unfit and illegitimate ruler "whom thunder hath made greater", and Book I has many direct references to God as a "monarch", "tyrant of heaven", and "perpetual king" (PL, Book I, 42, 124, 131, 638). In sum, Satan uses his rhetoric to paint the picture of God as a tyrant in order to discredit Him and give merit to his rebellion. However, despite what Satan says Milton makes it clear that Satan is the one who is wrong and that jealousy and deceit are simply a part of his nature. In describing the character of God, Satan even goes as far as saying: "...to our grand foe,/ who now triumphs, and in the excess of joy/ Sole reigning holds the tyranny of heaven." (PL, Book I, 120). Therefore, faced with such a tyrannical and unjust ruler, Satan takes a liberalist approach and he perseveres and remains resolute in his opposition to God. As it is intended, this makes him appear as quite a remarkable figure since when experiencing hardship and injustice he neither yields nor does he play the role of dejected victim:

Receive thy new possessor: one who brings  
A mind not to be changed by place or time.  
The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.  
What matter where, if I be the same,  
And what I should be, all but less than he  
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least  
We shall be free...  
Here we may reign secure...  
Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.  
(PL, Book I, 252-263)

If taken for face value, Satan's words do present him as a superior moral being as he is a character who enduringly fights for liberation while being oppressed by an illegitimate tyrant. He remains unchanged and steadfast in his beliefs despite losing the battle. Yet, the implicit problem that lies within Satan's proclamations and the logic behind his decisions is that they are just



words, words that are false. Satan's words are well-crafted and warped to a considerable degree, making it quite easy for a reader to become entangled in his rhetoric.

In describing this crafty effect of deceiving the reader C.S Lewis writes that Milton provides to the reader: "...a façade of logical connections...the virtue of this is that it pulls our logical faculty to sleep and enables us to accept what we are given without question." (Lewis, 42). It is interesting to note that this deceptive effect can be produced with the character Satan, a biblical/metaphorical figure that has a well-established identity that far predates Milton's epic. This suggests that man can be deceived by evil even when it presents itself in a form that he knows he should be wary of. This is of course what happens to Eve in the Garden who is deceived despite being warned in advance that she will be tested. This demonstrates Milton's genius because even though the readers know that they should be wary of everything the character Satan says or does, his character is constructed in such a way that causes one to suspend judgment, and even run the risk of "understanding" him, just as Eve does.

Although he portrays character traits that are admirable, and appears to fight for a worthy cause Milton makes it clear that it is Satan's intentions and disposition that destroy all of his good qualities, and undermines his seemingly noble purpose. John M. Steadman explains in his essay *The Idea of Satan as the Hero of "Paradise Lost"*:

Many of the apparently heroic qualities that the devil displays-contempt of danger, fortitude of mind and body, prudence as adventurer and as leader-are, in fact, morally neutral; they can be, and often have been, exercised for both good and evil ends. In another context, they could have been associated with genuine heroic virtue; the example of the faithful angels is a case in point. Through Satan's alienation from good, these potentially laudable qualities have become depraved; and this depravity is implicit even in his earliest speeches.

(Steadman, 255)

Here, Steadman makes a key point, Satan is given heroic traits and does display admirable qualities, but the single most important quality he is lacking is goodness. Despite how he appears, and the words he uses, he never has good intentions. In fact, as he becomes increasingly evil and depraved, he loses even the last remnants of goodness and magnificence that he was bestowed upon his creation. Satan experiences a self-driven, self-destructive steady process of degradation where his lowliness in stature becomes directly correlated with his depravity, and as the poem progresses this becomes apparently clear. In the beginning of the poem he is a magnificent yet fallen angel, and in the end he is reduced to a snake that slithers in the dirt. Satan's downfall emphasizes the point that in the conceptual world of "Paradise Lost" God does not destroy people, they destroy themselves.

As mentioned earlier, Milton's world is governed by divine justice, and everything has its place within the order. Not only does Satan lack in goodness, but he also fails to acknowledge the laws of divine justice, and there are moments where he rants and raves as if these laws do not exist. To be fair, it can be argued that in the earlier books of the poem it is not entirely clear whether or not Satan understands how divine justice operates or if he does in fact know and simply chooses to challenge it. However, regardless of what he does know before the rebellion, it is unarguable that afterwards he does in fact learn that God is no tyrant, and He has legitimacy as ruler because He is the creator. This is a fact that is both unquestionable and unchallengeable. We know that Satan learns this after the fall, but the majority of his actions and words do not reflect upon his costly, acquired knowledge as he continues to seek revenge and produce evil.

