

THE IMPORTANCE OF OBEDIENCE & FREE WILL IN JOHN MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST*

Assistant: Halima Ismail Radam¹

University of Diyala, Basic Education College, Department of English

Puneshamery@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

One can argue that the notion of Free will is the unconditional supremacy given to Humans by God to create their own faith and destiny. However, Milton expressed his own perspective of Free will as a singular authorization of obedience for him and for others to God. The main intension of this study is to highlight the question of obedience and free will in John Milton Poem *Paradise Lost* (1667). This study will offer an answer to the key question on “what is the Miltonic obedience?”, this study will examine not only the outlined unadventurously literary texts set by Milton but rather to focus on the concept of obedience and free will in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). Furthermore, this study will highlight the Miltonic theory of obedience and free will as an attempt to understand and to recreate his ideologies of Free will and God's Will of obedience from Milton's perspective. This study will be textually limited to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). Theoretically, this study will follow the method of theological and philosophical literary interpretation to fully comprehend Milton's conception of obedience and Free will. This study will undertake the classic literary and the religious Christian methodology for further analytic understanding in highlighting both Milton's philosophical classicism and Milton's the theoretical Christen.

KeyWords: Obedience, Disobedience, Free will, Paradise Lost, Religious study

1. INTRODUCTION

One can argue that the notion of Free will is the unconditional supremacy given to Humans by God to create their own faith and destiny. However, Milton expressed his own perspective of Free will as a singular authorization of obedience for him and for others to God. Milton's theory of obedience is an extremely complicated perception of God's Will, thus the understanding of obedience mechanism one shouldn't consider obedience as an abstract ideology (Mohsen Qassemi, 2010). Milton tried to frame the method and the function of obedience since to him it wasn't factual, idealized, law, emotional statue and an inferior condition but it was rather an expression of the dependence lies within the liberated individuals (Timothy Irish Watt, 2011). *Paradise Lost (1667)* by John Milton is his most well-known three books poem which tells the story of the two main falls in classical/religious style. The first fall which is the fall of the angel Satan and his rebellious comrades for their disobedience to God's commands furthermore, Satan plans on entering the Gardens of Eden and his wishes in destroying humanity. The second fall is the fall of mankind "Adam and Eve" as they disobey God as well by eating the forbidden apple from the Tree of

knowledge. Milton wrote the famous Biblical story in a literary style using English language to give his characters their own voice. What was so unusual about the poem is that it was narrated by the fallen angel himself Satan as he present his own version of the truth. Milton's characterization of Satan, Adam and Eve held a powerful position in exploring the importance of free will and obedience vs. disobedience.

In *Paradise Lost* Milton concentrated on the depiction of obedience in regarding of choice and free will. This study will offer an answer to the key question on “what is the Miltonic obedience?”, this study will examine not only the outlined unadventurously literary texts set by Milton but rather to focus on the concept of obedience and Free will in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). Furthermore, this study will highlight the Miltonic theory of obedience and Free will as an attempt to understand and to recreate his ideologies of Free will and God's Will of obedience from Milton's perspective. This study will be textually limited to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). Theoretically, this study will follow the method of theological and philosophical literary interpretation to fully comprehend Milton's conception of obedience and Free will. This study will undertake the classic literary and the religious Christian methodology for further analytic

understanding in highlighting both Milton's philosophical classicism and Milton's the theoretical Christen.

2. THE MILTONIC OBEDIENCE

Milton's obedience conception can be understood as the solitary law to all mankind. Milton existed as a servant for the notion of individuality¹ he only desired to be released from any figure of obligation or obedience. Milton's obedience came as the consequence of his passion to read the classical scriptures, as Christian he was fanatical in understanding the Bible and the laws of existence "his prioritization of conscience was so emphatic that it could at time seem so synonymous with his concept of obedience" (Nicola Learmonth, 2001). According to Milton such discernment is considered fabricated as the link between the consciences to the classical texts was originally roughly regarded as prioritization thus Milton was merely focused on the notion of the proper alignment and the conscience of the texts hence, he desired to comprehend the rules of obedience.

