“TO KNOW IN MEASURE WHAT THE MIND MAY WELL CONTAIN”:
THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF MONISM IN MILTON’S PARADISE LOST

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By

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For Jason Rosenblatt and M. Lindsay Kaplan:

“Gentle to me and affable hath been
Thy condescension, and shall be honored ever
With grateful memory”

Many thanks,
Jessica
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Introduction

The material and spiritual hierarchy that Milton outlines in Book V of *Paradise Lost* (469-505) has been explored by generations of scholars seeking to understand its philosophical underpinnings, narrative consistency, and concurrent cultural influences. Recent scholarship by Steven Fallon (1995) and John Rogers (1996) has turned the critical conversation towards the function of *matter* and *materiality* in the monist hierarchy as it may respond to the burgeoning natural philosophies of Milton’s peers Hobbes, Descartes, and Harvey; building from that foundation, however, newer investigations by Phillip J. Donnelly and N.K. Sugimura have questioned Fallon’s equation of materiality as varying states of corporeality (Donnelly, 79) or whether spirituousness (what Sugimura equates with immaterial *reason*) can be categorized as a type of matter at all (52). The complications with characterizing the monist hierarchy as one primarily defined by various states of materiality—moving upwards from bodies dissolving into spirits—arise in questions that seemingly undermine the consistency of this philosophy throughout the text: how could fallen angels, for example, be *more* material than human beings? Or, how *would* a physical body refine itself into pure spirit, since we never see the process take place?

These complications arise in a large part from overlooking the major role epistemology (here called *reason*) plays in the dynamic nature of the continuum, and the fact that choices made by characters propel them into different physical states within it. In fact, when Raphael explains that some beings are “more refined, more spirituous, and
pure, / As nearer to him placed or nearer tending’’ (475-476),\(^1\) we find God-like
tendencies—dispositions or actions, rather than simply forms—an equal factor in
defining the purity of an ontological state. With the question in mind as to whether matter
can be affected by reason, I suggest in this thesis that epistemology, particularly as it
influences choice, proves inseparable from the makeup of the monist continuum and
crucial in considering its dynamic nature.

This thesis presents an alternate reading of monism, with an emphasis on its
epistemology, in three parts: first, in examining how the continuum of Raphael’s speech
can be read in two ways—the material and the intellectual—and how each angle
influences a character’s place in the heavenly hierarchy. This chapter then focuses more
specifically on the relationship between being and knowing (and its limits) by examining
the torturous logic of fallen angels and the discursive logic of human beings in contrast to
the intuitive apprehension of divine beings. The second chapter argues that Milton
situates choice, as it stems from knowledge and free will, as the catalyst for movement
along this hierarchy. This chapter considers the role of obedience and virtue in the
poem’s process of ascension, ultimately demonstrating that the dynamism of the
continuum supports the epic’s crux of knowing and choosing correctly. Finally, the third
chapter will explore the temptation and fall of man, and in particular, how the tenuous
process of human knowledge is upended by the faulty and cyclical logic of the fallen.
This chapter demonstrates that the epic in fact hinges on conflicts of epistemology, whose

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\(^1\) Unless otherwise noted, all book and line references of Milton's poetry, or page numbers referencing
Milton’s prose, draw from *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, Ed. William Kerrigan,
consequences resonate on the level of ontology, and explores how knowledge and existence are altered and reconstructed after the fall.
Chapter One: Epistemology before Ontology?

Opening his discussion of the monist hierarchy in Book V, the archangel Raphael explains that all creation is of one kind:

Endued with various forms, various degrees
Of substance, and in things that live, of life;
But more refined, more spirituous, and pure,
As nearer to him placed or nearer tending
Each in their several active spheres assigned,
Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
Proportioned to each kind. (473-79)

Here Milton designs a continuum that on its most basic level conceptualizes all “matter” as descending from God and returning up towards him in varying states of materiality; those things farther from God are more physically defined, while those beings closer consist of refined matter and lack a confining form, thus more closely resembling godliness. Conceptualizing “one matter” as a continuum allows body and spirit to exist as varying degrees of the same substance, implicitly rejecting the dualist view of the human soul entrapped in a prison-like body, and maintaining that all creation (physical and spiritual) fundamentally belongs to and derives from God.

This material continuity sets up the possibility for the physical bodies of mankind to “at last turn all to spirit” (497), a de-materialization that allows in some sense the complete ascension of man. Milton argues in De Doctrina Christiana, ‘Man is a living
being, intrinsically and properly one and individual, not compound or separable, not, according to the common opinion, made up and framed of two distinct and different natures, as of soul and body, but that the whole man is soul, and the soul man, that is to say, a body, or substance individual, animated, sensitive, and rational” (CPW VI: 317-18). The complete fusion of body and soul allows the material makeup of human beings to include degrees of matter that extend from materiality (form or body) to spirit (refined matter). Becoming like angels, then, would require a continued purification of physical matter, shifting the greater part of one’s being from gross matter to refined spirit.

To understand the relationship of epistemology to this ontological philosophy, we first must recognize how reason in *Paradise Lost* varies with states of being. Raphael initially describes two kinds of reason: “Discursive, or intuitive; discourse / Is oftest yours, the latter most is ours, / Differing but in degree, of kind the same” (486-90).

*Discursive* reason belongs to man, and through its connotations of movement, conversation, and logical progression, reflects a creature whose cognitive processes are influenced by its realities of body, motion, methodology, time, and language. Similarly, *intuitive* reason signifies immediate and correct perception, fitting for an angelic body close to God and lacking as many material boundaries as it does obstacles to comprehension. The fact that Raphael addresses matter first and mind second—

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2 *Discursive*, as defined by the OED: “running hither and thither,” “passing rapidly or irregularly from one subject to another; rambling, digressive; extending over or dealing with a wide range of subjects,” or “passing from premises to conclusions; proceeding by reasoning or argument; ratiocinative” (def. 1-3). *Discourse* connotes the idea of unfolding over time (1) or the back and forth movement of conversation (3). Likewise, *intuitive* is defined as “beholding” (1a), “immediate perception” (2), and ‘immediate perception without the intervention of any reasoning process’ (3a), respectively. Patrick Cook, drawing also from the work of Merritt Hughes, Alistair Fowler, and Robert West, notes that the distinctions between intuitive and discursive reason feature heavily in the work of Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham:
particularly when there appears such a strong correlative between states of being and ways of knowing—suggests that ontology precedes and defines epistemology in the created world.

However, when describing these two kinds of reason, Raphael actually outlines an intellectual continuum alongside the material continuum, which charts the mental and emotional growth of living beings. Having conceptualized the material continuum as a growing tree, he turns the end of the metaphor (the fruits and flowers) into the beginning of the growth of mind and soul:

…flow’rs and their fruit

Man’s nourishment, by gradual scale sublimed
To vital spirits aspire, to animal,
To intellectual, give both life and sense,
Fancy and understanding, whence the soul
Reason receives, and reason is her being. (482-487)

Kerrigan, Rumrich, and Fallon note that Milton amends Galen’s theory of spirits, adopting “vital spirits, which reside in the heart and are the vehicles of passion, and animal spirits, which reside in the brain and are the vehicles of rational thought,” while suggesting that the addition of intellectual spirits may be a possible correlative for intuition (483-85n). Thus, the scale of internal action moves from passion, to analysis, to apprehension, the latter two offering processes of “understanding” that make up reason, which in turn shapes the nature of the soul. Sugimura sees this contingent scale as

see “Intuition, discourse, and the human face in Paradise Lost.” Essays in Literature. 23.2 (Fall 1996): 147-164.
troublingly dualist—the soul developing separately from the body (46)—but by tying this development to the literal process of ingestion and nourishment, I believe the angel means to suggest a simultaneous growth of body and spirit. Yet Raphael does describe an intellectual continuum that parallels, but does not necessarily depend upon, material states; by pointing out a progression of mental activity and forms of reason that are “differing but in degree,” he leaves room for movement between the various processes in their own right.

As a result, when we consider an earlier moment in the text—Book III’s invocation to light—the hypothetical space opens in which we may consider the possibility that a change in reason could catalyze a change in degrees of body and spirit. In the invocation the narrator pleads, “celestial light / Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers / Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence / Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight” (51-55). The passage points out the failure of “mortal sight” to capture divine images and illuminations, and so privileges an interior mental sight over a physical reception of information. For a human narrator to transcend his discursive reasoning implies a shift from the sensory primacy of the body to the apprehensive primacy of the spirit. Rather than a shift in materiality inspiring a shift in ways of knowing, here the shift from external to internal revelation actually imagines a shift from the physical body to the spirit. We find here the beginnings of a physical shift by mental activity, the possibility of changing the primacy of the body to the primacy of the spirit, and the possibility of realizing Raphael’s caveat that beings are either nearer to God “plac’d,” or, as we find in this case, “nearer tending.”
What we find by examining the material and mental continuum overall is a mutually influential relationship: materiality can influence the kinds of cognition more naturally suited to various beings, while the application of reason can purify or degrade material form. Problems within this philosophy persist, however, when characters actually move along the continuum. Sugimura points out that fallen angels, for example, remain mercurial—“Milton’s description does not testify to a mechanized descent into brute matter” (186)—as Satan, for example, retains the ability to change his shape (III. 634) and inhabit animals (IX. 187). Fallon has suggested, “Milton’s devils…are less corporeal than his men, but they are moving toward a greater relative corporeality” (103). The possibility of “relative corporeality”—that the fallen angels are suffering under a greater strain of materiality because it falls so far from their natural state—demonstrates that not only does ontology change for characters over the course of the text, but that because their newly gained materiality results from their fall, it may be argued that materiality can be epistemologically and consequentially determined.

The poles of the monist continuum would benefit from redefinition—they cannot only mark the grossest material from the most spirituous and pure, but must also consider epistemological states from the “dense” to the “illuminated.” In broadening our understanding of the continuum by taking into account the role of knowing and acting to placement and movement, it becomes prudent to explore in greater specificity the process of knowing for fallen angels, unfallen angels, and mankind. The subsequent pages of this chapter will explore these ways of knowing, and demonstrate that the monist continuum
can be productively read as the movement of states from the illogical (the demons in Hell), to the logical (mankind on Earth), to the omniscient (God in Heaven).

The Hell that opens the narrative of *Paradise Lost* is dark, disorienting, and seemingly endless—a manifestation in many ways of the tormented, obstinate, and irrational psychological state of its inhabitants. Barbara Lewalski notes, “the physical conditions of these places [Hell, Earth, and Heaven] are fitted to the beings that inhabit them, but the inhabitants interact with and shape their environments, creating societies in their own image” (465). Satan discovers early on in Hell a newly changed body, the cause of which he attributes to his assault on God. Yet the mentality that inspired his rebellion remains unchanged; he vows never to “repent or change, / Though changed in outward luster; that fixed mind / And high disdain, from sense of injured merit, / That with the mightiest raised me to contend” (I. 96-99). Compellingly, the fallen angel identifies his “fixed mind” and “sense of injured merit” as the cause for rebellion that results in a body “changed in outward luster” or physical appearance; as the cherub Zephon scornfully explains to Satan, “thou resembllest now / Thy sin and place of doom obscure and foul” (IV. 839-40). We find the changing of Satan’s material form follows his epistemological mistake: a misunderstanding of the Heavenly laws and a reading of the Son’s ascension as a personal slight.

What becomes apparent is that a fundamental flaw resides in Satan’s interpretive framework even in Heaven, which later becomes a painful paradox for the fallen angel: why wasn’t he able to comprehend that loving God meant serving him? In his troubled soliloquy of Book IV, he laments, “all his good proved ill in me, / And wrought but
malice” (48-49) and notes that “other powers as great / Fell not, but stand unshaken, from within / Or from without, to all temptations armed” (63-65). These moments of reflection prove troubling, revealing as they do that some part of Satan could not accept or fully understand God’s hierarchy, and suggesting that without a change in mindset he could never happily exist within it. In Hell, Mammon similarly insists that the fallen angels can never return to Heaven “and to his Godhead sing / Forced hallelujahs” (I. 242-43), imagining, “how wearisome / Eternity so spent in worship paid / To whom we hate” (247-49). For these two fallen angels Heaven always proved unlivable, not because of their makeup (as all angels have “the same free will and power to stand” [IV.66]) but because of how they comprehend its laws and operation.