Continuing this point, after his fall there are moments of revelation where Satan is forced to concede what he knows to be true and right. For example, in his earlier arguments, Satan characterizes God as a tyrant who relishes in his victory over the fallen and as one who would

demand the angels to “bow and sue for grace with suppliant knee” (PL Book I, 111-112). Yet we see that in Book IV Satan acknowledges that he was wrong for inciting a rebellion, and that his accusations are false: “Warring in heaven against heaven’s matchless king:/ Ah wherefore! He deserved no such return/ From me, whom he created what I was/ In that bright eminence, and with his good/ Upbraided none; nor was his service hard.” (PL Book IV, 41-45). Satan admits this to himself in soliloquy like fashion but he never utters such a confession to his fellow fallen. This failure to openly acknowledge his mistake can be attributed to his excessive and obstinate pride, which is his greatest weakness. Even though he knows the truth, he continues to deceive and mislead the fellow fallen and incite them even after they have been cast into hell. Through Satan’s confession that is deliberately intended for and directed at the reader, we learn that not only is God the legitimate and unquestionable ruler in Milton’s conceptual world, but also that because He *is* goodness, and His decisions and actions are not subject to scrutiny. Satan makes it clear that even attempting to put God under the microscope of judgment is a path to evil. Also, because of his meaningless decision to perpetuate evil, this confession has another effect; it shows the futility and desperation of evil, and its implicit contradiction.

The alleged harsh treatment that the angels received from God the alleged *tyrant* whilst in heaven is actually enacted upon them in hell by their equal, Satan. In hell, Satan is a *real* tyrant, and it becomes clear that Satan’s magnificent argument against God the alleged tyrant was not an argument for change in style of authority. Rather, it was an argument based solely on jealousy, one in which Satan had no intentions to abolish tyranny but rather he hoped to become the *new* tyrant. It is quite interesting to see Satan’s manner of ruling in Book II after Satan makes his proposition to the seraphim. Here, for the skeptic reader and non-skeptic alike, Satan’s façade is fully exposed and the blatant hypocrisy that he represents is revealed:

Thus saying rose  
The monarch, and prevented all reply....  
But they dreaded not more the adventure than his voice  
Forbidding; and at once with him they rose;  
Their rising all at once was as the sound  
Of thunder heard remote. Towards him they bend  
With awful reverence prone; and as a god  
Extol him equal to the highest in heaven...  
(PL Book II, 466-479)

Satan becomes the type of ruler that he so elegantly argues against, and his followers see this but only after it is too late. By the time they have realized their folly, they are silenced by their fear of his voice and they are forced to bow to him; a type of subjugated treatment they had never received in heaven. Again we see Milton's poetic genius because even the way Satan describes their former treatment in heaven in his argument is not how God actually ruled, but rather it is a distorted representation of how Satan imagines *he* would rule if he were God, and in hell he rules in exactly this fashion. Falling for Satan's trap and his hypocrisy is something that the fellow seraphim's, and later man, are defenseless to prevent. God describes in Book III: "For neither man nor angel can discern/ Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks/ Invisible, except to God alone..." (PL Book III, 682-684). This idea of a hidden unavoidable evil again plays right into the skeptic doctrine as it suggests a level of human vulnerability. Through the poem the reader is allowed to see how the undetected external evil operates and deceives others. Even after the fallen angels realize their mistake, Satan continues to use his language to disguise the fact that he is now a sovereign ruler, but for the careful reader, the guise has already been revealed, and for the Seraphim this knowledge has come too late. In this sense Milton uses the fallen Seraphim so that the reader can learn from their mistake; the mistake of being deceived by evil, one that anyone can make according to the skeptic doctrine, being that human reason is not dependable.

Beyond desiring to be a tyrant, Satan, like Faust also desires to be more than what he is; he wants to be God. The last lines in the above quote from Book II read: "and as a god/ extol

him equal to the highest in heaven..." (PL Book II, 479). This theme of wanting to be God is constant with Satan: "Than hell's dread emperor with pomp supreme, and Godlike imitated state..." (PL Book II, 510-511). Satan even attempts to literally re-create a Heaven in Hell by tricking his fellow fallen into building him a palace in Book V that resembles God's throne in Heaven. Like Faust, Satan is afflicted with the curse of insatiability, and has both unrealistic expectations and desires that exceed his limitations. He aspires beyond hope and possibility and having such desires is a large part of what leads him to his fall. Milton repeatedly makes this clear in his narration as he describes Satan as having: "fallacious hope", "false presumptuous hope", and being "thus high uplifted beyond hope", (PL, II, 7, 522, 568). Satan exemplifies that having such desires can not only lead to ceaseless unhappiness but can also result in ones fall from grace. In Milton's world just as it is in Goethe's, desiring to exceed ones given limitations, as well as desiring to have abilities beyond those already granted by God is a path toward evil and self-destruction.

