

Institutions, Theology, and the Language of Freedom in the Poetry and  
Prose of John Milton

by

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## Author's Declaration

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## Abstract

Freedom is an essential topic in the writings of John Milton, but what he means by this term varies over the course of his career. Milton's prose works centre on religious and political liberty, which explore how the church and state interact with Christians and citizens. His early prose tracts express skepticism about the contributions of institutions, particularly coercive institutions, to freedom. As the English Revolution progresses, Milton begins to separate religious and political liberty based on the role of institutions in each type of freedom. In Milton's commonwealth and late prose, religious freedom protects the individual conscience from being coerced by any civil or ecclesiastical institution; institutions are limited to persuasion and admonition in religious matters. Political freedom, in contrast, involves parliament leading, schools educating, and the army compelling the English people so that they accept a commonwealth, as political freedom is only possible in a commonwealth. Although these institutions often act against the will of the electorate, Milton's language presents them as expressions of popular sovereignty. In his epic poem *Paradise Lost*, Milton shifts the setting from England to the mythical realm of heaven and presents an additional dimension of liberty. *Paradise Lost* incorporates much of the language regarding freedom and institutions from Milton's prose, but it expresses a theological freedom that focuses on a Christian's relationship with God. Theological freedom involves both free choice and dependence on God. Milton uses the character God to articulate the principles of theological freedom, and the characters Satan and Adam and Eve to illustrate failures in theological freedom. These failures shake the reader's confidence, but the poem ends with the restoration of freedom, encouraging the reader to accept freedom through dependence on God.

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## List of Abbreviations

- CPW* *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols. Ed. D. M. Wolfe, et al. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1953-82.
- CW* *The Complete Works of John Milton*, 4 vols. to date. Ed. Thomas Corns and Gordon Campbell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012-2014.
- WJM* *The Works of John Milton*, 18 vols. Ed. F. A. Patterson et al. New York: Columbia University Press, 1931-8.

## **Introduction**

The notion of freedom lies at the heart of most modern western democracies, often enshrined in a formal constitutional document like the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms or the American Bill of Rights.<sup>1</sup> Although freedom's value is a given, its meaning is a source of contention. Does freedom mean the right to decide for one's self without interference? Are certain social conditions necessary for freedom? Does freedom lie in the individual or the larger community? All major politicians and political parties insist that they support freedom, but they use different language in answering these crucial questions. Since nearly everyone agrees that freedom is necessary to live a fulfilling life, the language one uses to define freedom also shapes the definition of human happiness. Additionally, freedom, when accompanied by the appropriate rhetoric, is a powerful justification for almost any action. The language of freedom reflects how we understand ourselves and what we can do in the name of larger objectives. Given these implications, it is unsurprising that political rivals battle to control the rhetoric of freedom. The ability to define freedom and to persuade others of the validity of that definition are alike important for securing political power.

Debates regarding freedom dominate the news, but they are nothing new. In the mid-seventeenth century, the polemicist and poet John Milton was just as eager to have a monopoly on the language of freedom as any modern politician. Milton's writings are not merely a product of a particular moment in history; they are part of a continuing effort to reshape the language of freedom and present this language in a manner that garners broad support. Milton appeals to freedom to defend and attack various regimes and policies, yet the type of freedom that he endorses is not consistent. This dissertation interrogates Milton's struggle in his prose and poetry to reconcile a philosophical commitment to liberty with the practical means of



establishing freedom. Although he values the condition of liberty, Milton's work questions the possibility of its achievement, particularly if the population resists. As Milton argues for liberty, he uses language that attempts to preserve the theory of liberty within realities that seem far from his own ideal of freedom. Sometimes employed as an official propagandist and sometimes imagining the ideal commonwealth, Milton endorses regimes and values that seem at odds with liberty, yet his writing finds ways to accommodate any government or ruler to freedom. Due to the rapidly evolving political situation, Milton's position on liberty shifts over the years, but he never acknowledges these shifts. Instead, the rhetoric of his tracts seeks to conceal changes in his thought so that he can claim consistency.