As a result of this impasse of epistemology, Satan rebels and falls, and from these actions arise the first grossly material forms (both the materialized demons and human beings) and an infernal world that materializes God’s anger and Satan’s obstinacy. Stanley Fish has rightly noted in Surprised by Sin, “When Satan decides in his freedom to break union he alters more than his relationship to the sustaining power of the universe; he alters the universe and creates a new one populated by persons, events, possibilities, aspirations and facts that come into being (for him) simultaneously with his self-transformation” (xxxii).³ Not only was Hell created for Satan, but Fish points out that it was created in some sense from Satan—it is a world that manifests his belief in a God endlessly exacting a “debt immense” (IV. 52) imagined in his soliloquy.

³ Fish later argues, “What Milton does, in effect, is join the ontology of monism—there is only one thing real—with the epistemology of antinomianism—the real is only known perspectivally, according to the lights of individual believers” (xlv). It would be another argument to assess at length the validity and purpose of Satan’s viewpoints, one which Fish among others have already admirably debated.
If we can conceptualize Hell as literally *embracing* Satan’s already flawed method of understanding God, then it comes as no surprise that this material world appears to be equally incongruous with natural order. Satan has already implicitly suggested that Hell may be a projection of a psychological state, resolving, “The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” (254-255). If Hell, though created by God, exists as the reflection of mind unwilling to understand and follow His laws, then it follows that the matter of Hell does not clearly adhere to the laws of nature. Fire becomes an especially loaded symbol, as it burns forever while never consuming its fuel or coming towards an end. Where in Exodus 3:2 the burning bush heralds Moses’ revelation from God, we find in Hell “one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames / No light, but rather darkness visible…a fiery deluge fed / With ever burning sulfur unconsumed” (I. 62-63, 68-69). Fire of this sort literally creates the boundaries of Hell—there are “upper, nether, and surrounding fires” (346)—yet provides no illumination of its interior. Instead, it outlines and fills a space with activity that is endless, empty, and unproductive. If Hell is the mind, the fire might well be its obscuring and tormenting reason.

This obscuration of reason works its way into the diabolical hierarchy in Hell, where Satan reigns most evil. The narrator describes the infernal council: “Satan exalted sat, by merit raised / To that bad eminence; and from despair / Thus high uplifted beyond hope, aspires / Beyond thus high” (II. 5-8). The logic of exaltation is reversed in Hell, a mirror image of ascension by virtue in Heaven. Where Satan is allegedly “raised,” he has been on the whole lowered, his “merit” exists as corruption, and his place “beyond hope”
could be either conviction or despair. The verbal irony underscores that the hellish hierarchy employs logic both preposterous and perverse. If Hell reflects or mirrors Heaven—so that hierarchies move similarly but stretch in opposite directions—then the language here refracts the image of Hell, bending it to look like Heaven once again. The logic of the hierarchy becomes convoluted and unclear, though very much in keeping with the distortion of the realm that produced it. Likewise, when the logic is untangled, often no progress has actually been made; where there appears to be an ascension there follows a negation of that movement, as in the lines, “Satan, whom now transcendent glory raised…unmoved thus spake” (II. 427, 429, italics mine). Under the guise of movement nothing has actually changed—playing on the link between mind and body, Satan resolved against God still occupies the lowest place in Hell. The logic of the infernal realm forces the mind to work without progress—what seems like movement or action only ends up back where it began.4

Likewise, the fallen consciousness itself can be conceptualized as a “movement without progress,” as the epic in general frames gaining knowledge as a movement towards God. Demons, however, can no longer move towards God and are left spinning their wheels (or their mental “cogs,” so to speak). Frank Manley articulated this point by suggesting that Moloch’s erroneous hope for re-ascension (70-81) is based on the demon’s inability to “realize is that he is an intellectual substance whose motion is not

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4 While a number of scholars, most recently Richard Arnold, have treated the confusion in Hell in terms of formal logic, William Pallister has treated these inconsistencies in terms of rhetorical theory, equally based on Satan’s demonstration of his limited and faulty knowledge. See Arnold, Richard The Logic of The Fall: Right Reason and [Im]pure Reason in Milton’s Paradise Lost. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2006; and Pallister, William. Between Words: the Rhetorical Universe of Paradise Lost. Toronto: U of Toronto P. 2008, in particular Chapter 8, “The Rhetoric of Hell.”
physical, but mental, dependent on his own volition” (Manley, 115). Manley argues that ascension relies on love of God, a “principle that bound the entire pre-Copernican universe together in a chain of love and directed everything in it upward toward God as toward the complete fulfillment of itself, the realization of all its potentialities” (111). Moloch and the other devils, Manley asserts, have rent themselves free from this chain, so that ascension is no longer their natural movement: “They have no movement in them whatsoever, or, perhaps it would be more precise to say that they move inertly into negation. Their movement is an increment of nothing, a growth of non-growth…At the core of their being, the fullest actualization of themselves, there is nothing except more hate and more privation” (116). This movement into negativity manifests itself in the strange logic of Hell, which cancels itself out as it fails to build a productive path towards Truth, which belongs to God.

That knowledge can be Hell, Milton argues in *De Doctrina Christiana*; he proposes the fallen angels retain their higher knowledge as “a torment to them rather than a consolation, so they utterly despair of their own salvation” (CPW VI: 349). Indeed, the worst torment witnessed in this Hell proves to be the turmoil of the mind, characterized by irresolute “wand’ring” without reaching solace or conclusion. After the infernal council the demons “Disband, and wand’ring, each his several way / Pursues, as inclination or sad choice / Leads him perplexed, where he may likeliest find / Truce to his restless thoughts” (II. 521-26). Here, the demons’ act of wandering hopes to find a path away from “restless thoughts,” although this effort results in feeling more “perplexed.”

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5 Manley ends his argument by thoughtfully surmising, “Instead of being uplifted by love, they are continually depressed. For hate, among other things, is depressing” (116).
Attempting to escape the mind causes the actions of moving and thinking to wind around each other inescapably, so that neither effort can really be satisfied.

Likewise, *wandering* defines the process of reasoning and philosophizing itself for fallen angels. Those that choose to while away the time in thought engage “In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high / Of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate, / Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute, / And found no end, in wand’ring mazes lost…Vain wisdom all, and false philosophy” (558-61, 565). The attempted height of these thoughts recalls Manley’s point about ascension: no truth can be reached by fallen angels who cannot comprehend God’s love, because they are then incapable of comprehending the laws of His creation. In their attempt to overthrow God, the fallen angels have privileged the notion of a world from which He is absent. Yet by forcing God from the equation no intellectual progress can be made—if God and his commands are the answers to these questions, then the demons are cursed to argue without them.

The absence of God also indicates the absence of the collective knowledge that unifies the angelic community, like the spirituous body; as the fallen angels distinguished themselves by dissenting in Heaven, so have they also taken on individual bodies and opinions in Hell. Sugimura points out that “it is the ‘Satanic,’ not the heavenly, host who argue and debate” (189) and notes, “the rebel angels…depart from the unity of intellect as epitomized by the heavenly host and become isolated individuals—separated and singular objects” (167). Individualized bodies become a consequence of this individualization of intellect, a split from the Heavenly host and then a splintering among
the fallen. If truth stems from God, then fallen angels will never reach it, leaving the individuated angels to take aim at each other with conflicting hypotheses and values.

The entire process of splitting from God can be characterized by *selfishness*, both morally and physically—the fixity of personal desire leads to the fixity of physical form. William Poole notes, “the prefix ‘self-‘...is almost invariably associated with a kind of causal short-circuiting and overwhelmingly with devils and devilry. Thus Satan promises the devils that, ‘self-Rais’d’ they can reconquer heaven; that they are self-begot, self-rais’d by our own quickening power’. To God, they are ‘Self-tempted, self-deprav’d’, ‘Self-lost’ (I.634, 5.860-1, 7.154)” (150-51). The process of intellectual individuation, in essence, is a process of self-assertion. Giving primacy to the self rather than to God tears the fallen angels from the collective and upward movement that Manley asserts is based on the love of God, and manifests itself by entrapping the demons in the very “selves” they created in Heaven.6

We can argue that the devil’s damnation is all in their heads, so to speak. What sets them farthest from God proves not to be their material state, but their epistemology that refuses to accept the collective knowledge that loving God leads to truth. Their philosophizing remains both “vain” and erroneous because they are tormented by an intellect that searches for truth within a worldview that has already rejected its source.

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6 John Rogers argues in *The Matter of Revolution* that self-generation underlies the philosophy of the monist continuum: ‘The process by which ‘order from disorder sprung’ (3.317) was set in motion by an unrepeatable originary act that empowered the world’s material mould to order itself; once the abyss has been impregnated with a self-activating *divina virtus*, the effective control over generation devolves on the now self-generating matter of chaos” (114). Rogers’s argument that material forms create themselves can also be considered from the angle of self-determining epistemology—if reason can affect matter, then individual figures can retain a degree of control over their material state. They can, and as for the fallen angels do, generate their forms.
Like a fire burning without dying or giving any light, Hell manifests this intellectual frustration in its material form.

This ardent desire for knowledge torments fallen angels, but burns more pleasantly in human beings. Questions abound in prelapsarian Eden: Eve asks Adam about the nature of starlight (IV. 657-58), and Adam inquires about his creation (VIII. 257), the creation of the world (VII. 90-97), and the motions of the planets (VIII. 5-38). While generally applauding the first father’s enthusiasm, keeping this questioning impulse in check marks Raphael’s dialogue in Books V-VIII, hinting that mankind’s knowledge may still require divine guidance to avoid falling into error. Brought to light by exploring human knowledge in the poem is its need for management and its opportunity for mistakes. These problems come to a head in Milton’s depiction of the fall, and also plagued the advancement of knowledge in the poet’s cultural moment.

Unlike Hell, Eden sits firmly in the chain of being so that everything in it—plants, beings, thoughts—naturally gravitates upward; it embodies potentiality and, as Barbara Lewalski notes, “is preeminently a place of growth and change” for plants, animals, and humans alike (465). Adam recalls of his awakening there, “Straight toward heav’n my wond’ring eyes I turned, / And gazed a while the ample sky, till raised / By quick instinctive motion up I sprung, / As thitherward endeavoring,” (VIII. 257-260). The first father exhibits a natural upward motion towards God, as well as a gaze fixed on Heaven—it should be no surprise that he immediately asks “how came I thus, how here?” (277) The question yields two readings of Adam’s inquiring mind: first, it demonstrates an instinctive understanding of nature as created by God; second, it exemplifies his
impulse for questioning the natural world and its origins. While Adam’s instincts are naturally more often correct than fallen man’s, his questioning can still ascend beyond his reach. 7 Alvin Snider warns of Adam’s queries, “The subtle distinction between intellectual curiosity (wondering) and the restless motions of the mind (wandering) will provide matter for subsequent instruction” (129) from Raphael.

The problem of managing human knowledge was not a unique concern of Milton’s, but one that recurred in various forms throughout his lifetime in debates over censorship, education, and scientific advancement. Even Milton’s language characterizing false knowledge as errant or wandering were commonplace; Snider notes in Francis Bacon’s Novum Organum that, “Playing on the sense of the Latin verb errare as ‘to wonder,’ Bacon disparages modern experimental scientists for pursuing ‘a kind of wandering inquiry’ that leads nowhere. … Bacon imagines error as circular entrapment or labyrinthine entanglement” (38). 8 Indeed, Bacon’s great project—Instauratio Magna,
of which the *Novum Organon* was a part—was dedicated to the organization of existing knowledge and the methodized uncovering of new knowledge to avoid errors of intellectual assumption.

Likewise, Bacon conceptualized right knowledge as a linear and gradated movement towards a realization of mankind’s full potential, just as all material things in Milton’s Eden enact the upward inclination of monism. Adam comprehends his intellectual movement as parallel with the “scale of nature” that Raphael has laid out for him in Book V; he thanks the angel, “Well hast thou taught the way that might direct / Our knowledge, and the scale of nature set / From center to circumference, whereon / In contemplation of created things / By steps we may ascend to God” (VI. 508-12). Notably, Adam correlates “contemplation” with ascension by way of a stepped or gradual scale not unlike the degrees of being, or vital spirits of Raphael’s narrative. The process of gaining knowledge reflects the upward and seemingly ordered progression of the natural hierarchy.

As a result, for Milton to employ a methodological ascent of knowledge unites the ratiocinative side of discursive reasoning—of formal and progressive movement towards truth—with the natural ascension of monism—God as truth. In this sense it recalls Bacon’s radical reorganization of logical knowledge by way of inductive, rather than deductive, reasoning. In the *Novum Organum* Bacon argues that deductive reasoning “rushes up from the sense and particulars to axioms of the highest generality and, from

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these principles and their indubitable truth, goes on to infer and discover middle axioms,”
while inductive reasoning “draws axioms from the sense and particulars by climbing
steadily and by degrees so that it reaches the ones of highest generality last of all; and this
is the true but still untrodden way” (71). Bacon’s program rebels against Aristotle’s logic
that posits general truths about the world and locates particulars within it—for Bacon,
this approach becomes too easily wrapped in intellectualism, rather than real observation.
Like Milton’s scale of nature, Bacon’s program proposes, that knowledge “ascend the
proper ladder by successive, uninterrupted or unbroken steps, from particulars to lower
axioms, then to middle ones, each higher than the last until eventually we come to the
most general” (161).