Part of the reason why Satan desires to be God is because he associates God with power and authority. This is a correct association but it is an overly simplistic one. God is not only at the top of the hierarchal ladder because of his role as the creator, it is also (and arguably mainly) because of his goodness. Satan wrongly associates God's role as creator as being directly attributed to God's *power* and this causes Satan's jealousy. Satan sees God as most *powerful* while forgetting that God is also most *good*; the latter being the more complete way of understanding God as it does not lead to unwarranted questions of authority. Because he only thinks in terms of power, Satan only desires power which is a pointless aim in Milton's conceptual world. In this world there is only one ultimate power and that is God, who is at once empowered and limited by the overarching system of divine justice. Everything below God is

limited according to its preordained limitations. Therefore, no creature or any person can become more powerful than god, or more powerful than which they are intended; hence there is no purpose in seeking power as an end. In sum, the goal is to have likeness to God in goodness, not in power. This is because the ultimate aim for all creatures is to maintain the right relationship to God. Satan never realizes this, and arguably he is never supposed to as Milton uses Satan's critical mistake as an example to teach the reader, in his famously quoted attempt: "to justify the ways of God to men".

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, it is implied in "Paradise Lost" that goodness actually has more significance than power and authority. Moral worth, hierarchal rank, greatness, and ultimate happiness in Milton's conceptual world is all based on the amount of one's goodness. In this world goodness is the greatest quality that one can have, and it is demonstrated through ones actions. This is shown in Book III when God explains why the Son of God is extolled:

Because thou hast, though throned in highest bliss  
Equal to God, and equally enjoying  
Godlike fruition, quitted all to save  
A world from utter loss, and hast been found  
By merit more than birthright Son of God,  
Found worthiest to be so by being good.  
Far more than great or high; because in thee  
Love hath abounded more than glory abounds...  
(PI Book III, 305-312)

It is directly stated that The Son of God is by virtue of his *goodness* worthy of his title and rank. It is also important to note that his goodness is determined through his *action*, his merit and *intentions*, love. He does not have to volunteer himself for such a task, nor does he do it because he knows that it will bring him recognition or distinction amongst the celestial beings. He sacrifices himself simply out of love. Satan is the inverse; he speaks of liberation and freedom

yet behaves as a tyrant, and like the Son of God he also volunteers himself for a solo task; yet, his intention upon embarking on his “sacrificial” solo endeavor to redeem the fallen is to place himself above his peers. Satan’s intentions are both selfish and wrong because they are intended as an affront to God. Juxtaposing Satan’s actions against the Son of God’s is yet another example of Milton’s subtle yet didactic rhetoric that argues for the right course of living.

In Shelley’s argument Satan is described as a “superior moral being” when being compared to God. I entertained the argument in order to show how one could make such a proposition and to display the *moral* nature of Satan’s motives and decisions. Yet, there is something that I alluded to earlier that is inherently wrong with Shelley’s argument that makes it fundamentally flawed. This is the understanding of the word moral. Morality is tied to behavior, so for one to be considered a moral being, one must choose to make decisions that conform to what are considered the ideals of right human conduct. Therefore, one thing that is implicit in the understanding of the word moral is *choice*. Morality requires one to be able to differentiate between those actions which are right (good) and those which are wrong (evil) and to make a conscious free-willed choice as to which path to take. God cannot be considered as a moral being and the reason is simple. He is good by definition and is incapable of producing evil or choosing to commit an evil act, so that is taken care of. For Satan the question of morality is a bit more complex.