¹ *Paradise Lost* 3.94

When Milton graduated from Cambridge University in 1632, he had grasped the primary importance of obedience to God as it was an important law for human existence and part of the conditional traditions of mankind. This ideology upheld the notion of obedience as a singular frame for Milton and he hadn't yet become fully engaged with the history and the spirituality of obedience, thus he didn't start to write his own formula of obedience origin and its purpose (Jessica Micallef, 2013). Milton after graduation spent his time until his last dying breath trying to understand for himself and for the rest of mankind what does it mean the divine obedience and Free will? His answer started by writing the *Nativity Ode* (1629) followed by *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634) as it was considered as dramatic crisis until later saved by publishing *Lycidas* (1637), later on he published his most popular text *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Paradise Regained* (1671) and finally, he published *Samson Agonistes* (1671).

In his first literary scripts *Masque (1634)* and *Lycidas (1637)*, Milton highlighted the formidable spirituality and the holy dilemma regarding the notion of obedience. Milton started to emphasize on the mechanism of obedience and its operative rules, following the works of Paul who defined obedience "dependent on the conscience" hence Milton's theory of obedience was initially related to the purity which was associated with the

concept of obedience, as the mind should be pure to be prepare for obedience (Annabel Patterson, 1990, p.773).

Milton's *Christian Doctrine* where he re-opened the notion of obedience and made it a public knowledge, he expressed his theory of obedience as he understood it at that time. Milton at that time lived a life of civil wars and constant revolutions hence his idea of religious holiness and obedience became violent and darken by the world around him thus Milton started to fashion his "prophetic individuality" from a young age (William Kerrigan, 1972).

In his late work *The Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelaty* (1642) Milton reimagined himself as the holy prophet Jeremiah, Milton was mesmerized with Jeremiah and the moment in which he declared himself as the prophet

"If he shall think to be silent, as Jeremiah did, because of the reproach and derision he met with daily" (Yale 1:803)

In the passage the "He" refers to Milton himself, Milton believed that in order to be fully obedient to God the mankind should transform them into a prophet figure. In his poem *Apology for Smectymmuus* (1642) he mentioned that:

“For I readers, shall always be of this opinion, that obedience to the Spirit of God, rather than to the faire seeming pretenses of men, is the best and most dutiful order that a Christian can observe” (Yale 1: 937)

As Milton defined obedience which refers to the “Spirit of God” yet also defines the true meaning of being a Christian hence, for Milton the true devoted Christian is someone that follows everything that the creator demands for that we and they were created (Jason P. Rosenblatt, 2006, p.71-137). God is the creator of all things and for such reason all creation must obey the creator, for Milton theory in order to obey one must know the rules yet as human nature and Miltonic nature is impossible to know and follow all the rules set by the creator. Since obedience is a notion depends on the “conscience” the actions then shouldn’t be met with perfection since it’s durable to understand the Divine Will of God.

Obedience to Milton which rationales the foundation of will and obedience as the contrast of obedience is disobedience that causes the falls of angels and mankind as mentioned in *Paradise Lost*.

3. THE SPECIFICATION OF FREE WILL AND BEDIENCE

The concept of defying ones fate and going against what was written in the stars requires the fully understanding of ones chooses and Free will. Free will was being defined in different frame from philosophical,

psychological, social and religious perspective, according Merriam Webster Online was gave the simplest definition and the “ability to choose how to act, the ability to make choices that are not controlled by fate or by God”. The first keywords mentioned which are “choose the action” which is rooted on the human’s ability to choosing the action and taking the action without any opposition, the second keywords which are “Fate or God” which refer to someone with higher power that can prevent such free will as specified. The limitation of fate and God reflect the notion of predestination which is an ideology that refer to the “human’s ultimate fate” as their actions and lives are pre-determined by higher power beyond their controls.

Milton’s depicts that God is to be considered as the final creator of everything and thus with his unlimited powers he granted the mankind with free will “I formed them free, and free they must remain, till they enthrall themselves ..” (PL Book 3,P. 124). Milton doesn’t deny the fact that they were as humans created in a free form as God gave them and the angels the powers to express and create their own individuality yet Milton believes that even with such Free will God demands obedience and with obedience comes the limitation of free will

“The decision of an absolutely free will cannot be determined by forces outside it, and in a casual sense, such decision has no antecedents” (Kimberly Batchelor, 2016)