The parallel motions of both Bacon’s induction and Milton’s discursivity may not
be entirely coincidental; though many scholars have found Milton’s work to be rich with
the principles and method of formal logic (deductive reasoning, as Bacon would call it), it
also appears that he was willing to enrich or digress from it as the situation required.9
Notably, in his translation of Ramus’ Art of Logic (1672), Milton relates Bacon’s
induction to the logician’s simple axioms, arguing, “This is something which our
compatriot Bacon, De augmentis scientiarum 5.4, very correctly suggests concerning
induction, that ‘by one and the same operation of the mind the object of a query be both
discovered and judged.’ But this is not less true of individual simple arguments” (CPW

9 Most recently, Richard Arnold has mapped the poem’s use of principles of Ramist logic in The Logic of
the Fall: Right Reason and [Im]pure Reason in Milton’s Paradise Lost, cited in footnote #3. Other strong
studies of the Ramism of Paradise Lost include Kathleen Swaim’s chapter on “Lapsarian Logic” in Before
and After the Fall: Contrasting Modes in Paradise Lost. Amherst: UMass P, 1986 and Walter J. Ong’s
VIII: 220). Rather than viewing the methodologies as diametrically opposed, Milton finds their common ground in small, self-evident truths that can be built up into larger ones.

Additionally, Milton notes exceptions even within the textbook itself to moments in which Ramus’ method does not apply. Walter Ong surmises that Milton “is more explicit than Ramus in making clear that the ‘one and only method’ of proceeding from the more general to the more particular applies properly to the interior organization of knowledge after it has been discovered and not to discovery as such” (295). Similarly, William G. Riggs points out that in the Art of Logic, Milton explicitly indicates that discovery of the arts moves in the opposite direction of Ramus’s logic, because they consist of “singular incidences” which “can be gathered only from sensation” (CPW VIII: 214). Milton explains, “sensation is useless without observation, which commits to memory the isolated singular instances; observation useless without induction, which from as many singulars as possible sets up a general rule by an induction” (214). The poet’s keen sense of variation in the knowledge process becomes apparent in his treatment of the exceptions to formal logic—we find throughout his textbook an awareness of the flexibilities of methods of knowing and learning.¹⁰

As a result, the deliberate choice to articulate human knowledge as process-based and upwardly mobile allows Milton to oppose the linear motion and gradual ascent of right reason against the erratic motion and philosophical leaps of wrong reason. Raphael redirects Adam’s inquiries by admonishing, “heav’n is for thee too high / To know what

¹⁰ Riggs argues that Milton strays from Ramist methodology in his treatise Of Education both for practical pedagogical reasons and to heighten the status of poetry in his curriculum. See “Poetry and Method in Milton’s ‘Of Education’.” Studies in Philology. 89.4 (Autumn, 1992): 445-469.
passes there; be lowly wise: / Think only what concerns thee and thy being” (VIII. 172-74). This is not to say that Raphael disapproves of Adam’s questions, but that he wants to impart the fact that correct knowledge grows—like everything in Eden—from the ground up. This understanding frees Adam from reaching too far above himself, and by allowing this growth to take place he becomes “freed from intricacies, taught to live, / The easiest way, nor with perplexing thoughts / To interrupt the sweet of life” (182-83). Yet he continues, “unless we ourselves / Seek them with wand’ring thoughts, and notions vain. / But apt the mind or fancy is to rove / Unchecked, and of her roving is no end; / Till warned, or by experience taught, she learn” (186-190). Even on a linguistic level Adam has incorporated the project of ascension by right reason as antithetical to the dangerous whirlpools of undirected inquiry.

Likewise, while the self-seeking of knowledge torments the devils in Hell, “the contemplation of created things” continually engages Adam and Eve in the reality of God’s creation rather than their own mental inventions. For Bacon the depths of the mind could create endless unproductive activity, “For the wit and minde of man, if it worke upon matter, which is the contemplation of the creatures of God worketh according to the stuffe, and is limited thereby; but if it worke upon itself, as the Spider worketh his webbe, then it is endless, and brings forth indeed Copwebs of learning, admirable for the finesse of thread and worke, but of no substance or profite” (Advancement of Learning, 24). We can imagine here Adam’s education contrasted against the devils’ speculation—as a part of the monist universe, the material world of Eden proves to be both logical and comprehensible. For the devils contemplating Hell, however, there becomes a twofold
frustration: first, their minds work without end because they have rejected God as truth; second, because Hell is the manifestation of the minds that rejected God, contemplating Hell forces the mind to “work upon itself” and spin beautiful yet insubstantial webs around its vain philosophizers.

Grounding Adam’s knowledge also reminds him of the immediate boundaries his ontological state places on his mental capacity. When Raphael explains that he has been instructed “to answer thy desire / Of knowledge within bounds” (VII. 119-120), he echoes the initial boundaries placed on forms at the time of their creation, the “bounds / Proportioned to each kind” (V. 478-79). The circumscribing of Adam’s knowledge reasserts the limits of intellect within the philosophy of monism, so that the greater intelligence comprehends the lesser being—Adam should understand beings and forms less advanced along the continuum, but not those things that are above him. Adam’s intellect and form should grow in tandem, which Raphael makes clear by equating the process of mental growth with the process of ingestion and digestion, as he did in Book V when he described the fruits and flowers fueling the “vital spirits” leading up to reason. Here, however, Raphael warns, “But knowledge is as food, and needs no less / Her temperance over appetite to know / In measure what the mind may well contain, / Oppresses else with surfeit, and soon turns / Wisdom to folly, and nourishment to wind” (VII. 126-130). For knowledge to work “as food” suggests that the mind is subject to the same kinds of limitations as the body—without proper process in consumption and digestion knowledge, as food, turns foul.
The limitations of human knowledge stem not simply from overreaching, however, but also lie within Adam and Eve’s way of knowing itself; what distances discursivity from intuitiveness is the former’s reliance on process, which can easily be upset. Although Adam and Eve receive direction from Raphael, and although the process of gradual growth surrounds them in the garden, moments arise in which they have difficulty understanding natural progression and hierarchy. Eve relates her mistake when retelling the narrative of her birth—she falls in love with her reflection and its “answering looks / Of sympathy and love,” explaining, “there I had fixed / Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire” (IV. 464-66). A guiding voice rectifies her “vain desire” and leads her to Adam, and she alleges from that moment she learned “How beauty is excelled by manly grace / And wisdom, which alone is truly fair” (490-491). The problem with understanding natural order begins early—looking down into the water, Eve assumes she’s looking up into “another sky” (459)—and must be corrected by introducing her superior. Yet the passage is haunted by reversals: up as down or woman as god, complemented by Eve’s physical turning (“back I turned” [480]) and Adam’s plea (“Return fair Eve” [481]). All of these turns and reversals open the space for Eve’s confusion during the temptation, in which the process of wrong reasoning becomes both dizzying and dangerous.

Adam also struggles with the concepts of order and servitude, which Raphael carefully attempts to amend in Book VIII. Adam’s inquiry about the motion of the planets stems from his observation that the heavens seem to revolve around the Earth, and he assumes that the grander universe is unfairly serving a lesser planet (15-38).
Raphael identifies this problematic assumption as a trait that may continue in humankind and responds, “Already by thy reasoning this I guess, / Who art to lead thy offspring, and supposest / That bodies bright and greater should not serve / The less not bright” admonishing, “consider first, that great / Or bright infers not excellence” (85-88, 90-91). Raphael expresses this concern again when he warns Adam not to privilege Eve above himself “By attributing overmuch to things / Less excellent” (565-66). Raphael goes to great lengths to ensure that Adam understands the proper hierarchy, which—in addition to the two occasions in which Adam questions it—reinforces the importance of understanding natural order and hints at trouble when lesser forms are accidentally elevated over the greater. Even more surprising, however, is Adam’s slightly defiant response to Raphael that “I to thee disclose / What inward thence I feel, not therefore foiled,…yet still / Approve the best, and follow what I approve” (607-608, 610-11). Unlike Eve’s concession of her mistake, Adam doesn’t vocally reaffirm the hierarchy, explaining only that he entertains possible hierarchical reversals, but believes his judgment on the issue to be sound. The space that Adam has opened for confusion and misjudgment actually remains wide open at the end of his conversation with Raphael.

However, the possibility for error does not rest with mankind, but remains in play even for angels, whose semi-material form still ties them to a degree of intellectual and physical constraint. Milton argues in *De Doctrina Christiana* that angels are not

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11I am drawing upon the arguments of scholars such as Fallon, Rogers, D. Bentley Hart, and Philip J. Donnelly that angels are a part of the material continuum, albeit more rarefied and spirituous. Even they, however, debate whether angels are corporeal, or simply material; see Donnelly’s response to Fallon’s *Milton Among the Philosophers*, “‘Matter’ versus Body: The Character of Milton’s Monism.” *Milton Quarterly*, 33.3 (1999): 79-85, and Hart’s “Matter, Monism, and Narrative: An Essay on the Metaphysics of *Paradise Lost*” *Milton Quarterly* 30.4 (1996): 16-27. For a reading of angels as “intelligential
omniscient, but “[t]hey know by revelation only those things which God sees fit to show them, and they know other things by virtue of their very high intelligence, but there are many things of which they are ignorant” (CPW VI: 347-48). They appear to have problems particularly with evil, as Uriel fails to identify Satan as an intruder, “For neither man nor angel can discern / Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks / Invisible, except to God alone” (682-84). What we find is that angelic reliance on revelation sometimes prevents them from intuiting correctly, suggesting the bounds on angelic knowledge are based on what God chooses to reveal.

Though angelic intelligence remains imperfect (just as their substance remains in some sense material) the immediacy and powerful collectivity of their apprehension opposes the individualization and errancy of demonic reasoning. Their physical form reflects this unobstructed integration, that they “in obstacle find none / Of membrane, joint, or limb, exclusive bars: / Easier than air with air, if spirits embrace, / Total they mix, union of pure with pure” (V. 625-27). This perfect sexual intercourse not only implies near-complete physical integration, but the more perfect emotional unity that follows from it (and, we could conjecture, explains in part why fallen angels are denied sexual concourse—they cannot integrate themselves physically or intellectually). We may argue that if fallen angels manifest their selfishness in physical form, unfallen angels toe the line of complete selflessness, both in intellect and in form. We find in these “intelligential substances” (408) the line between intellect and materiality blurred, just as in Heaven forms and voices effortlessly mix.

substances” suggesting a possible immateriality to angels, see Sugimura, Chapter 5, “Milton’s Angelology: Intelligential Substance in Paradise Lost” (158-195).
Unless angels fall, however, we don’t see them move along the continuum. Their cognitive motion is one of continual recommitment to obedience and to God. Although their fallibility and partial materiality leaves open the space between body and spirit, discourse and intuition—the ground that must be navigated for human ascension to work as Raphael suggests it might—angels on the whole exemplify the consistent exercise of obedience required by the love of God. Raphael explains to Adam, “our happy state / Hold, as you yours, while our obedience holds; / … In this we stand or fall” (536-37, 540). As we will find in the following chapter, obedience requires constant testing, and as such choice—the application of knowledge alongside the exercise of free will—becomes the crux of the dynamic continuum, either maintaining or drastically changing one’s position on the hierarchy. The contract of obedience, and the testing that it subsequently entails, ensures that choice becomes the catalyst that increases or decreases virtue, sometimes propelling beings through a continuum allegedly defined by gradual ascent.
Chapter Two: Navigating the Continuum

While many scholars have identified the correlations between ontological states and epistemological processes at any given point on Milton’s monist continuum, we find here that the poet employs knowledge and in particular, choices, as a crux for determining movement along that continuum. Arguably, we can adopt Milton’s assertion from the *Areopagitica*, “that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary” (939), as a model for understanding the operation and implications of choice in *Paradise Lost*. The moments of trial in which characters must apply their knowledge—of God and of creation—in the exercise of free will become the moments that subsequently purify or degrade their ontological state. Over the course of the poem, a complex relationship emerges between the necessity of obedience and the freedom of choice; comparing Satan’s failed attempt at ascension with the Son’s successful one demonstrates how knowing and choosing are closely related in navigating the continuum, and how those choices irreversibly impact ontological states. These episodes provide a model, in turn, for Adam and Eve to apply knowing to choosing in order to maintain their happy state.