Satan’s choice to challenge God’s authority is not in accordance with the way the word ‘choice’ is generally understood. At times during the poem it seems as if Satan is driven by such an intense compulsion to resist God’s will that he can do nothing else: “To do aught good never will be our task, but ever do ill our sole delight, as being contrary to his high will whom we resist.” (Pl, I 159-162). This compulsion is driven by his pride. As mentioned earlier, Satan’s

pride is his greatest weakness; and, if attempting to understand him as a moral being, it is his greatest deficiency. Because of his pride Satan is unable to repent even though at times he momentarily considers the possibility:

But say I could repent and could obtain  
By act of grace my former state; how soon  
Would height recall high thoughts, how soon unsay  
What feigned submission swore: ease would recant  
Vows made in pain, as violent and void.  
(PL, IV 93-97)

Though he fails to understand the laws of divine justice, Satan knows himself pretty well and he is aware that within him lies a disdain for authority, an insatiable appetite for power, and an excessively unreasonable sense of pride. These character traits seem to be innate. That is to say that despite being made good as all of God's creations initially are, it is arguable that Satan is also created with a fundamental flaw that that will inevitably lead to his downfall. His obstinate pride, and ceaseless malevolence, is so compulsory in nature that at times Satan acts as a force rather than as a complete character, very much similar to Shakespeare's Iago. Adding to this complexity, what makes Satan's character so difficult to comprehend is the fact that he is able to differentiate between good and evil. Yet, because of the way Milton constructs Satan it is not entirely clear whether or not he is able to freely make decisions as to which path to choose.

Further complicating this issue of Satan's morality are the ideas of salvation and redemption. Generally speaking, when one chooses to be morally responsible and make morally wise decisions, there are always two factors that come into play: One is that the said individual believes that behaving in a morally acceptable way will somehow allow them to coexist in a society whilst having a clear conscience in regards to how they think of themselves, and how others view them. In sum, behaving morally will put the conscience at ease. The other belief is that living in such way will allow the individual to have a clear conscience in regards to how



their eternal soul is being shaped during their mortal existence. In sum, it allows an individual to imagine/hope that he or she will have a promising afterlife; it gives the individual the sense that he or she has a tangible sense of control over his or her ultimate fate. The second belief is the most important in regards to “Paradise Lost”. For Satan and the fallen Seraphim, there is no hope of salvation and/or redemption. This act of mercy is only offered to man as God explains in Book III:

...they themselves ordained their fall.  
The first sort by their own suggestion fell,  
Self-tempted, self-depraved: man falls deceived  
By the other first: man therefore shall find grace,  
The other none: in mercy and justice both...  
(PL, Book III, 128-132)

Satan is aware of this knowledge, and even if it were possible to be granted mercy, because of his pride, he would be unable to accept mercy. These factors play a major role in determining whether or not it is acceptable to view Satan as a moral being. When an individual knows that their end result is predetermined regardless of how they act, their intentions, and the decisions they make, it is quite easy to see how this foreknowledge changes everything. In understanding this simple fact it becomes even more implausible to interpret Satan as a moral being since he knows that there is literally no point in trying to be good, as it will not help him or change the mind of God. Therefore, even if he was not cursed with his deficiencies of pride and insatiability, and he actually wanted to sincerely repent, there would be no point as God has already sentenced the fallen. Taking these factors into consideration, contrary to Shelley’s belief it is impossible to understand either God or Satan as moral beings.

One final remark about Satan is the fact that his evilness is exploited by God. In *Faust*, destruction is a part of the natural creation cycle as it ultimately leads to more creation and evil in *Faust* is used as stimulant that initially leads man down the wrong path but ultimately back to

the right course of living. In “Paradise Lost” evil is used as a means to further augment goodness. C.S Lewis remarks: “As the angels point out, whoever tries to rebel against God produces the result opposite to his intention (VII, 613). At the end of the poem Adam is astonished at the power ‘that all this good of evil shall produce’ (XII, 470)” (Lewis, 67). In this sense, Satan is used by God in the same way that Mephistopheles is used; he essentially awakens man to the knowledge of both good and evil. This may help justify why Satan operates as a force of evil throughout the poem. By this I mean, in Milton’s conceptual world evil is a necessity as it further augments and explicates goodness, and although it is quite destructive, it is a force that is limited and harnessed by God. Rather than having evil represented as an abstract force Milton assigns the role of evil to the character Satan and Goethe follows suit using Mephistopheles. This embodiment of a force makes evil more explicit, eloquent and real, so that the reader can see how it operates, its irrationality, mercilessness and hopelessness. Therefore, Satan becomes the metaphorical representation of evil and consequently, he cannot change because evil does not change; he is ceaseless in his malevolence, because evil does not rest, and so on and so forth. In this regard, Satan becomes the ultimate tool for both Milton and the structure of the conceptual world of the poem itself.