In grappling with the issue of freedom, Milton's works separate political from religious liberty based on the role of political and ecclesiastical institutions in each type of freedom, allowing for much greater institutional direction in political liberty. Religious liberty is only possible when institutions are limited to using persuasion and admonition, while political liberty requires institutions that can coerce the population. When discussing institutions exercising control in religion, Milton uses words such as compulsion, servility, and fear to stress a negative outcome. In politics, conversely, he portrays dominant institutions as leading, educating, protecting, and saving the population; all of these actions illustrate the positive effect of institutional control. The actual interactions between institutions and people are similar in both instances, but Milton uses different language to depict these interactions, which reflects his interpretation of religious and political freedom. Powerful, invasive institutions infringe on religious liberty, but they also create political liberty. To understand how Milton's writings engage with the tensions surrounding freedom, I will begin with Milton's earliest printed prose, move chronologically through the prose tracts, and then analyze the representation of freedom in

*Paradise Lost*. When discussing Milton's prose, I will situate his tracts within the context of the English Revolution. This method will enable me to explore the shifts and tensions in the language of Miltonic liberty over the 1640s, 1650s, and 1660s.

Miltonic liberty often responds to specific challenges and perceived threats to liberty in the seventeenth century. The political and cultural circumstances of seventeenth-century England were very different from our own. Consequently, Miltonic freedom sometimes sounds offensive to the modern reader, but at other moments it sounds oddly contemporary. David Loewenstein acknowledges that Milton's interpretation of freedom is not always in line with our own, but he also argues that Milton's exploration of different types of freedom is essential to understanding ourselves and our own struggles over freedom ("Public Milton" 65). Since many of Milton's writings are tied to particular governments and act as propaganda, some critics describe him as a "second-rate political thinker" (McDowell 135). It is true that Milton's discussion of liberty rarely has the philosophical complexity of other seventeenth-century political theorists, such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Milton, however, is less concerned with presenting a coherent philosophy than with using persuasive language to outline a practical program for bringing liberty to England. His comments on liberty are rarely abstract and absolute. It is this pragmatic side of Milton causes him, at some moments, to feel so contemporary as he proposes real policies rather than philosophical concepts to address the problem of freedom in the seventeenth-century.

Both religious and political liberty featured prominently in the English Civil War, but the meaning of the word "liberty" varies over the course of the revolutionary decades.<sup>2</sup> The word "liberty" in the early 1640s, as Blair Worden points out, meant almost exclusively secular liberty. When parliamentarians discussed religious matters in the early 1640s, they spoke of

“innovations” in religion rather than liberty (Worden “Oliver Cromwell and the Case” 233). One reason for this initial reluctance to use the term religious liberty was that most members of the Long Parliament promoted religious uniformity rather than liberty (Coffey *Persecution and Toleration* 138). As the Civil War progressed, however, the idea of religious liberty began to gain traction. Many mainstream Puritans in England, following in the tradition of Martin Luther and John Calvin, viewed Christian or religious liberty as separate from civil liberty, while the more radical figures combined both types of liberty (Worden “Oliver Cromwell and the Case” 235-239). According to J. C. Davis, civil liberty in the mid-seventeenth century was connected to the law, which protected citizens “against [the] will, arbitrary power, and tyranny” of a ruler, while religious liberty had two components: “Freedom from the arbitrary authority of a civil power” and “subjection to the arbitrary power of an overwhelming divine authority” (Davis 513, 520). Perfect religious liberty involved submission to God. Andrew Murphy views early modern supporters of religious toleration as promoting exclusively negative freedom, that is, the freedom to be left to worship how one chooses without any interference from civil or ecclesiastical authorities (3-4). Liberty lay at the centre of the struggle in seventeenth-century England, but exactly what type of liberty people fought for varied over the years and among different religious and political factions.