Modern critics argue that the conception of free will held reasoning in pushing people into different directions by creating tension and internal struggle when certain problems presented (Joshua May, 2014). Such free will or the power of determinism give the sense of choice and options, Peter Van Inwagen (2000) mentioned that one can't change the past and the laws of the past but one can possess an internal understanding of free will "the consequence argument" as it mean that mankind hold both the can't and the can. Sparks, Vohs, Baumeister and Stillman (2007) created their own theory of free will as its represent the basic human ability to exercise discipline as with free will comes the consequences of random unpredictable behaviors which aren't limited to the social and internal believe or normality. Klaus Wertenbroch (2017) mentioned that when Adam and Eve followed the will of Saran "the serpent" making temptation and desire a priority by eating the apple thus they designed the original sin hence from a philosophical consideration two things co-exist within which are the consciousness of sins and the free will of choosing. Both these elements of free will and consciousness imply the actions and reaction theory "eating the apple from the tree of knowledge is a sin which is a core action hence the fall from the Godly grace is the reaction for such sin".

The possession of free will it doesn't necessary mean that God foresee everything ahead and it rather that God will allow it to pass no matter the consequences. Milton believed that humans were given the free will to choose their own fate same as the angels as some angels choose to stay under God's grace in heaven yet the others choose to follow Satan.

4. OBEDIENCE & FREE WILL IN *PARADISE LOST*

Paradise lost (1667) by John Milton is a poem of obedience and punishment, free will and commandments, the notion of obedience to God is well presented within the text. Milton gives his readers the free will in choosing to agree or to disagree with is intension by giving them two different paths. Paradise Lost the same as the Bible gives us the better understanding of the creation of all things and the original story yet from two different perspectives. In the first book of Paradise Lost the first act of disobedience was by the fallen angle himself Satan as he was known to be the rebel angel followed by his companions the fallen ones. They were vanished from the holy grace and they were

punished and chained to the hellish lake but they were able to escape their punishment.

Satan discover that God had other plans in creating a new place for his new favored creation the morals, he and his fallen angels tried to leap into paradise in order to bring horror to the newly created beings. Satan at that time keeps on wondering if the path he choose is considered to be the rightful path for him, or should be ripened and return to the holy grace but he finally understand that it's his fate to follow the path of darkness and its upon his free will. Despite of being dethroned from heaven Satan was able to rebuild his own empire in hell and calming it to be his:

***“The mind is its own place and in itself
can make a heav’n of hell
a hell of heav’n” (Milton, I.P. 254-255)***

Satan even believed that “it’s better to reign in hell, than serve in Heav’n”². Satan didn’t want to lose his determination and his free will by obeying God, when he started to fall. Milton created a clear

² Milton, I. 263

dissection between democracy and totalitarianism; in Milton's version God represent the totalitarianism ruler all while Satan is the free willed freedom fighter:

***“OF Mans first Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of the Forbidden Tree, whose Mortals Last
Brought Death into the World, and all out woe
with loss of EDEN, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat” (PL Book.I, 5)***

The poem starts with the word “disobedience” just to highlight the importance of obedience to God and the fruit of knowledge which is the original sin by Adam and Eve. In the first Book and the first Lines, Milton address the original sin by mentioning the consequences of disobedience “Death into the World, Loss of Eden and lose the blissful seat” yet it's important to note that Milton mentioned in the same lines the concept of redemption “Till one greater Man restore us and regain the blissful seat” meant by God alone. Furthermore, in the ninth Book is when Milton addresses the forbidden sin committed by Adam and Eve, God as the all-powerful didn't end or prevent such action from taking place in the first place all in the name of free choice and obedience.

God knew that such disobedience would happen yet Milton express the importance of the “Godly Given Choice” although the action committed was disobeying God, God made it their choice to disobey and to decide their own destiny knowing the outcomes of such disobedience.

***“Which of ye will be mortal to redeem
Man’s Mortal crime? (PL Book III, P. 214)***

In Milton’s Third book God came as asked about the “mortal crimes” however, nothing was being said by the angels, only Jesus Christ called out to be the victim and the savior of all mankind as he said:

***“Father, Thy word is passed, man shall find Grace
Behold me then, me for him, life for life
I offer, on me let thine anger fall
account me man, I for his sake will leave
thy bosom, and this glory next to thee
Freely put off, and for him lastly die (PL Book III, 227)***

This action taken by Jesus Christ is both as obedience to God’s Command and free will as well, The Christ wanted to redeem from the man’s sins by surfacing himself for mankind to obey God’s will but also to display a sense of freedom of choice.