It is quite a feat that Milton is able to personify such an abstract force as evil so imaginatively. Here in this excerpt we see Satan attempt to explain how he feels about his decisions, and what is so remarkable is that if evil were a character this is perhaps how it would think:

Now land, now sea, and shores with forest crowned,  
Rocks, dens, and caves; but I in none of these  
Find place or refuge; and the more I see  
Pleasures about me, so much more I feel  
Torment within me, as from the hateful siege  
Of contraries; all good to me becomes

Bane, and in heaven much worse would be my state,  
But neither here seek I, no nor in heaven  
To dwell, unless by mastering heaven's supreme;  
Nor hope to be myself less miserable  
By what I seek, but others to make such  
As I, though thereby worse to me redound:  
For only in destroying I find ease  
To my relentless thoughts...

(PL, Book IX 117, 130)

Satan's isolation, aimlessness and utter hopelessness are apparent. He is tortured by his very existence and is unable to find happiness in anything that either the physical or eternal world has to offer. His endless torment is what spawns his evil and he commits evil actions as means to find ease to his suffering. Milton makes it clear that this problem Satan has is something that is unique to the character and its origins are not entirely clear. Here again the theme of this mysterious torment is repeated in Book IV where Satan Proclaims:

Me Miserable! which way shall I fly  
Infinite wrath, infinite despair?  
Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell

(PL, Book IV, 73-75)

One thing that is worth noting about Satan and evil in general in Milton's world is the isolation effect. The more evil one becomes the more isolated they become as they become further removed from others and most importantly to Milton, from God. Digressing for a moment, the poem "Alone" by Edgar Allen Poe reads much like Satan's above self-reflection in Book IX and in my opinion it is a fine example of the isolation effect of evil:

From childhood's hour I have not been  
As others were -- I have not seen  
As others saw -- I could not bring  
My passions from a common spring --  
From the same source I have not taken  
My sorrow -- I could not awaken  
My heart to joy at the same tone --  
And all I lov'd -- I lov'd alone --  
Then -- in my childhood -- in the dawn  
Of a most stormy life -- was drawn  
From ev'ry depth of good and ill  
The mystery which binds me still --

From the torrent, or the fountain --  
From the red cliff of the mountain --  
From the sun that 'round me roll'd  
In its autumn tint of gold --  
From the lightning in the sky  
As it pass'd me flying by --  
From the thunder, and the storm --  
And the cloud that took the form  
(When the rest of Heaven was blue)  
Of a demon in my view --

Like Satan, the speaker in the poem is born with a deficiency that creates endless torment, and as a result he is unable to find happiness in any of life's experiences or nature's offerings. Rather, there remains a demon in his view that prevents happiness. This inner demon causes the speaker to experience life in an isolated state, hence the title "Alone". This same isolating effect occurs with Satan, who by the end of the poem is not only removed from heaven, but he even loses the grace of his fellow fallen as his actions have them reduced to serpents, thus removing them all even further from their former states, further into despair and even further from God.

Milton creates a broad understanding of evil through Satan; first it is glorified in its magnificent appearance; then it is abhorred once the guise has been removed, and finally once it is degraded and the reader realizes why evil functions in the manner that it does, it is pitied. Though there is much for the reader to learn from Satan's experience in regards to the right course of conduct, since he operates as a force there is a limitation as to what is applicable to the reader as human beings generally do not function as forces. The key difference between Satan and man as alluded to earlier is that man has hope. Though I went into great lengths in order to show that Satan is not a moral being, man unquestionably is. As a result, Milton's and his God's treatment of man in the poem is profoundly different from that of the fallen angels and Satan. Because of this, in order to have a more complete understanding of how Milton's conceptual

world operates, it is necessary to redirect the conversation to the discussion of man in the poem through the characters Adam and Eve.

Many of the lessons that are learned through the character Satan in the approximately first eight and one half books of the epic poem, are the same lessons learned by Man in the remainder of the poem. For example, through Satan we learn about divine justice, what constitutes good and evil, and the consequences of good actions vs. bad actions, all of which are applicable to man. This is why the majority of the words in the “Paradise Lost” section of this essay have been dedicated to the discussion of Satan. There are few differences between what can be learned from Satan’s experiences and the experiences of Man in the later books of the poem. Though few, these differences provide to the reader key elaborations to some of the points already discussed as well as some small nuances that are worthy of mention. Together, this information shows how everything learned through Satan in the earlier books is taken and both explicitly and specifically applied to Man, thus more completely addressing man’s role in the conceptual order.