In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton makes explicit the idea that matter can be affected by the actions of its possessor. He rhetorically asks, “When matter or form has gone out from God and become the property of another, what is there to prevent its being infected and polluted, since it is now in a mutable state, by the calculations which proceed from the creatures themselves?” (309) With his emphasis on post-creation “calculations,” the poet indicates that free actions maintain or degrade the purity of
matter given by God. He anticipates a rebuttal, “But you will say, body cannot emanate from spirit,” and counters it with an echo of his monism: “spirit, being the more excellent substance, virtually, as they say, and eminently contains within itself what is clearly the inferior substance; in the same way as the spiritual and rational faculty contains the corporeal, that is, the sentient and vegetative substance” (309). The greater or more powerful substance, here the spirit, contains and controls the material substance, here, as Milton is discussing, the body. The overarching argument proposes the responsibility of the being in maintaining or degrading their material state, by way of their freely formed thoughts and choices.

In practice, it is not simply “thinking” that inspires a degradation or purification of matter, but its impetus towards action against God. The process of Satan’s rebellion moves from misinterpretation of the exaltation and the (literal and figurative) conception of sin, into a refusal to obey God and the war that ensues—a process by which mental activity leads to rebellious action. The narrator recounts Satan’s restless night after the exaltation as one of jealous thoughts followed by resolution: “fraught / With envy against the Son of God” (V. 661-62), Satan “Deep malice thence conceiving and disdain…resolved / With all his legions to dislodge, and leave / Unworshipped, unobeyed the throne supreme” (666, 668-70). Crucially, where Satan could simply bristle at the new laws of Heaven, he resolves his internal conflict in favor of desertion. We find here the first instance in which Satan’s sinning—while outwardly a form of action—results in a kind of negation, characterized as it is by the refusal to obey God and a desire to overthrow Him. Satan dis-lodges, and leaves God un-worshipped and un-obeyed. Sin
degrades the body through a kind of negative action, which is the conscious choice to refuse God. The mind’s negation of its spiritual guide degrades the body with sin.

Similarly, it is not Satan’s conception of Sin, but the way in which he embraces her that leads to the war and the rise of death. Sin’s narrative of their incestuous relationship can be read as an allegory of Satan’s physical engagement with the idea of sin, which in turn incorporates that negativity into his once-perfect divine form. Sin relates to Satan, “[you] becam’st enamored, and such joy thou took’st / With me in secret, that my womb conceived / A growing burden. Meanwhile war arose” (II. 765-767).

Fallon argues that Sin’s account offers an “alternative vision of the fall” (185), so that while in Sin’s narrative war arises circumstantially during their relationship, an allegorical reading proposes that their relationship represents Satan’s active and material sinning that leads to war. Likewise, Fallon argues that because Milton shares Augustine’s sense that evil functions as a privation or negative space—aligning with the negative or dissenting quality of Satan’s rebellion—characters that represent evil also have no ontological form.12 Because Satan’s initial disobedience comes in the form of refusal, then Sin as an allegory of negation comes to represent both Satan’s negative act (not obeying) and the absence of God through which sin is born. For Satan to act negatively in

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embracing Sin means that he brings that negativity into his physical being, thus degrading his divine spirit.\(^\text{13}\)

At the same time, because Milton represents Sin as external to Satan (“Out of thy head I sprung” [II. 758, emphasis added]), Satan’s choice to embrace her should be understood as a movement towards an end, rather than an immediate fall. Just as allegory creates characters that symbolize deprivation or negative space, the external creation of Sin conceptualizes a split between Satan’s right reason and his free will, subsequently introducing two ways of looking at the universe: one that obeys God and one that refuses Him. Andrew Escobedo notes that unlike Adam and Eve, it is nearly impossible to pinpoint a moment of choice in which Satan moves from servant to sinner, and even when critics offer one it fails to explain satisfactorily the impetus for Satan’s rebellion (796). Escobedo argues that Milton deliberately obscures these moments and motivations so that, for example, “If we identify conspiracy with choice, Sin’s appearance allegorically reflects what Satan has already willed. If we identify conspiracy with deliberation, Sin’s appearance compels Satan finally to cross the volitional threshold from intention to choice” (809-10). What the allegory of incest offers us, I propose, is an episode that suggests a process of falling, in which Satan creates (and over time fully integrates) an alternate epistemology to the divine consciousness. The act of copulation implies action over a stretch of time that builds towards climax, so Satan’s repeatedly acting upon a

\(^\text{13}\) In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton employs a similar idea of sin and sexual consummation with a passage from James 1: “every man is tempted when he is drawn on and enticed by his own lust: then, when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin” (James 1:14-15, cited in CPW VI: 388). Here, man copulates with his lust (or desire) to birth Sin, yet the fundamental equation remains the same in *Paradise Lost*—Satan is attracted to and copulates with the Sin created by his mind, which in turn brings literal sin (rebellion) into the world.
negative idea builds it into a full-on epistemological and ontological rebellion against God. If as Fallon points out, “Metaphysical evil is the negative distance between created perfection and willed corruption” (171), then the allegorical copulation of Satan and Sin dramatizes the angel’s process of crossing the distance between a separated reason and will. By copulating with a figure of negation Satan dramatizes how that epistemological separation from God creates a negation, a physical evil, within his mind and body.¹⁴

This distance must actively be crossed, however, for sin to become real—at least as Adam explains to Eve after Satan visits her dream. He consoles, “Evil into the mind of god or man / May come or go, so unapproved, and leave / No spot or blame behind: Which gives me hope / That what in sleep thou didst abhor to dream, / Waking thou never wilt consent to do” (V. 117-121). For Adam, the residual “spot or blame” (an impurity upon God’s perfect matter, either spirituous or physical) can only grow from Eve’s “consent” or choice to be complicit in the evil of the waking world. If we stay for a moment on this issue of “consent,” however, and recall the explicitly sexual allegory of Satan’s movement towards sin, then Eve’s dream takes on a more serious cast than Adam lends it. Eve’s recollection of the dream is palpably sexual: “he drew nigh, and to me held, / Even to my mouth of that same fruit held part / Which he had plucked; the pleasant savory smell / So quickened appetite, that I, methought, / Could not but taste”¹⁴

¹⁴ John Leonard, in Chapter Three of his Naming in Paradise: Milton and the Language of Adam and Eve, writes compellingly of Satan’s creation of new meanings for words to bridge the gap of articulating his invented sinfulness. Leonard points out, “To insinuate something to someone is to open up a gap—between one’s words and one’s meaning, and between oneself and one’s auditor. An auditor need not fill this gap with the meaning the speaker intends” (149). We can correlate Leonard’s identification of fallen language and the choice of the listener to accept or engage with new meanings with the gap between conceiving or viewing Sin and engaging with her. The distance between seeing an interpretation and choosing it must be crossed even on a linguistic level during the rebellion in Heaven. See Leonard, John. Naming in Paradise: Milton and the Language of Adam and Eve. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.
This temptation is a form of seduction, and Eve’s sense of violation upon waking is quite clear. Adam is correct—the dream is not itself a fall—but its resemblance to Satan’s seduction by Sin suggests that Eve too will be *seduced* into denying God, moving through the temptation towards a climactic refusal of His laws.

Adam’s instincts regarding the relationship between intelligence and action are substantiated in Book III, as God expounds upon the necessity of free will to the offering of obedience. He argues that freely given service is “proof…of true allegiance” (103, 104) and asks, “What pleasure I from such obedience paid? / When will and reason (reason is also choice) / Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled, / Made passive both, had served necessity, / Not me” (107-111). God argues that to bind “will and reason” by necessity—creating beings who cannot choose but to serve—renders that service a passive, rather than an active, demonstration or “proof” of their devotion.

Fundamentally, freedom of choice relies upon a freedom of intellectual activity, so that the will may choose to serve God based on its own reasoning and understanding of the relationship. Milton’s “obedience,” Michael Schoenfeldt points out, “involves not just doing what you are told, but using reason to figure out what authority you are supposed to follow, and to ascertain what you are supposed to do according to a higher moral code” (379). The ability to discern reasonably between the authority of the self and the authority of God marks the tension in which Satan chooses disobedience, and so it becomes Raphael’s job to make sure Adam and Eve, in their lesser knowledge but substantial reasoning capacity, understand the one true epistemology that acknowledges God as its head.
If freedom is based on will, and will is based on reason, then it becomes easier to understand God’s imperative in sending Raphael to teach Adam and Eve about creation—they must learn their full responsibility in maintaining their spiritual state. God directs Raphael to visit Adam, “and such discourse bring on, / As may advise him of his happy state, / Happiness in his power left to free will, his will though free, / Yet mutable; whence warn him to beware / He swerve not too secure: tell him withal his danger,” adding, “lest willfully transgressing he pretend / Surprisal, unadmonished, unforewarned” (V. 233-38, 244-45). The verbal emphasis concentrates on the word “will,” in the close repetition of “will, his will”—bracketed on both sides by the modifier “free”—subtly reinforcing that the “will” in question belongs to man, rather than God. This early repetition bolsters the final clause, “lest willfully transgressing,” in which the will becomes the active agent of the transgression—that is, transgressing with or through the will. At the same time, “willfully” also suggests “willfulness,” in the sense that man should understand disobedience, so that when God rather cynically suggests that Adam might “pretend / Surprisal,” he reinforces a view of disobedience as a deliberate choice, rather than an accident. For that reason, God directs Raphael to ensure that Adam (and presumably Eve, although God exclusively uses the singular masculine pronoun) understands that he has all the knowledge needed for obedience, and that if he fails he will also carry all the fault.

By incorporating the message of obedience in his explanation of monism, Raphael allows Adam and Eve the ability to see fully the possibilities of ascension their devotion may bring. Yet Adam questions Raphael about the contract of obedience, which allows
Raphael to expand upon the lesson of free will God has deemed paramount to their education. Adam inquires:

What meant that caution joined, ‘If ye be found Obedient’? Can we want obedience then To him, or possibly his love desert Who formed us from the dust, and placed us here Full to utmost measure of what bliss Human desires can seek to apprehend? (513-18)

Adam equates obedience to God with his natural state, as if he would be unable to operate to the contrary. In De Doctrina Christiana Milton defends God’s arboreal prohibition against just this argument, explaining that without it man “would not have shown obedience at all by performing good works, since he was in fact drawn to these by his own natural impulses and without being commanded” (CPW VI: 352). Likewise, he explicitly defines obedience as an active quality of decision, rather than a passive natural directive, writing, “OBEDIENCE is the virtue which makes us determine to do God’s will above all things, and to serve him” (663, emphasis added). While Adam may think he will naturally and unthinkingly serve God—which he will, as long as he lets right reason be his guide—his natural freedom means that his actions will always be a function of his choice.

 Appropriately, Raphael answers Adam’s question by equating obedience with the “voluntary service” of the angels (529), but more broadly with the argument of Book III, that freely given obedience to God actively and continuously demonstrates love for Him.
He asks, “for how / Can hearts, not free, be tried, whether they must serve / Willing or no, who will but what they must / By destiny, and can no other choose?” (531-34)

Service itself becomes a kind of “trial” when the beings engaged in it are free, primarily, as Raphael indicates, because those who are not free lack the ability to choose. Echoing God’s play on “will” and “willfully,” Raphael links “will” to “willing,” shifting the connotation from that of a naturally and unconsciously directing inclination (which Adam initially understands) into one of agreement and active compliance. Choosing to serve rises from the love of God underscoring the entire monist continuum, returning to God the love in which He created it. Thomas Copeland explains: “virtue arises from love, which belongs to a cosmic scheme of immeasurable vastness, mysteriously interlocking the multitudinous creation into a single organism under God” and continues, “to become virtue, love must be confirmed, tested by choice” (118). Each request for obedience then becomes a trial by which a being chooses to demonstrate its understanding of and love for God.

At the same time, Raphael emphasizes that obedience from angels maintains their position in God’s hierarchy, but makes no mention of their ascension as he does for Adam and Eve. He explains:

Myself and all th’angelic host that stand

In sight of God enthroned, our happy state

Hold, as you yours, while our obedience holds;

On other surety none; freely we serve,

Because we freely love, as in our will
To love or not; in this we stand or fall. (V. 535-40)

The emphasis resides in standing and holding in opposition to falling, so that ascension is not posited here the way Raphael posits it for Adam. Milton describes the angels in *De Doctrina Christiana* as “absolutely obedient to God in all things” (1:345), which seems as if their obedience were absolute in a restrained sense, and their maintained position simply reflects their lack of choice. In fact, both passages argue simply that the angels demonstrate perfect obedience, not because it is demanded, but because their higher reasoning capacity allows them to understand better God’s love. Voluntary service stands as the only “surety” of angelic position, so that the love that inspires and rewards obedience becomes the requirement for continued participation in monism itself. In turn, the practice of obedience purifies spirituous matter, but (as discussed in chapter one) in that purification both matter and intellect become less individualized and more diffused.