Milonic freedom has attracted much scholarly attention, but perhaps the most prominent recent approach to the topic has been to situate Milton within the English republican milieu.<sup>3</sup> Quentin Skinner associates Milton’s defences of the regicide and the English Commonwealth with a neo-Roman theory of liberty, which stressed the need to be free from dependence on another person, such as a king (“John Milton” 2). Simply being aware that one is living under the authority and goodwill of an arbitrary ruler restricts one’s options and limits freedom

(Skinner “A Third” 257). Although some scholars have employed this framework when analyzing Milton’s texts (Cox 146-66; Tahvanainen, 128-45), Skinner’s interpretation of liberty is problematic when applied to Milton’s late tracts. Neo-Roman liberty involves opposition not only to monarchy, but to any institution or individual that holds dominant power over a nation’s liberty. But Milton’s writings in 1659 and 1660 reveal that he did not object to the presence of arbitrary power in certain institutions, provided that the institution directs the nation toward liberty. Richard Tuck provides a more effective interpretation of Milton’s republicanism, as he connects Milton to “aristocratic republicanism,” which distrusted “mass politics” and ignored constitutional and legal forms in the interests of the people or a prince (223, 253). Additionally, Milton’s understanding of grace and humanity’s dependence on God for salvation cannot, as Paul Stevens points out, be reconciled with neo-Roman liberty (“Obnoxious” 297-8). Consequently, republican liberty has no relevance to Miltonic religious liberty.

Another common interpretation of Miltonic liberty is to view it as a precursor to liberal individualism. These scholars focus on how Miltonic freedom protects and empowers the individual. Annabel Patterson sees the origins of modern liberalism (which she associates with individual rights, free speech, freedom of religion, freedom to participate in government, and freedom from arbitrary arrest) in seventeenth-century writers like Milton. Patterson’s interest is in how these new liberal ideas became accepted, and she finds an explanation in the eloquence of literary works. Both writers and rulers, according to Patterson, accepted that literature was a safe place to explore intellectual thought. Consequently, literary texts, like Milton’s sonnets, contain early expressions of liberalism (Patterson 15-16). Pointing to the policies that Milton promotes in both *Defensio Secunda* and *The Readie and Easie Way*, which centre on education, free speech, and free religion, Patterson labels Milton an “example of liberalism in the broad political

sense” (65). Although not as explicitly interested in the origins of liberalism as Patterson, Susanne Woods similarly calls Miltonic freedom an “individualistic and meritocratic challenge to the dominant Tudor and Stuart view of freedom as a function of hierarchy and social order” (*Milton and the Poetics* 196). For Woods, Miltonic freedom is about individual choice, and Milton’s texts seek to persuade the reader to make rational choices. Rhetorically, Milton uses constructions that do not force his vision of freedom upon the reader, but instead beckon the “reader to affirm a common vision.” Woods insists that Milton maintains this position even at the end of his career, when he held a low opinion of the English people (*Milton and the Poetics* 2-4). But while there are certainly moments when Milton does sound like a proto-liberal championing the rights of the individual, a liberal reading of Miltonic freedom, like a republican one, still ignores the authoritarian nature of Milton’s late prose. The liberal-individualist approach is more useful in understanding Miltonic religious liberty, although even that becomes more complex when Milton considers the theological implications of God’s role.

Some of the best work on Miltonic freedom focuses on the contradictions in Milton’s work and applies a skeptical lens to his version of freedom. This method highlights those to whom Milton denies freedom. Nicholas McDowell views Milton’s writings, particularly *Observations*, as expressing “the authoritarian face of what would become western liberalism.” Both Milton and western liberalism attempt to assimilate peoples whom they consider to be intolerant. In *Observations*, Milton’s idea of freedom of conscience denies freedom to those, like Catholics and strict Presbyterians, who deny freedom to others (McDowell 136-7). McDowell compares Milton’s frustration with the Irish for not civilizing themselves to Americans who are frustrated that countries in the Middle East do not readily accept democracy (144). Diane Purkiss highlights the specifically masculine nature of Miltonic liberty, as Milton

seeks to secure public liberty for the male subject while denying such liberty to women (189-95). William Walker provides the strongest critique of Milton's supposed liberalism, pointing to Milton's tendency to "sort" people based on intellectual ability (*Antiformalist* 109-113). Additionally, Walker stresses Milton's willingness to support governments that, with the help of the army, restricted people's freedom, something that no liberal would tolerate (*Antiformalist* 172).