One key difference between Satan and Man is that Man is directly given adequate knowledge of God and the functions of divine justice, whereas Satan has to pay a price and learn this through his mistake. In Book V the angel Raphael is sent to Paradise by God to relate to Adam and Eve their state of free-will, who their enemy is, and the story of Satan’s Fall. This is done so that Man cannot claim he was not warned, as God relates:

Lest willfully transgressing he pretend  
Surprisal, unadmonished, unforewarnded  
(PL, Book V, 244-245)

This small act of God is monumental because it makes Man morally responsible and self-accountable. Not only is Man free-willed like Satan is, but unlike Satan, Man has the advantage of knowing what to be wary of and the consequences of one's actions, before the actions are made. What is interesting is that whether he intended to or not Milton like Raphael, produces this same 'informative' effect with his poems audience through the very act of writing such a didactic poem.

Like Satan and Faust, Man in "Paradise Lost" is also cursed with the desire to possess knowledge that exceeds his limitations. In Book VII Raphael explains to Adam the limitations of human knowledge:

Thee also happier, shall not be withheld  
Thy hearing, such commission from above  
I have received, to answer thy desire  
Of knowledge within bounds; beyond abstain  
To ask, nor let thine own inventions hope  
Things not revealed, which the invisible king,  
Only omniscient, hath suppressed in night,  
To none communicable in earth or heaven  
(PL, Book VII, 118-124)

Raphael uses his reasoning and rhetoric to convince Adam and Eve to keep their thoughts earth bound, that certain knowledge is reserved for God alone. However, his warnings are to no avail, and in Book VIII, Adam again pushes his boundaries in inquiring of Raphael the nature of celestial motions. Once again, Raphael has to explain the limitations of human knowledge, as he implores of Adam to remain content:

To ask or search I blame thee not, for heaven  
Is as the book of God before thee set...  
whether heaven move earth,  
Imports not, if thou reckon right, the rest  
From Man or angel the great architect  
Did wisely to conceal, and not divulge  
His secrets to be scanned by them who ought  
Rather admire...  
(PL, Book VIII, 65-75)

Raphael warns Man several times of the folly in having such desires, and in his arguments he makes it very clear that there are glimpses of heaven to be found on earth through both studying and being content with Gods accessible and visible creations (Book VIII, 171-178). However, we know that ultimately these warnings are ignored. This occurs when Eve falls for Satan's trap in the garden, and it is no coincidence that Satan's most effective bargaining chip in his persuasion is his offering of forbidden knowledge. Satan knows that this internal evil, Pride, is one of Man's greatest weaknesses. This suggests that the desire for the unknowable and unobtainable is something that is a constant struggle for Man. Interestingly, this struggle is undoubtedly tied to free-will. That is to say that though Man is free, he is also limited, and because Man is free he must not exploit his freedom; Man must control his desires, and keep them within bounds. This understanding is of course a large part of what Faust learns in Part Two of the play.

Satan and Man both struggle with desire, but for Satan his desires are more acute and overwhelming. Beyond this nuance, there is also one other key difference, a point that was alluded to earlier; Man has help with controlling his desires and making good decisions.

Illustrating this, God says in Book III:

And I will place within the as a guide  
My umpire conscience, whom if they will hear,  
Light after light well used they shall attain,  
And to the end persisting, safe arrive.  
(PL, Book III, 195-198)

These lines read similarly to the following lines in John Donne's Holy Sonnet XIV but with a slight twist:

Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
But is captivated, and proves weak or untrue.  
(Donne, Holy Sonnet XIV)

In the first excerpt from “Paradise Lost” the gift of reason is instilled in Man through God. It operates as a form of conscience and as a guide and when used properly it can lead Man to God and eternal happiness. (This is arguably the same reason that gives God the confidence to wager Faust’s eternal soul in the Prologue of Goethe’s play.) Donne’s lines add even more to the understanding of the faculty of reason. In the first line of the sonnet, the speaker makes a similar point that reason is instilled in man through God, but more than just a guide, reason is also a defender that wards off evil. However, in the second line of the sonnet we see that reason fails man and proves untrue. Not only does this explicitly relate back to the doctrines of Academic Skepticism, but it also shows how in both Donne’s Poem and in “Paradise Lost” reason can be unreliable and that reason alone will not save Man. This is a part of the reason why Eve is able to be seduced by Satan despite being fairly warned in advance and being graced with the gift of reason; her reasoning fails her. Reason in “Paradise Lost” is quite unlike *Faust* where each man’s ability to reason is independently governed, and shaped by experience, where right reasoning and action alone are enough to save a man’s soul. For Milton, reason is a tool that can assist man in achieving happiness but alone it does not complete the task. Since man is fundamentally flawed and susceptible to err even with the gift of reason, divine intervention and instruction is needed in order for him to find happiness. Man depends on the Grace of God as Man *needs* God, in order to find happiness and salvation.