The practice of obedience does perpetuate the angelic state, as over time a being becomes more physically and intellectually engaged in the collective conscious and thus closer to God as part of this unified whole.

It is towards this state of reciprocal love and collectivity that Raphael supposes Adam might ascend, although he will have been “Improved by tract of time” (498), or spiritually purified by a series of obedient acts over the course of his life. God explains that men remain on Earth “till by degrees of merit raised / They open to themselves at length the way / Up hither, under long obedience tried, / And Earth be chang’d to Heav’n, and Heav’n to Earth, / One kingdom, joy and union without end” (VIII. 157-161). The underlying point becomes that ascension arises from a kind of progressive purification—
Adam will be “by degrees of merit raised” as long as he succeeds “under long obedience tried.” Stella Revard explains, “as man functions as part of the creation, he lives to partake of and re-create in himself the vitalizing goodness of God” (54), so that the reciprocal process of love freely given allows Adam to become more fully engaged in and understanding of the divine consciousness. If ascension works as Raphael has posited, then the body of man will join with the collective and intelligential spirituousness of Heaven—then as Earth and its inhabitants become purified and integrated into the divine collective, so may Earth and Heaven be spiritually and materially joined as “One kingdom / joy and union without end.”

Still, ascension seems to be left entirely to the inhabitants of Earth: if spiritual purification leads to a greater engagement with the collective—both of materiality and consciousness—how could an already divine individual rise above the rest? This question exactly propels Satan’s fall and in the War in Heaven, as he watches the Son “Who speedily through all the hierarchies / Intends to pass triumphant, and give laws” (V. 692-93). Though Satan burns to ascend a natural hierarchy—one like monism in which the greater is naturally placed above the lesser—Rumrich explains that God through the exaltation has confronted the angels with a change: “The change in the Son’s status marks the transition from a merely natural order to a specifically moral one,” continuing, “God institutes a new order by presenting the Son and demanding that the angels make a moral decision” (161-62). Satan’s misunderstanding of the new hierarchy (and the requirements for ascension) functions as a pivotal mistake leading to his fall, yet the
Son’s exaltation in part relies on his choice to become incarnate, complicating the nature of heavenly ascent with a requirement of mortal descent.

Another problem with ascension in Heaven (aside from the rather lateral movement of engaging the collective spirit and consciousness), proves to be the vast gap between the creator and the created—the debt of gratitude that can never be repaid. Peter E. Medine, in his study of gratitude in *Paradise Lost*, points out “strictly (or legally) speaking, the fulfillment of the obligation of gratitude may be impossible, as in the case of the parent / child or divine / human relationship. One cannot return to his parents exactly what he has received from them—his very life and (presumably) rearing—or any reasonable equivalent” (121). Satan understands this inability to some degree, and in his soliloquy in Book IV conceptualizes obedience in heaven in terms of a divine debt owed to God. Yet he reveals his failure to recognize obedience and love as a self-fulfilling force, in which the satisfaction of that debt is inherent in its acknowledgement. He believed through his rebellion that he would “in a moment quit / The debt immense of endless gratitude, / So burdensome still paying, still to owe,” (51-53), but he learns that he was “Forgetful what from him I still received, / And understood not that a grateful mind / By owing owes not, but still pays, at once / Indebted and discharged” (54-57). Satan conceptualizes this “debt immense” as a cycle in which the act of paying never satisfies the demand for payment; the angels by this logic are “still paying, still to owe” ad infinitum. Yet the heavenly debt is actually self-satisfying, because gratitude simultaneously acknowledges the state of indebtedness and repays God with thanks—in the very nature of gratitude, the debtor proves “at once / Indebted and discharged.”
Likewise, repayment of this debt requires both understanding and acting like God, in freely and selflessly giving love. Medine explains, “Theologically speaking, if one recognizes and acknowledges God’s benefits, he can—will?—respond with gratitude, that is respond *gratis*, which is a mirror image of God’s actions towards mankind” and continues, “the response becomes religious in the deepest sense, an exertion of the ultimate freedom: it makes one godly—godlike—and reveals the state of grace” (122). The system of repayment does not require endless attempts to repay an infinite Creator through infinite service (a kind of inescapable indentured servitude). Rather, it is based in a simultaneous and reciprocal love, in which the method of payment mirrors the debt itself. Gratitude, then, requires a real understanding of God’s love, and obedience becomes a free choice to reciprocate and imitate it.

Satan’s misunderstanding of the heavenly debt, then, demonstrates not simply a misunderstanding of a holding pattern in Heaven by which the angels retain their places; it demonstrates a misunderstanding of the ascension of the Son, who ascends by choosing to redeem the debt of all mankind. Although Raphael recalls the Son’s exaltation in Book V—which narrates the ascension without addressing the cause—the readers have already witnessed a compelling reason for it in Book III, when the Son agrees to sacrifice himself to save mankind from the effects of the impending fall. The Argument of Book III suggests that the Son’s exaltation in Book V is tied to this particular sacrifice, as it anticipates, “The Son of God freely offers himself a ransom for man: the Father accepts him, ordains his incarnation, pronounces his exaltation above all names in Heaven and Earth, commands all the angels to adore him” (359). Likewise, at the moment of
exaltation God commands, “assume / Thy merits; under thee as Head Supreme / Thrones, Princedoms, Powers, Dominions I reduce: / All knees to thee shall bow” (318-321). The exaltation and command of adoration follows Raphael’s narration in Book V, in which God decrees to “Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers…your head I him appoint; / And by myself have sworn to him shall bow / All knees in Heav’n, and shall confess him Lord” (601, 606-608). The dramatization of the Son’s exaltation in Book III sheds light on the fact that his choice to “ransom” himself demonstrates the supreme devotion for which he is being celebrated.

It proves fitting, then, that the language of debt and gratitude that underscores the angels’ obedience becomes the language that surrounds the Son’s sacrifice. As God predicts man’s fall in Book III he links that first disobedience with ingratitude: “Ingrate, he had of me / All he could have; I made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall” (97-99). In many ways, a failure to uphold the “sole pledge of his obedience” (95) derives from man’s inability to appreciate his debt to God by appreciating His authority. Indeed, his disobedience splits him from God—“man disobeying, / Disloyal breaks his fealty” (203-204)—and leaves him “enthralled / By sin” (176-77), so that from this enthrallment he must be rescued by a greater power. Hence God calls upon the inhabitants of Heaven to help repay the balance: “Which of ye will be mortal to redeem / Man’s mortal crime, and just th’unjust to save, / Dwells in Heaven charity so dear?” (214-16) The request for “charity,” in the context of both divine debt and spiritual enthrallment, then collapses the meanings of economic generosity and
Christian compassion, so that the Son’s sacrifice simultaneously fulfills a contract and mirrors the freely-given love of God.

I highlight the similarity of the exaltation and the sacrifice to indicate that the Son’s ascent is irrevocably tied to his descent through the incarnation; the Son’s final exaltation, after the Revelation, can only occur because he has agreed to become man, suffer, and die in order to ascend. If the angels regularly engage in repaying a debt to God in order to maintain their position near Him, then the Son’s voluntary choice to take on the debt of mankind signifies a greater demonstration of his love for God and for creation. At the same time, because the satisfaction of the debt requires his incarnation, then the hierarchical “ascent” the Son experiences in Heaven is in fact reliant on his literal descent and ascent. Hence, not only does the Son’s incarnation, life, and death gently anticipate the monistic plant metaphor Raphael uses to describe it—“virgin seed” (284), “second root” (288), “live in thee transplanted” (293)—but God outlines the path of human ascension by decreeing, “So man, as is most just, / Shall satisfy for man, be judged and die, / And dying rise, and rising with him raise / His brethren, ransomed with his own dear life” (294-297). Like prime matter, the Son leaves God, becomes material, and over time and trial returns to Him—as Albert Labriola notes, “the Son reflects, in turn, the perfectibility of the human nature that he inhabits” (118)—allowing mankind once again the opportunity to rise towards Heaven by retracing its path.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{15} Labriola is of the opinion that the Son was an angel before his incarnation, and “thereby manifests the perfectibility of the angelic nature by exercising the fullest capability of self sacrificing love” in addition to the perfectibility of mankind (118). How Milton conceptualized the Son before the exaltation is debated, however—William B. Hunter, Jr. follows David Masson’s assertion that the Son existed as Logos or Word of God “which had created everything, including the angels” (216). Regardless of the Son’s status as Logos or angel, Labriola aptly concludes, “This affirmation validates the greater importance of the voluntary
Hence, the exaltation relies upon the Son’s becoming man and successfully passing through the process of ascension—as Milton writes in *Paradise Regained*, Satan is defeated “By one man’s firm obedience fully tried / Through all temptation” (I. 4-5)—but also reflects the significant change in heavenly order from a natural hierarchy to a moral hierarchy, in which a good man can ascend to the heights of Heaven. God explains:

Nor shalt thou by descending to assume
Man’s nature, lessen or degrade thine own.
Because thou hast, though throned in highest bliss
Equal to God, and equally enjoying
God-like fruition, quitted all to save
A world from utter loss. (303-308)

If we read the enjambment at the end of line 303, we find the crux of Christ’s exaltation—“by descending to assume”—in which the act of becoming lesser propels his reward of becoming greater. At the same time, the Son represents the triumphant ability of man to ascend once again through the continuum, as he sets aside his godliness entirely. Yet when God explains that the Son’s nature will not be degraded or lessened, we can argue this means he will remain spiritually pure even as he takes on a human form.¹⁶ The agreement to descend, then, parallels the radical hierarchical change in humiliation of the Son, rather than of his divine birthright, as the more perfect way and means of expressing his godliness and godliness” (118). See Labriola, Albert C. “The Son as Angel in *Paradise Lost.*” *Milton in the Age of Fish: Essays on Authorship, Text, and Terrorism.* Ed. Michael Lieb and Albert Labriola. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP (2006); Hunter, William B., “Milton on the Exaltation of the Son: The War in Heaven in *Paradise Lost.*” *ELH.* 36.1 (March 1969): 215-231.

¹⁶ Neil D. Graves argues that the Son’s descent entails an ontological and moral fall. I agree only to the extent of the argument that the Son, in his operation of free will, has the possibility of disobedience, which
Heaven, in that the Son “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” (308-311). As Rumrich explains, the hierarchy has become a moral one, and the importance of the Son’s “nearer tending” has outstripped the importance of Satan’s “nearer plac’d.”

The ascension of the Son both as a spiritual being and as a man, most importantly, becomes a method of unifying all things in God. Revard points out in Heaven “the Son is the means to achieve this union, for to look to the Son as king is to look to be united with God ‘as one individual Soul / For ever happy’ (5.610-611)” and continues, “If, knowing God as a loving Creator, [the angels] see his decree as perverse, then they willfully misunderstand the universe and their part in it. The mistake must be willful, for it must represent the conscious demand of self over that of Creator” (57). The Son’s offer to restore mankind and the subsequent leadership that grants him offers the angels another chance to obey God and become more fully unified within His will. At the same time, the Son’s descent and re-ascent as man allows mankind to be elevated and enter Heaven; God explains, “Therefore thy humiliation shall exalt / With thee thy manhood also to this throne; / Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt reign / Both God and man, Son both of God and man, / Anointed universal King” (313-317). By descending and then exalting both the human and divine, the Son paves the way—as Raphael promised to Adam in Book VIII that “Earth be chang’d to Heav’n, and Heav’n to Earth”—for God to become “all in all” (III. 341). Pointedly, this unity does not necessarily come in the form of the collapse of Heaven of Earth, but in a strengthening of their exchange; God explains that reinforces the magnitude of his perfection. See Graves, “Infelix Culpa: Milton’s Son of God and the Incarnation as a Fall in Paradise Lost.” Philological Quarterly 81.2 (Spring 200): 159-183.
during the Revelation “the world shall burn, and from her ashes spring / New Heav’n and Earth…With joy and love triumphing, and fair truth” (334-335, 338). Rather than a total unification of all spirits in Heaven, we might read God as being *everything* in *everyone*. God is “all in all” in that all beings can live in and fully embrace his tenets. We find then that the Son’s sacrifice successfully re-integrates man and spirit, through virtue of obedience and the power of choice, so that mankind can once again spiritually and intellectually ascend towards God.\footnote{17}

We find that the Son’s incarnation and ascension represents the perfectibility of man, and the ascension of spirit, through the power of moral choice. His offer to sacrifice himself for mankind demonstrates an understanding of both the divine debt and the will of God, and most notably, provides an example by which mankind can ascend through earthly trial and spiritual purity. Schoenfeldt rightly notes, “For Milton, obedience is not a function of servility but rather the highest form of ethical autonomy …. [he] imagines obedience not as a static condition but rather as active, even heroic conduct” (366).\footnote{18} Yet it may appear to be anachronistic to employ the temporal life and death of the Son as a model for Adam and Eve; however, Stephen J. Schuler aptly notes that while the Son’s death fulfills the doctrine of justification—that through the acceptance of God’s grace

\footnote{17} John Rumrich reflects upon the implications of the Son’s ability to *choose* his fate, explaining, “It is difficult to fully appreciate the daring of Milton’s God in creating a second divinity who perfectly represents his Father’s natural will in creation, but who could choose to forsake his Father’s moral will rather than be forsaken by it” (165). One could understand the same for the being who chooses to be forsaken, so that even in the exchange between God’s request and the Son’s acceptance there arises a reciprocal demonstration of risk and love, engendering the Son’s godliness even as he chooses to become man.