Further, several critics analyze Milton's writings in the context of the expanding slave trade. Maureen Quilligan notes that Milton believes in the value of the slave trade, and she refers to *Paradise Lost* as "mediating the contradictions of a slave economy." An empire built on the slave trade (like Britain in the seventeenth century) rather than martial conquest requires a new kind of hero. Quilligan interprets Milton's Satan as a conquering hero who, in the new economy of the slave trade, becomes a villain (213-19). Mary Nyquist's recent book, *Arbitrary Power*, also explores Miltonic freedom in relation to the slave trade. Nyquist shows that early modern antityrannical discourse, which had its roots in antiquity, focused on figurative, political slavery (the dishonour and disenfranchisement of free, male citizens) rather than actual, chattel slavery (1-2). Those writers, including Milton, who contributed to the antityrannical discourse were not concerned with the vulnerability of chattel slaves, but with the values of the political sphere (Nyquist 5). Antityrannicism focused on protecting and enlarging "the political claims of propertied citizens within increasingly centralized-nation states" (Nyquist 18). Nyquist argues that Milton's depiction of the curse of Ham in Book XII of *Paradise Lost*—in the early modern period, Africans were linked to Ham and the Canaanites—simultaneously shows Milton's support for chattel slavery and his opposition to political slavery (136-47).

These scholars are right to remind us of the religious, gender, national, and racial limits of Miltonic liberty. But any discussion of Miltonic freedom must keep in mind that Milton never imagines liberty extending to all people. In some ways Miltonic liberty is even more restrictive than these critics suggest. Milton not only limits who could experience liberty, he sometimes tries to control how people use their liberty. In the process, Milton creates a definition of liberty that stands at odds with modern western liberal democracy.

The most recent study of Miltonic freedom, Warren Chernaik's *Milton and the Burden of Freedom*, explores the theological side of freedom. The central tension in all of Milton's works, according to Chernaik, lies in the fact that an all-powerful God rules the universe and demands obedience while simultaneously permitting humanity free choice (13). Chernaik describes Milton as having a post-Calvinist theology, meaning that necessity does not eliminate free will. In such a theology, grace is a free gift from God and necessary for human salvation, but by itself grace is not sufficient for salvation; people must also exercise free choice in order to be saved (Chernaik 34-6). Although not necessarily paradigm shifting, Chernaik's book provides an effective outline of the theological issues in Miltonic freedom.<sup>4</sup> Chernaik's analysis, however, is limited to religious liberty. Miltonic freedom is not only concerned with the role of God, but also with earthly institutions that are capable of directing humanity.

The problem with examining Miltonic liberty as a single concept, as many scholars do, is that such an approach fails to take into account the differences in political and religious liberty. By the 1650s, Milton was separating religious from political freedom. This separation can be illuminated by turning to Isaiah Berlin's concepts of negative and positive liberty. In his famous essay "Two Concepts of Liberty," Berlin defined negative freedom as "liberty from; absence of interference" (122). Proponents of negative liberty envision a defined space of non-interference

in which an individual is free to act as he/she chooses. They assert that such a space is necessary for people to pursue any desirable ends in human life. Positive freedom, in contrast, is “not freedom from, but freedom to – to lead one prescribed form of life” (Berlin 131). Skinner describes Berlinian positive freedom as seeking “self-perfection,” being the best possible version of one’s self (“A Third” 239). This “self-perfection,” however, is not necessarily self-directed; it can be imposed on a person by external forces. Positive liberty becomes controversial because one person’s definition of “self-perfection” may differ from another’s. At its darkest moments, positive freedom can justify extreme coercion to transform people into their “real self” so that they can achieve a “higher freedom” (Berlin 132).

Berlin’s essay, particularly his preference for negative over positive liberty, has received much criticism, but his ideas still provide a useful framework to understand Miltonic freedom.<sup>5</sup> The links between Berlin’s essay and Milton’s writings have been noted by Catherine Martin, Steven Jablonski, and Susanne Woods. Martin interprets Milton as following the principles of negative liberty along both liberal and republican lines, that is, he combines liberal freedom of the individual with republican collective maintenance of freedom (315-6). Jablonski, on the other hand, argues that Milton, while recognizing the value of negative liberty, ultimately prefers positive liberty (112). Similarly, Woods associates Milton with both sides of Berlin’s freedom, but views Milton’s emphasis on “the act of rational, knowledgeable choice” as closer to positive freedom (194-5). Milton certainly believed that there was an optimal way to live, which connects him to positive liberty’s freedom “to lead one prescribed form of life.” How one reaches that life, however, depends on whether one is pursuing religious or political freedom.