## **Hope**

The final point to be discussed in regards to “Paradise Lost”, is arguably the most profound difference between the experience of Satan and Man; it is the idea of hope. As mentioned earlier in the essay in the discussion of Satan as a ‘moral being’, Satan has no hope of redemption and he learns this after his rebellion. On the contrary, despite committing the same



sin of disobedience, Man is redeemed through the sacrificial act undertaken by the Son of God. Because Satan has no hope of salvation, the only thing a reader can learn from the experiences of his character is what *not* to do in Milton's conceptual world. With Satan, all that is observed is the action: rebellion; the knowledge acquired through the action: he was wrong; and the consequential punishment: eternal damnation. This knowledge is of great importance, but it is not enough, because it leaves the reader with the question, "what *can* Man do?" This answer to this question is particularly important since the type of punishment received by Satan is not administered to Man in the same way. Even though they are significantly shorter than the earlier books, because they answer this question, the later books of the poem centered on Man, are of vital importance in illustrating how man is to live.

Similarly to the experiences of Satan, through Man the reader sees the progression of events: wrong action, what is learned, and consequential punishment. Yet, in addition to this the reader is also shown the promising hope of regaining in the future, the Paradise that was once lost, as well as the necessary steps required to guide one along the path of redemption. As a result, the experience of Man provides a more optimistic and complete picture of how Milton understands the conceptual life process. It is not simply bad behavior equals eternal punishment, but rather, bad actions equal eternal punishment, if left *unresolved*. That is to say, similarly to *Faust*, bad actions can be atoned for through good actions and sincere repentance. This idea of redemption is altogether missing from Satan's experience as he is perpetually tormented. This exception that is made exclusively for Man reveals that within the laws of divine justice there is a capacity for mercy and forgiveness solely on the behalf of man.

In Book XII Adam relates what he has learned in regards to his thirst for forbidden knowledge:

Greatly instructed I shall hence depart,  
Greatly in peace of thought, and have my fill  
Of knowledge, what this vessel can contain;  
Beyond which was my folly to aspire  
Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best,  
And love with the fear the only God, to walk  
As in presence, ever to observe  
His providence, and on him sole depend,  
Merciful over all his works, with good  
Still overcoming evil...

(PL, Book XII, 557-566)

What is ironic about this excerpt is the fact that Adam concedes that he *now* knows of his mistake in seeking forbidden knowledge, when both he and the reader already knew this not only through Satan's mistake, but also through Raphael's direct warnings in Books VII and VIII. Therefore, this confession by Adam only mirrors what the reader has already learned. It is as if Milton uses this repetitive technique to ensure that this knowledge is not forgotten. Man is warned, thus he learns what not to do. Yet, man makes the mistake, and it is not until after the mistake is made that he truly learns, *again*. It is not enough to simply know, man must experience evil either directly or indirectly to learn what is right.

Continuing in his attempt "to justify the ways of God to men", Milton's last two books of the poem provide exact didactic instructions of specific behaviors and actions that are necessary to ensure an individual maintains the right relationship to God, which is arguably the single most important point of the poem itself. To make sure nothing is left out in Adam's newfound, dearly acquired knowledge the angel Michael in last-minute fashion adds:

...only add  
Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add faith,  
Add virtue, patience, temperance, add love,  
By name to come called charity, the soul  
Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath  
To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess  
A paradise within thee, happier far.

(PL, Book XII, 581-587).

Here we see that the angel Michael provides some final reminders to Adam so as to help mankind follow the right course of living. Yet, what is interesting is that these suggestions are not only intended to help man stray away from evil, but it is also implied that in heeding these instructions man will find happiness within himself. This is an intriguing thought as it suggests that having the right relationship to God is equivalent to having the quintessential relationship with self; that this relationship will not only ensure eternal life, but it will also grant the most meaningful natural life since it is the only way man can only attain true happiness.