\footnote{18} Charles Durham also notes the heroic resistance of Abdiel as an incident of the changing moral hierarchy, in which a lesser angel can be found more meritorious than an archangel. See “‘To stand approv’d in sight of God’: Abdiel, Obedience, and Hierarchy in *Paradise Lost*.” *Milton Quarterly* 26.1 (March, 1992): 15-20.
man can find salvation—mankind still requires the process of sanctification, “the lifelong
process by which the Christian learn to live virtuously” (45). Schuler considers Milton’s
pedagogical treatise, *Of Education* (1644), and suggests, “because Milton’s conception of
education consistently deals with sanctification, education before and after the Fall is not
radically different” (46). Just as gratitude and obedience allow spirits to become more
virtuous by imitating and reciprocating freely given god-like love, so does Milton’s
treatise situate the goal of education as knowledge of God for the purposes of imitating
Him. The oft-quoted opening advocates this pattern: “The end then of learning is to repair
the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge
to love him, to imitate him, to be like him as we may the nearest by possessing our souls
of true virtue, which, being united to the heavenly grace of faith, makes up the highest
perfection” (971). It is in this argument that we see the goal of Raphael’s journey—to set
mankind on the right path to knowledge, to explain how knowledge of God’s love indebts
His creation, and how this knowledge can be a guide to reciprocating that love to Him, a
process through which mankind becomes god-like.

As a result, we find that the application of knowledge in moments of trial
becomes the impetus for ascension or fall—the choice to obey and imitate God or
disobey and break from him leads to the purification or degradation of an ontological
state. When Adam and Eve are confronted by the Temptation, they are presented with—
to borrow Stanley Fish’s reflection upon the *Areopagitica*—“the temptation to substitute
for the innumerable and inconclusive acts that go to make up the process by which the
self is refined and purified some *external* form of purification that can be mechanically
applied” (244). The possibility of restricting choice to preserve purification, of course, proves abominable to Milton in the form of licensing, and useless to the God of his epic. Thomas Festa surmises, “God ‘trusts him [man] with the gift of reason to be his own chooser’ because obedience to God, unless a conscious choice, is meaningless (YP 2:514; cf. PL 3.103-11)” (53). Hence God instructs Raphael to spark the minds of Adam and Eve to grow in their knowledge of creation and exercise their good reason in understanding how to best love and serve Him.

Yet we find that this capacity for reason, as it influences the will, must be consistently and correctly applied—just as falling can occur by reasoning that God does not need to be obeyed, so must right reason be sustained by the opposite opinion. Adam admonishes Eve:

God left free the will, for what obeys
Reason, is free, and reason he made right,
But bid her well beware, and still erect,
Least by some fair appearing good surprised
She dictate false, and misinform the will
To do what God expressly hath forbid. (IX. 351-356)

Adam opens up the possibility that reason can be swayed—alternatives can be presented—and may instruct the will to act against God, rather than for him. Just as mankind becomes “enthralled” to passion and sin after their fall, so must Adam and Eve must now be wary now of letting God’s right reason, not “some fair appearing good,” serve as their guide. William Walker notes, “the Fall is not essentially a failure of the will
but a failure of that faculty upon which the freedom of the will depends” (155); exercising right reason means continually reaffirming God’s authority and believing the reason he has given man—that encourages love and obedience—is right. Eve will encounter its antithesis during the temptation, as Satan will undermine her received knowledge and present the possibility of an epistemology without God. The following chapter explores how Eve’s slow negation of God’s authority, alongside Adam’s privileging of body over mind, will lead to a choice that manifests those qualities in their minds, bodies, and environments.
Chapter Three: Embodying the Fall

The temptation of man in Book IX of *Paradise Lost* most clearly demonstrates how epistemological activity results in ontological change: privileging Satan’s logic over divine faith, for example, results in the physical consequences of childbirth and death for Adam and Eve. Yet falling, in some sense, also alters the entire process of self-directed ascension through the monist continuum; just as it prevents re-entrance for fallen angels, it complicates ascension for fallen man. With “knowledge of good bought dear by knowing ill” (IV. 221-22), mankind opens itself both to experience and to enact evil as a method of knowing it, and thus cannot escape its enthrallment by itself. Over the course of the temptation and its aftermath, we can uncover a process in which fallen logic—functioning as anti-logic, or the deprivation of knowledge—is embodied in Satan’s serpent and his rhetoric, and packaged to Eve as a new epistemology of experience in place of faith. Experience, rather than building a unified epistemology to rival faith, actually has a divorcing effect: it presumes knowledge without God, spiritually severs Adam and Eve, and shifts their way of knowing from collectivity to division. This final chapter demonstrates how the epic hinges on issues of epistemology: the crux of temptation lies in Satan’s presentation of two different ways of knowing—experience and faith—between which Eve believes she must choose. The consequence of that choice, we find, radically alters mankind’s ontological state and the epistemology with which it corresponds.
Strikingly, the opening narrative of Book IX recalls the relationship between epistemology and ontology discussed in this project; we find Satan attempting to *embody* his mind, searching for an animal to inhabit that might make his cruel intentions inauspicious. This episode subtly echoes Satan’s fall from grace, descending by reason from mutable to base matter—fitting in the sense that he will orchestrate the fall of man with the same temptation of power and refusal of obedience that led to his damnation. The image of Satan entering the garden in mist and assuming the appropriate form to house his evil mind acts almost like a Shakespearian dumbshow, replaying the plot and anticipating the climax. First, an emphasis is placed upon “rising” as Satan enters Paradise through the Tigris river, which “Rose up a fountain by the Tree of Life; / In with the river sunk, and with it rose / Satan involved in rising mist“ (73-75). The effect of both “rising” and “mist” is reminiscent of the angelic ontological state, in which the higher one rises in the heavenly hierarchy the more one dissipates into others. Tellingly, the narrative describes Satan as “involved,” connoting both envelopment or covering (OED 1) or winding and coiling (OED 2, 3). Arguably, we can picture Satan surrounded by angelic unity but not partaking in it, beginning to revolve his rebellious thoughts in Heaven.

Once in Eden, the narrative focuses on Satan’s mental cogitations, which “after long debate, irresolute / Of thoughts revolved, his final sentence *chose*” (87-88). The characteristically fallen “revolving” thoughts lead to a choice, which appropriately includes his “final sentence,” as it does in Heaven, and in turn brings him to the appropriate body: “Fit vessel, fittest imp of fraud…for the wily snake, / Whatever
sleights none would suspicious mark, / As from his wit and native subtlety proceeding” (89, 91-93). Evil choice leads to “fit vessel” for such a mind, as here the snake embodies his subtle machinations, where his demonic body has represented a hardened heart and isolation from the Heavenly collective. In this case Satan chooses his fit body, rather than incidentally changing it by falling, yet the fiend feels distinctly how this moment recalls his fall from grace. The fiend laments, “O foul descent! That I who erst contended / With gods to sit the highest, am now constrained / Into a beast, and mixed with bestial slime, / This essence to incarnate and imbrute, / That to the hight of deity aspired” (163-67). The degradation of “essence” to both fleshly *incarnation* and *imbrutation* directly mirrors his permanently changed material state, from spirituousness to gross matter. Further, the fact that Satan’s final act of evil revisits his moral and physical fall reminds us of the inescapability of the original act; every sin traces back to it because sinfulness engenders more sins, each time replaying for and recapturing him in a degrading cycle of damnation.

While Satan’s wrong reasoning inadvertently led to his fall, during the temptation he deliberately employs this intellectual process and its embodiment to draw Eve into falling as he did: by questioning God’s edicts and refusing to obey them. In chapter one I discussed how the fallen consciousness is characterized by circularity and “wandering”—in Book IX, we find Satan exploiting this oblique mental process in order to lure Eve into sin. We can consider the process as one that uses the “maze” (Satan’s strange and unproductive logic) to cause “amazement” (Eve’s loss of grounding as a result of Satan’s reasoning). Kathleen Swaim astutely observes of the image, “in *Paradise Lost*, IX, *maze*
is at first concretely offered as the physical and spatial form assumed by Satan in the serpent. As the sequence of uses proceeds, maze comes to describe more abstractly...the verbal, logical, and spiritual processes Satan employs to controvert the reason and faith of Eve and thus of Adam” (134). Compellingly, as Swaim points out, in this book mazes act doubly to both lure and obscure. Wandering through the garden, Satan hopes to find “the serpent sleeping, in whose mazy folds / To hide me, and the dark intent I bring” (IX. 161-62). With the serpent embodying the temptation, evil also will be hidden underneath the “mazy folds” of Satan’s wandering (il)logic.

The process of amazed is linguistically marked by Satan’s rising circular movement, which moves into his inspiration of Eve’s “wonder,” leading to her “amazement.” Once Satan inhabits the serpent the concentration of language connoting serpentine movement and circling intensifies—if he doesn’t actually circle Eve like a vulture circling its prey, he might as well have. He proceeds with “indented wave” (496), a “circular base of rising folds” (498), “fold above fold a surging maze” (499), “erect / Amidst his circling spires” (501-502), and “floated redundant” (503), “with tract oblique” (510), from which he “veers oft” (515), and finally “so varied he, and of his torturous train / Curled many a wanton wreath in sight of Eve, / To lure her eye” (516-518, emphasis added). Such knotting intends for us to lose our way, and we find that layered meanings will follow from the serpent’s layered body. He addresses Eve, “Wonder not” (532), initiating a complex play first on the word one—he has both found Eve alone and praises her singularity (532n). Yet the address itself also operates on several levels of meaning, as it first commands Eve not to wonder and in a kind of
dramatic irony admits to readers *this is not a wonder*. Such doubling of *one* acts like the serpent’s folds to hide his “dark intent” within a multiplicity of meanings. His speech will lead Eve “not unamazed” (552), and then “yet more amazed” (614), until finally “He leading swiftly rolled / In tangles, and made intricate seem straight” (631-32). The narrator compares him to a “wand’ring fire” (634) that “misleads th’amazed night-wanderer from his way / To bogs and mires, and oft through pond or pool, / There swallowed up and lost” (640-42). The linguistic markers of Satan’s conversation with Eve chart a process of encircling, confusing, and swallowing that anticipates the logical process in which Eve becomes enveloped and lost.

This image of misleading and swallowing up underlines Satan’s end game for the temptation: to destroy God’s creation by destroying Adam and Eve. I have already mentioned that sin exemplifies an impulse towards negation—and as Augustine argued, towards depriving oneself of God—so Satan’s destructive impulse becomes both a function and perpetuation of his sinful state. Early in the book he explains, “For only in destroying I find ease / To my relentless thoughts” (129-130), embracing the hellish cycle of continual sinning that temporarily eases but ultimately unleashes further torment. This impulse to destroy manifests itself in Satan’s logic as well as his goals; he recalls, “What hither brought us, hate, *not* love, *nor* hope / Of Paradise for Hell, *hope* here to taste / Of pleasure, *but* all pleasure to destroy, / Save what is in *destroying*; other joy / To me is lost” (475-79, emphasis added). The language here becomes that of introduction and negation, dragging words from one clause to the next and undermining them. Just as sin is a form of spiritual negation, sinfulness is characterized by a linguistic negation,
suggesting logic that grows from a sinful mind doesn’t move very far, if at all. It resonates with the destructive impulse and negative mechanism by which Satan will lure Eve into negating God’s word and destroying Eden.