The holy angels have to obey God and also they have their own sense of free will, since Satan disobeyed God the remaining angels they had two different baths that they can wake on. Some angels continued their loyalty to God and stayed in heaven while the rest of the angels fall into hell alongside Satan. Milton displayed the philosophy of obedience and free will not only with mankind but with angels as well. As the angel Raphael mentioned:

**“Myself and all Th’ angelic host
Freely we serve
Because we Freely Love” (PL Book V, P. 538)**

One of the angels Abdiel obedience God’s command and choice God and the path of light and stand oppose his fellow angels, Milton also highlight the rewards and the punishments of obedience:

***“With a Nobel Stroke he lifted high
which hung not, but so swift with tempest fell
On the Proud crest of Satan” (PL Book VI, P. 198-91)***

The angel Abdiel was the first angel to display his loyalty and obedience to God by vanishing Satan out of his mercy and Satan

with his own free will and choice he decided to define his fate and to stand against God by choosing the path of disobedience as me stated:

***“Will ye submit your Necks, and choose to bend
The supple Knee?”***

***Natives and sons of Heav’n possessed before
By none, and if not equal all, yet free
Equally free; for orders and degree***

***Of Those imperial titles which assert
Our Being ordained to govern, not to serve?” (PL Book V, P. 787)***

Milton suggests when it comes to free will and obedience all individuals’ morals and immortals are equals in the holy kingdom.

After Satan choice of disobeying he and the rebel angels gathered in Pandemonium, Satan had choice to go through the path of disobedience against God and he used his own free will and his methods of disobedience to encourage Eve in defying God’s rules as well. Satan vowed to break and demolish all mankind as this is his choice and the path which he choice

***“ So Having said a while he ‘Satan’ stood, expecting
Their universal shout and high applause***

*To fill his ear, when contrary he hears
On all sides, from innumerable tongues
A dismal universal hiss, the sound
Of Public scorn, he wondered but not long*

*His arms clung to his ribs, his legs entwining
each other, till supplanted down he fell
a monstrous serpent on his belly prone
Reluctant, but in Vain, a greater power
Now ruled him, Punished in the shape he sinned
According to his doom: he would have spoke
But hiss for hiss returned with forked tongue
Alike to Serpents ...” (PL Book X, P. 504-20)*

Following Satan and the rebel angel’s disobedience, they all turned into hellish serpents as a punishment from God for their disobedience as they abused their free will to choice darkness. Milton examined such point as a limited conception of free will against obedience, since free will stands for the right of doing the action and following a certain path choosing by certain a person for his/herself. Milton doesn’t completely comprehend the reason behind God’s punishment for disobeying his holy orders as God mentioned that each one has their own free will in choosing and following their own path.

The first maiden Eve was seduced by Satan to eat the apple of knowledge from the forbidden Tree

***“Ye shall not die
How should ye? By the Fruit?
It gives you life
To Knowledge” (PL Book IX, P. 685-7)***

Eve didn't distinguish the reason behind the satanic lure, but her mistake led to the fall of all mankind and disobeying God's will. From obedience perspective Eve didn't wish to disobey God however Milton explain that it was Eve choice and free will to eat what she shouldn't have eaten and thus her free will was in reality is her act of disobedience. Even when Eve convinced Adam in eating the fruit with her, he knows that this act means standing against God's will

***“The sacred fruit forbidd'n some cursed fraud
Of enemy hath beguiled thee, yet unknown” (PL Book IX,P. 904-5)***

***“How can I live without thee, how forgo
Thy sweet converse and love so dearly joined
To live again in these wild woods forlorn?” (PL Book IX, P. 908-10)***

Northrop Frye (1965) mentioned that Adam had willingly disobeyed God's commands and sinned by eating the fruit with Eve as he knows the consequences of such choice, he also highlighted the idea that:

“When Adam eats the forbidden fruit, then is not an act, But the surrendering of power to act. Man is free to lose his freedom. And there obviously the freedom to stop” (P. 57)

God gave all the angels and the humans all the conscious and free will to make their own chooses, God also gave his creation the will to fall or to stay in his grace, although God had punished the fallen angels, Adam and Eve but God is with a forgiving nature.

All the key characters in Milton's epic classical poem had their own free will to choose different path and to take different actions than the ones they choose. Each had a different fate and different destiny awaits them Satan, Eve, Adam and Jesus Christ they all had their own free will to obey or disobey. They all have the conscious to pursue their own selfish reasons and to follow their lust yet on a different path which is God's will and the Godly grace.

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