## **Reading the Works together**

The prevailing sentiment that I am left with every time I finish reading the later books of *Paradise Lost* is the idea that human beings need help, that is to say they are incapable of thinking for themselves and/or making the wisest decisions. Resulting from such inadequacy, human beings are ultimately incapable of redeeming their eternal souls. This is why, in the world of this poem, the Son of God, (more specifically God's grace) is essential for human salvation, as man is forever dependent on God's grace. Milton creates a world where man is not only dependent on God but he also lives for God. This is to say that the entire life experience is a means to an end, to be or not to be with God.

Such understandings of both man and the purpose of life are dramatically different from those presented in Goethe's world where Faust, a man, is able to save himself, where despite his mistakes his individual reason and earnestness is enough. For Goethe, salvation and happiness

are attained as one discovers them through life's experience. Yet, these virtues are only afforded if one chooses to take part in the creative force of life through earnest and well intentioned activity. In *Faust*, though Faust ascends to heaven at the end of the play, unlike Milton's epic it is not convincing that the purpose of Faust's existence was to ascend to heaven. Rather, the ending of the play merely suggests that if one is to discover good in one's life and die a good man they will achieve salvation. However, this ultimate happiness or salvation is no greater than the happiness that can be attained on earth.

In *Faust* religion or a form of such is present but it is not as clearly defined nor as dominant as we see in Milton's world. In the play this religion can simply be understood as a way of life, that each man discovers himself, a way that ultimately leads to good. Milton believed in Puritan ideals and while he was writing "Paradise Lost", the Puritan Revolution was at its peak. Therefore, the world of "Paradise Lost" is without a doubt partially shaped by Milton's own religious beliefs and at the same time confined to the limitations of Puritan ideals. In "Paradise Lost", God is present, and in the text he speaks directly. For Goethe, who is a Romantic and a skeptic, God remains at a marked distance, and his presence is almost non-existent in *Faust*. With the exception of Mephistopheles' bet with God in the Prologue which is written after he wrote the play, God never speaks directly nor is his presence felt as intimately as it is in *Paradise*. In *Faust*, the Angel/Chorus who cry out to Faust are the only connection he has with God, and even then these voices merely serve as faint, echoed representations of God, their obscurity reflecting that of the authors own religious skepticism, as well as the 17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> century shift from a God centered world to a more secular ideology

In both works, good and evil have an intimate relationship. Because these two forces are so interwoven with each other, human beings are always caught in between the two and therefore

forced to act and make decisions that have serious moral implications. For both of these writers, decisions and the intentions tied to them mean everything and they can mean the difference between salvation and damnation. As both works show, our decisions can easily be marred either by satanical figures, or even worse by our own insidious, inner-demons. Eve and Adam are deceived by Satan, the deceiver of men, but this works because they are flawed by their own innate demons and thus made readily susceptible to Satan't lure. Faust is likewise deceived by Mephistopheles, and his inner demon is his struggle with his selfish desires and his preoccupation with both forbidden knowledge and experience. This makes Mephistopheles task all the easy, as there is none better suited for bringing out the worse in others.

In both works, it is implied that the metaphorical representations of man, Adam, Eve and Faust, fall victim to Satan not only because of the devils uncanny ability to manipulate the truth, but because of something else. Both authors know that there is something within human nature that is unchanging, a flaw that makes us susceptible to sin, susceptible to err. With this said, each work reveals that there is a way to cast away the veil of deception and return to the rightful path. However, each writer defines the path of redemption and salvation differently, one path is through self and the other is through God. Despite this difference, the ultimate goal for human beings in both worlds is in essence quite the same. It is as Angelloz describes, “[in *Faust*] man strives for reintegration” into the conceptual world, the conceptual world being an understanding of the world that is unique to the individual and the reintegration a process by which man discovers his niche within this world; through this discover man becomes harmoniously one with self and with the world . (Angelloz 287). Though Angelloz speaks solely for *Faust*, in both works man strives for this reintegration in different ways. In “Paradise Lost” the reintegration comes through both developing an understanding of God (though limited), which hopefully

results in one ultimately finding God. In *Faust* reintegration is realized through finding ones purpose and path to fulfillment within the natural world.

Both works reveal that, regardless of their forms, man forever seeks both happiness and meaning, two desires that are a part of the larger timeless and perhaps primordial desire: the innate human desire to be a part of something larger, something more than what one conceives oneself to be. Through a comparison of both of these conceptual worlds and analyzing how they function when read together and in juxtaposition, it becomes clear that the themes of good, evil, human weakness, temptation, salvation, redemption, and universal balance, are themes that are both elemental and recurring in most conceptual worlds, and in all great literature.

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