One of the reasons that Berlin is so critical of positive freedom is that he imagines any government that leads people to “one prescribed form of life” as inevitably employing the



methods of the Soviet Union (that is, condemning all opponents to execution or life in the gulags). Positive freedom, however, can be pursued through less overtly oppressive means, namely institutions that provide people with education, leadership, and some degree of material well-being. In an attempt to rehabilitate positive liberty from the taint of totalitarianism, Carol Gould argues that certain material and social conditions are necessary for freedom to be meaningful. These conditions can be fulfilled through “the design of a range of economic, social, and political institutions” (Gould 110). Without resorting to violence and torture, what is often called “big government” can direct people “to lead one prescribed form of life.” As Berlin put it, in slightly more ominous terms: “You want to be a human being. It is the aim of the state to satisfy your wish” (150). Active institutions lead to positive freedom, and it is the role of institutions that separates Miltonic religious liberty from political liberty.

Although Milton never advocates anything approaching the modern welfare state, he did believe that institutions have an essential role in freedom. Milton desires both political citizens and religious Christians to achieve specific ends in life, but whom he trusted to reach those ends differs in each case. With political decisions, Milton had no faith in the English people (no matter how narrowly he defined them) to make wise choices and preserve freedom.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, political freedom is only possible through institutions that better understood the true nature of freedom than does the broader population. These institutions can even employ military force if the English people resist their own freedom. Milton’s political liberty is part of Nyquist’s antityrannical discourse, but his texts also empower coercive institutions to prevent tyranny by exercising arbitrary control over the political landscape in the name of freedom. In religious matters, in contrast, Milton’s primary concern was to allow Christians to follow their conscience without any interference on the part of civil magistrates or church officials. Even

when a person's conscience appeared to err, no institution had the right to compel that individual to change his beliefs. But while Milton forbids institutions to use coercion to control people's religious beliefs, he does recognize the value of persuasive institutions (particularly the church), as they help people achieve salvation while respecting the supremacy of the individual conscience. Institutions are involved in both Miltonic religious and political freedom, but their role in each type of freedom could not be more different.

The activity of institutions is crucial to Miltonic freedom, but what, for Milton, constituted an institution? One of the most famous explorations of institutions and their power is Max Weber's work on bureaucracy. Weber defines the bureaucracy of modern states as fixed and permanent, strictly hierarchy, operated by trained experts, and following stable rules (196-8). The bureaucratic apparatus allows for a fast, unified implementation of policy, which is not affected by any personal or emotional factors. Objective experts who are rationally trained are the ones who administer such bureaucracy (Weber 214-6). Drawing on Weber's analysis, Michael Braddick argues that although early modern England did not have the rationalized bureaucracy that Weber describes, it is still fair to speak of a state in early modern England. Braddick conceives of the state not in terms of a specific form, but in terms of functional efficiency (15-18). Over the course of the early modern period, new offices emerged that had a limited, specialized focus. This specialization differentiates them from the traditional offices, like the village constable, who had broad duties (Braddick 86-9). The Civil War contributed to this process. During the war, parliament developed more dependable sources of revenue, such as assessment quotas and the excise tax (Braddick 253-4). To collect and manage these new financial resources, parliament created new, specialized agencies and appealed to necessity and reasons of state in order to legitimize these agencies and their activities (Braddick 272-4).

In terms of press control, state and military officials replaced the Stationers' Company, who had been driven more by the interests of their members than the security of the commonwealth, as the watchdog of the printing industry (Woodford "Developments and Debates" 4-14). Intelligence and press control became linked administratively during the English Commonwealth, allowing for greater centralization. Oliver Cromwell's Secretary of State and spy master John Thurloe epitomizes this growth in state power as he "showed considerable initiative in seeking and developing new techniques and sources [in intelligence gathering]" (Aubrey 213). Local courts could undertake the suppression of a pamphlet, but in the early 1650s, pamphlets were usually suppressed through the office of Thomas Scott, Thurloe's predecessor. When Thurloe took over from Scott, he was personally involved in many investigations into seditious pamphlets and reported directly to the Council of State on matters of press control (Peacey 178-81). The production of propaganda also "succumbed to the forces of bureaucratization, centralization and state-building," as writers were now retained so that they could write on demand on a number of issues (Peacey 188-9). All these administrative developments allowed the governments of the 1650s to exercise a greater influence on print culture than any of their predecessors.