While Satan’s circular rhetoric and insistent questioning certainly prove confusing to Eve and the reader, I’d like to suggest that when he heightens this confusion in the temptation, he is striving to negate received knowledge entirely and present the fruit as the only option to gain it. He peppers Eve with questions throughout the episode, but importantly concludes with those that are unanswerable:

That whoso eat thereof, forthwith attains
Wisdom without their leave? And wherein lies
The offense, that man should thus attain to know?
What can your knowledge hurt him, or this Tree
Impart against his will if all be his?
Or is it envy, and can envy dwell
In heav’nly breasts? These, these and many more
Causes import your need of this fair fruit. (724-31)

Such rhetorical questions break down Eve’s faith in received reason because they prove impossible to answer. Logic seemingly unravels before her eyes, and Satan’s temptation ends by positing the inability to know anything without eating the fruit. Strikingly, Eve mimics Satan’s convoluted linguistic play when she tries to consider the situation for herself, “For good unknown, sure is not had, or had / And yet unknown, is as not had at all. / In plain then, what forbids he but to know, / Forbids us good, forbids us to be
wise?” (756-59, emphasis added). The same “hateful siege / Of contraries” (121-22) that plagues the tormented Satan in the garden characterizes fallen (or falling) logic on the whole; introducing and negating, Eve engages in Satan’s same process of reasoning that delays conclusion and destroys linear and causal relationships. Rather than build upward, Satanic questioning tears down, creating a kind of logic that does not naturally progress but circles back and cancels itself out.

Canceling out linear logic allows Satan to introduce a new way of knowing that is divorced from God’s word: one that privileges personal experience and empirical evidence over faith. It is this same mindset that informs Satan’s heresy during the war in Heaven; he rebuts Abdiel’s indebtedness to God as a creator, “Strange point and new! / Doctrine which we would know whence learnt: who saw / When this creation was? Remember’st thou / Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?” (V. 855-58) Although Satan poses this question to undermine Abdiel’s belief in God’s creation—to force Abdiel to admit he cannot remember his creation—it poses an interesting problem in that neither angel can offer an empirical answer to the question of their origins. Satan’s questioning in this passage spirals knowledge into nothingness. He follows by suggesting the only way to fill the void of not-knowing is experience: “We know no time when we were not as now; / Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised / By our own quickening power” (859-861). Satan attempts, Barbara Lewalski succinctly explains, to be “a thorough-going empiricist, who demands proof by sense experience as the only basis for knowledge” *(Divine Revelation*, 11).
Certainly Satan employs empiricism as a way of suggesting God’s inexplicable decrees are—based on their inexplicability—unjustifiable, but in the temptation scene he wears down Eve’s collective knowledge in order to introduce an experiential epistemology that he knows will separate her from God. The process of negation moves first from undermining the validity of received knowledge, to introducing a method of knowing without God, which results in a life without God—sin once again becomes a process of negating God in the self by refusing to obey Him. In pressing Eve to eat the fruit, Satan highlights her present ignorance—“whatever thing death be” (IX. 695), he flippantly remarks—and asks, “Of evil, if what is evil / Be real, why not known, since easier shunned?” (698-99) He plays on the double meaning of knowing as both intellectual (faith or intuition) and active (experiential). Reading his question in two ways first undermines intellectual knowing and then encourages the active—he asks why Eve can’t identify evil and suggests, since she knows intellectually that eating the fruit is wrong (698-699n), she would actively know evil by doing it. Strikingly, Satan pulls apart divine and material knowledge and makes them incompatible—the opposite of Adam’s point in Book V that they are steps on the same scale—forcing Eve to choose between knowledge received and experienced.

In simple terms, the temptation attempts—and ultimately succeeds in—the dividing of what Raphael in Book V-VIII sought to unify: knowledge and creation. By forcing apart two ways of knowing, Eve is forced to choose one or the other. Kathleen Swaim argues in Before and After the Fall: Contrasting Modes in Paradise Lost, “Experience is a category of fallenness in Milton’s epic, of facts, things, time, and
literalness, of visibilia and weight, of that which is available to the lower sensory faculties and that which is subject to the law of gravity, that is, the downward pull of the earth” (13). In light of Raphael’s encouragement of Adam’s knowledge, however, we might adjust Swaim’s remark to suggest that “experience is the preoccupation of fallenness in Milton’s epic,” and in that way point out the reversal of knowledge priority taking place in Satan’s efforts. The notion of the downward pull, however, deftly articulates the problem that privileging experience over faith poses for ascension in the monist continuum. Everything, including knowledge, should be unified in its upward motion to God—Satan’s dividing rhetoric pulls knowledge out of this logical continuum by suggesting a way of knowing that is not bolstered by God’s omnipresence.

In *Divine Revelation and the Poetics of Experience*, Barbara Lewalski makes the important counterpoint that Eve does have experience from which she can draw, and I include it here to point out how Satan has created divisions where they do not exist. Eve’s informing experiences include her evil dream in Book V, Raphael’s narrative of the War in Heaven, the process of creation in the universe and growth in the garden, and the happiness of her life in Eden with Adam (15). Lewalski argues that during the temptation Eve is “called upon to construe a divine text in the light of her own experience of God’s ways, to interpret its as yet unknown implications by what she does know, drawing upon a rich fund of personal experience she has already gained” (14). Eve has enough intellectual background to know that the situation she faces during the temptation should be a question of whether or not she follows the serpent’s lead—this should be an easy choice since she knows temptation is coming, and has even seen it in her dream. But
because Satan undermines this cache of knowledge—received and intuited—that could help her make the choice, he is able to recast that choice as one between ignorance and knowledge. The success of his efforts infuses Eve’s final unfallen lines: “What fear I then, rather what know to fear / Under this ignorance of good and evil, / Of God or death, or law or penalty? / Here grows the cure of all, this fruit divine” (IX. 773-76). All of Raphael’s warnings fall away when Satan undermines Eve’s total knowledge, and all that is left to direct her appears to the be fruit.

Through this dividing of knowledge Satan forces Eve to choose between herself and God, forgetting that obedient experience of the world is part of a process leading up to godliness. Georgia Christopher argues that at the height of the temptation, “instead of repeating God’s prohibition in the face of counter-evidence as before, Eve undertakes to dissolve the cognitive dissonance between her new experience and her previous experience with God’s word” (160). Strikingly, the process of eating the fruit mirrors Satan’s allegorical embrace of Sin, as sinful thinking has created a distance between the good and evil self, and the choice to cross it involves an active integration of sin into the body. During Eve’s temptation, the same dissonance between personal ambition and divine obedience is resolved by refusing obedience, and by taking the action to refuse, the integration of sin into the body is again allegorically represented—here as ingestion, previously as copulation. For Satan, that integration is one of creating Sin and then embracing her, for Eve it is the act of “eating death” (792) that brings a sinful negation—refusal of God—into her physical and spiritual form. By eating the fruit she embraces Sin, and in that manner she ingests divine absence. Eve reinforces rather than solves her
cognitive dissonance by choosing the action that divides her from God, and embracing a way of “knowing” that cannot be resolved without Him.

Equally compelling about Satan’s methodology is the fact that division characterizes fallenness in a number of ways, which is also a strikingly weakened and painful condition. Appropriately, during the War in Heaven, when the sword of Michael “deep ent’ring shared / All his right side; then Satan first knew pain” (326-27). The division of himself from God, and of one-third of the angels from Heaven, inspires and resonates in the first pain that Satan ever feels. Hence, it becomes fitting that Michael’s attack physically enacts Satan’s spiritual severance and forces him to recognize the painful state of dividedness. Being divorced from God, divided in the self, signals the beginning of emotional and physical torment.

The pain of division derives from the fact that the underlying principles of the monist continuum are unity and love; all creation is unified as a result of its one matter, and the closer a being comes to God, the more unified its conscious and material state is with others. Division in any sense becomes problematic as strength of mind and being derives from collectivity, and because division in matter and mind characterizes lower states along the continuum, such as the fallen angels. Hence, the division of labor that Eve proposes before the fall becomes equally problematic, as it potentially weakens the collective strength of the human couple, and opens the space for descent. Adam acknowledges this point explaining, “I from the influence of thy looks receive / Access in every virtue, in thy sight / More wise, more watchful, stronger, if need were / Of outward strength,” (IX. 310-12). Further, not only is Adam strengthened by Eve’s presence, he
believes their strength to be reciprocal through their mutual love: “Not then mistrust, but
tender love enjoins, / That I should mind thee oft, and mind thou me” (357-58). The play
on “enjoin”—meaning both command and literally joining together—suggests that the
“tender love” governing their relationship requires their unity to sustain the reciprocity by
which they may strengthen each other. The relationship is not unlike the reciprocal love
of the angels and God, in which the bond is strengthened by the exchange within it.

To divide themselves now means to play with the possibility that they will
weaken their strength of body and mind; yet the process of dividing not only introduces
disagreement to Adam and Eve, but also physically reflects a troubling state of
intellectual discrepancy between the two. This dual divergence—of body and of mind—
is represented in the irresolvable paradox by which Adam finally relents to Eve’s request,
“Go; for thy stay, not free, absents thee more; / Go in thy native innocence, rely / On
what thou hast of virtue, summon all, / For God towards thee hath done his part, do thine”
(IX. 372-75). Adam suggests Eve go to help her stay with him in spirit, and because
forcing her to stay might disjoin them further. Yet there can be no consilience between
bodies and minds here, underscoring the possibility that in separating themselves Adam
and Eve enter a liminal state, where movement through the continuum is possible based
on the discrepancy between their physical and intellectual needs. Yet in finding
themselves divided, and dividing themselves further, they anticipate the epistemological
and ontological individuation resulting from movement down the continuum.

Paradoxically, Adam’s strong desire for unity draws him into the state of fallen
disunity, separating him both from Eve and God although he tries to avoid it. The
physical pull of his bond with Eve overrides even the argument of ascension with which she tempts him. Though he reads Eve’s account of the fruit as delivering the promise of graduated epistemological/ontological ascent that Raphael described—“Higher degree of life, inducement strong / To us, as likely tasting to attain / Proportional ascent, which cannot be / But to be gods, or angels, demi-gods” (934-36)—he does not give in to that promise of possible ascension. He falls in order to follow Eve, who also notes that they have been divided; “Thou therefore also taste,” she pleads, “that equal lot / May join us, equal joy, as equal love; / Lest thou not tasting, different degree / Disjoin us” (881-84).

Adam, now “amazed” (889) at Eve’s transgression, twice resolves that the bond of nature is too strong for him to ignore. To himself he decides, “I feel / The link of nature draw me: flesh of flesh, / Bone of my bone thou art, and from thy state / Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe” (913-16). To Eve he explains, “So forcible within my heart I feel / The bond of nature draw me to my own, / My own in thee, for what thou art is mine; / Our state cannot be severed, we are one, / One flesh; to lose thee were to lose myself” (955-59). Adam succumbs to the physical pull of Eve’s separation—as painful as we know such division to be—rather than remembering his spiritual allegiance to God, or even considering what division may occur between himself and his creator. Adam, as Raphael warned, has a tendency to privilege the lesser over the greater, and here we find him privileging both the physical over the intellectual, and the romantic over the spiritual.

Eve’s privileging of the lower experience over the higher faith, alongside Adam’s privileging of the body over the spirit, results in the ontological manifestation of those choices and the physical effects of the fall. When Adam lashes out at Eve that he
“willingly chose rather death with thee” than “immortal bliss” (1167), he articulates one of the ontological changes that follow from their disobedience; notably, most of the edicts of the protoevangelium introduce a new physicality to the lives of Adam and Eve. Like Satan during the War in Heaven, Eve as a divider will experience the pain that comes with physical division, as the Son explains, “Thy sorrow I will greatly multiply / By thy conception; children shalt thou bring / In sorrow forth” (X. 193-95). Her place in the natural hierarchy will also become concretized by the Son’s command, as he makes explicit “to thy husband’s will / Thine shall submit, he over thee shall rule” (195-96). Adam will first be forced into hard labor, and then consigned to death: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, / Till thou return unto the ground, for thou / Out of the ground wast taken, know thy birth, / For dust thou art, and shalt to dust return” (205-208). Furthermore, death will not be the pleasant dissolution Adam imagined in Book VIII: “with soft oppression seized / My drowsèd sense, untroubled, though I thought / I then was passing to my former state / Insensible, and forthwith to dissolve” (288-91). The “death” imagined before the fall was simply a dematerialization, the body’s return to the one matter of the continuum. After the fall, the body returns to dust—the gross matter of Earth—rather than directly to the rarefied matter of God. The physical changes brought about by the protoevangelium propose clear ontological alterations as a result of Adam and Eve’s choices to disobey God.

Yet perhaps the most important ontological consequence of the fall is the alteration of the universe itself, and the subsequent changes to the continuum—or at least ascension along it—that take place after the fall. God sends his angels to make sure the
sun shines “as might affect the Earth with cold and heat / Scarce tolerable” (653-54), to create seasons (655-56), to set the influence of zodiac signs (661-64), to place the winds against each other (664-67); possibly he “bid his angels to turn askance / The poles of Earth twice ten degrees and more / From the sun’s axle; they with labor pushed / Oblique the centric globe” (668-71), or else “the sun / Was bid turn reins from th’equinoctial road” (671-72)—the days have been altered no matter how one fancies the universe was set up. Alistair Fowler remarks of Milton’s prelapsarian order that “This lucid, rational world can be seen as figuring a simple innocence now lost” (cited in Poole, 180), and indeed the tilted and changeable universe reflects the obscure and changeable reasoning that characterizes fallen beings. Yet we may suggest a causal relationship between Eve’s first bite and its cosmic impact—“she plucked, she ate: / Earth felt the wound” (IX.781-82)—and William Poole argues, “For Milton, occasionally called a Baconian or a radical, the Fall not only damaged our ability to describe, but it cracked the frame of the cosmos” (180) and changed the shape of reality itself.

As a result of the fall Adam and Eve find not only the physical world changed, but also the future epistemology of the human race altered, reflecting the choice they made to know good by knowing evil. Upon awakening the couple finds, “their eyes how opened, and their minds / How darkened” (IX. 1053-54), by the restrictions they have placed upon their knowledge, and by the caveat that they must now know evil by experiencing it. Their cognitive processes have been overturned, “For understanding ruled not, and the will / Heard not her lore, both in subjection now / To sensual appetite, who from beneath / Usurping over sov’reign reason claimed / Superior sway” (1127-31).
Just as the body becomes more physically realized as a result of the fall, so do the baser instincts override the intellectual spirits that should govern them. If sensuality now rules reason, then learning becomes more tactile, and evil no longer intuited but differentiated from goodness by practice or experience.

Likewise, this “doom…of knowing good by evil,” as Milton writes in the *Areopagitica* (939), also leads to divisiveness in mankind’s knowledge; the process of knowing the world was once understanding the unity of all creation, but now it can only be known from the reassembly of divided and differentiated pieces. Swaim argues, “as the prelapsarian universe is unified and continuous, the postlapsarian is divided and fragmented…Raphael’s emphasis on likeness is replaced by Michael’s emphasis on differentiation” (56). Indeed, Milton poetically renders this change in the *Areopagitica* when he dramatizes the dismembered body of Truth reassembled by her “sad friends…[who] went up and down gathering up limb by limb still as they could find them” (955). The various pieces of Truth brought together by her seekers are only unified in God, who “shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mold them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection” (955). Strikingly, where in the prelapsarian world the body could turn into something resembling intelligence itself, the postlapsarian world transforms intelligence into a broken and dismembered body. Just as the Earth felt the wound of Eve’s bite, so does Truth find herself ripped apart—the Fall lends a painful physicality to all creation, underscored by the horrible image of tearing or separating that which once was unified.
What becomes especially striking, however, is mankind’s natural impulse towards unity even after the fall solidifies their spiritually divided state; the love that unifies the monist universe can be harnessed by mankind to reunify it after the fall. The separation and reunion of Adam and Eve demonstrates the process by which their loving reciprocity begins to heal the wounds of the fall; a microcosmic demonstration of the slow process of restoring the unity of creation. When Adam begins his soliloquy, he has been “to sorrow abandoned,” (717) and in that isolation only once mentions that his punishment has been “divided / With that bad woman” (834-37). Yet not only has Adam’s punishment been divided with Eve, but Adam more importantly has been divided from Eve. The rupture of their mutually stabilizing relationship has turned them against each other so that Adam, “estranged in look and altered style,” (1132) accuses Eve of disobedience and “thus they in mutual accusation spent / The fruitless hours, but neither self-condemning, / And of their vain contest appeared no end” (1187-90). Their “mutual” accusations become a perversion of their once reciprocal relationship. Rather than a reciprocity that strengthens their bond—love received back and forth at once moving between and unifying them—this reciprocal condemnation heightens their division and keeps them locked in an irresolvable cycle of blame.

After Adam’s fall he, like Satan, becomes locked in the vicious and unproductive cognitive cycle of the fallen. Primarily, Adam mulls over his place as the progenitor of all future sin on earth; “All that I eat or drink, or shall beget, / Is propagated curse” (X. 728-29), he laments. Not only does sin begin with Adam and live on in his children, but their anger will circle curses back upon him as the cause of their fallenness. For this reason he
bemoans God’s command to increase and multiply, “for what can I increase / Or multiply, but curses on my head?” (731-32). Adam articulates the circularity of his infamy by explaining “all from me / Shall with a fierce reflux on me redound, / On me as their natural center light / Heavy, though in their place” (738-41). For Adam to consider himself a “natural center” suggests a kind of emanation of his sin (“all from me”) that extends in all directions by his procreation, while the “reflux” of his children’s sins and accusations will increase the weight of his own burden—hence they “light” upon and make the center “heavy.” The rhetorical repetition of “on me” emphasizes Adam’s sense of being weighted under his children’s sins, yet the structure “on me redound, / On me” also creates a linguistic circularity within the lament itself—a sense of guilt piling up on the first father. Sin, proceeding from Adam, will only return to him.

The fallen man, like the fallen angel, questions what he owes to God and how that payment should be rendered, failing to understand the ontological shift that results from his fall that prevents the possibility of repayment. He articulates his indebtedness in the language of a contract, explaining

As my Will

Concurred not to my being, it were but right
And equal to reduce me to my dust,
Desirous to resign, and render back
All I received, unable to perform
Thy terms too hard, by which I was to hold
The good I sought not. (746-52)
Believing that his contractual obligation would be to “render back” his physical being to God if he could not return gratitude and obedience, Adam presses, “To the loss of that, / Sufficient penalty, why hast thou added / The sense of endless woes?” (752-54) Adam forgets that woe has been already established within the terms of the contract; in Book VIII, God tells him that if he eats the fruit he will be “From that day mortal, and this happy state / Shalt lose, expelled from hence into a world / Of woe and sorrow” (331-33). For Adam, like Satan, woe in the fallen state will also constitute a painful experience of unpayable debt—of living without the hope of satisfying God—as the Son explains, “Atonement for himself or offering meet, / Indebted and undone, hath none to bring” (III. 234-35). The Son’s perfect and sinless body must satisfy for mankind, not Adam’s simple rendering back of what he has defiled.

As a function of his fallen consciousness—in the manner of both Satan and Eve—Adam’s revolving thought process leads him to much the place in which he began; though he has forgiven God, he sees no end to suffering. He admits:

Him after all disputes

Forced I absolve: all my evasions vain,

And reasonings, though through mazes, lead me still

But to my own conviction: first and last

On me, me only, as the source and spring

Of all corruption, all the blame lights due;

So might the wrath. (828-33)
He acknowledges his own logical circularity by explaining his “reasonings” as fallen “mazes” that have taken him “but to my own conviction.” Within that larger cycle we again we find a refrain, “On me, me only,” which re-enforces his sense of singular fault, an eddy in a larger whirlpool of guilt and shame. While Adam’s fallen logic is not as linguistically convoluted as Satan’s or Eve’s, it continues to trap him in a cognitive cycle through which he can come to no conclusion. He finally laments, “O Conscience, into what Abyss of fears / And horrors hast thou driven me; out of which / I find no way, from deep to deeper plunged!” (842-44).

I posited in chapter one that fallen logic leads nowhere because God provides the true answers to all questions; without God, and particularly without love, no progress towards real truth can be made. Strikingly, it is Eve who restores Adam’s godlike (and prelapsarian) impulses for unity and love when she approaches him imploring, “Between us let there be peace, both joining; / As joined in injuries, one enmity / Against a foe by doom expressed assigned us,” (924-26). Eve’s plight unlocks in Adam the love that dispels fallen torment and reignites their hope for ascension; as Raphael long before explained, “loves refines / The thoughts, and heart enlarges, hath his seat / In reason, and is judicious, is the scale / By which to Heav’nly love thou may’st ascend” (VIII. 589-92). Love underscores the entire process of ascension, as service freely given brings one closer to God, so does the presence of love between Adam and Eve teach them to be more godlike—it “refines / The thoughts” and “hath his seat / In reason.” Most importantly, to refigure Adam’s words, love underscores the “scale of nature set,” as the hierarchy is ultimately built upon an increasing capacity to love and serve God. Eve’s
rejoining restores peace between the couple, and Adam again calls upon their strengthening reciprocity when relenting, “rise, let us no more contend, nor blame / Each other, blamed enough elsewhere, but strive / In offices of love, how we may light’n / Each other’s burden in our share of woe” (958-61). The focus turns once again to rising and lightening as the couple returns to love.

What then, is the relationship of body and mind at the end of the epic? It turns out to be far less poetic than the narrator hopes in Book III, who imagines outward eyes turning inward and seeing as divine beings might, but perhaps not as different as might first be thought. After Michael reveals future history, the Redemption, and the Apocalypse to Adam, the first father explains, “[I] have my fill / Of knowledge, what this vessel can contain” (XII. 558-59), and names love, obedience, dependence, fortitude, and faith as his greatest lessons. Yet what Adam’s vessel now contains is actually “the sum / Of wisdom” (575-76), having always been available to his frail, and now frailer, human form and darkened mind. Michael instructs him to let that knowledge govern his actions:

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. (XII. 581-87)
Ultimately, we find in that the same inwardness the creation of “a paradise within” that perhaps could grow towards God like Eden. Knowledge—turned inward to contemplate the dictates of faith—can still govern the body and refine the spirit, although the process will be more difficult with the darkening of reason, and incomplete without faith in the Son. A failure to reason and a choice to disobey has irreversibly altered the physical makeup of the universe, creating cracks in a once seamless process of ascension. Still, the effort to reunify creation combined with a return to interiority and spirituality keeps the possibility of ascension a reality and a gift, Milton suggests, for those who love God.
Conclusion

In her excellent biography, *The Life of John Milton*, Barbara Lewalski notes, “Milton’s epic is preeminently a poem about knowing and choosing—for the Miltonic Bard, for his characters, for the reader” (460). Over the course of this project, I have attempted to support this claim by demonstrating the integral nature of epistemology—of knowing and choosing—to the dynamic material continuum of the epic, and in turn to restore the agency of the beings placed along it. Though characters’ perceptions of the world influence their actions and bear physical consequences, it must also be recognized that the monistic makeup of the universe reflects the form of their reason—just as there is one matter, there is also, fundamentally, one mind. The complex struggles of obedience and faith can be read more simply along the lines of unity versus division, or positive versus negative action. Stanley Fish, in his Preface to the second edition of *Surprised by Sin*, argues “Paradise Lost is full of moments like this, moments in which the affirmation of variety is immediately countered by the imposition of unity and the insistence on an underlying sameness. These moments mime the logic of monism” (xxi). This presents, in some ways, a frustrating paradigm for an object as complex as the reasoning mind, which we imagine to be dynamic, unique, and multitudinous.

Yet Milton, I believe, means us to read these redirections with less judgment. We might take up his position from *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*:

Let the statutes of God be turned over…by men of what liberal profession whatsoever, of eminent spirit and breeding joined with a diffuse and
various knowledge of divine and human things; able to balance and define
good and evil, right and wrong, throughout every state of life; able to
show us the ways of the Lord, straight and faithful as they are, not full of
cracks and contradictions and pit-falling dispenses, but with divine insight
and benignity measured out to the proportion of each mind and spirit, each
temper and disposition, created so different from each other, and yet by
the skill of the wise conducting all to become uniform in virtue. (862-62)

We find, perhaps, that this one mind is not a divine brainwashing but a unity in virtue,
which can be accessed from any state along the continuum. The intellectual guide
becomes one like Raphael who redirects his students to the simplest principles needed to
love and obey God. The breadth of knowledge captured in the text—astronomy, history,
geography, logic, doctrine—varies and sometimes contradicts itself, not unholy in its
pursuit as long as the foundation of virtue truly lies beneath it. We find in Milton’s poem
a reminder to “be lowly wise,” concerned with the goodness, charity, and virtue, through
which we may feel that we are happier than we know.
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