Not all efforts to expand state power through institutions were successful, but even failures reveal the potential to imagine greater institutional power. Following a royalist uprising in 1655, Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell established the Major-Generals regime. The Major-Generals system involved dividing England into twelve associations, each administered by one or two Major-Generals. Ivan Roots notes that the Major-Generals' efforts to monitor royalists suggest "some understanding of the uses of statistics in an age which was beginning to create a science of political arithmetic" (Roots 81). In addition to monitoring enemies of the state, the

Major-Generals collected the Decimation Tax—a tax imposed on royalists who had not demonstrated loyalty to the new regime—and attempted to enforce godly reformation upon the nation, which included the banning of traditional English pastimes, such as gambling, bear-baiting, and cockfighting (Durston 23-5). The Major-General experiment is seen by historians as a failure. Its goals were too ambitious, there was not enough time to complete its broad tasks, and there was little support from London (Durston 229-30).

Although the Major-Generals regime fell short of its grand objectives, what it and the other historical developments illustrate is an interest in using civil and ecclesiastical institutions to shape the lives of the broader population. Political leaders and writers in seventeenth-century England could imagine powerful bureaucratic apparatuses, even if they could not actually construct them. Earlier in the seventeenth century, George Herbert's *The Country Parson* expresses an interest in the professionalization of the clergy. *The Country Parson* frames pastors in “distinctly legalistic and bureaucratic terms” as it shows the emergence of modernity in worship, social relations, agricultural technology and land use, and domestic relations (Cooley 5). Although there was no elaborate system of social control in seventeenth-century England, there are, in the words of Ronald Cooley, “traces of Weber’s rationalization” in Herbert’s depiction of pastors engaging with all aspects of life (9). Cooley views Herbert as using tradition and traditionalist rhetoric to introduce elements of modernity and rationalization (173-4).

Rationalized institutional power also interests Milton, but even when he imagines institutions that did not yet exist, Milton never envisions Weber’s rationalized bureaucracy. The institutions that Milton discusses lack the layers of hierarchy of Weber’s bureaucracy (they usually comprise small elite groups), and only occasionally does Milton refer to specialized training to prepare civil servants for their work. Milton does desire an elite class of rulers who

guide the nation, but this group differs from the technical experts of Weber's bureaucracy in that they are not specialists in one area. In Milton's prose, institutions are much simpler than Weber's complex bureaucracy. Like Braddick's definition of the state, Milton's institutions do not have a specific form. Rather, they are defined by their function. Institutions are the means by which religious and political authorities influence and/or control people's decisions and behaviour with the intention of achieving a specific outcome. For Milton, the activities of institutions include verbal persuasion, physical force, and protection, all of which are done in the pursuit of a more rational and free society.

Although Milton's institutions are simpler than Weber's bureaucracy, Milton's approach to assessing institutions and their relationship to freedom has much in common with Weber's analysis. Weber ties bureaucracy to the growth of capitalism, but he does not believe that bureaucracy is a source of freedom, famously asserting that it "produce[s] the iron cage of future serfdom" (qtd. in Mommsen 117). Rejecting the materialist focus of capitalism, Weber frames freedom in terms of the individual resisting capitalist bureaucratic control: "Freedom and democracy are only possible where the resolute will of a nation not to allow itself to be ruled like sheep is permanently alive" (71). Wolfgang Mommsen underlines the mixed view of bureaucracy in Weber's writings. While bureaucracy is essential for the challenges of modern civilization, and while it allows for "the rigorous rationalization of one's own social conduct in accordance with certain ultimate objectives," it also limits the possibility for individual self-realization, which is an essential part of any liberal society (Mommsen 109-11). Weber's bureaucracy, Mommsen notes, is not just a tool to implement policy, but a form of social organization, as it extends rational principles throughout society (115). Sebastian P. Tijsterman and Patrick Overeem similarly view Weber as presenting bureaucracy in opposition to freedom.<sup>7</sup>

Although Weber never formally discusses what freedom is, Tijsterman and Overeem conclude, based on Weber's brief references to freedom, that Weber has an existential view of freedom. For Weber, freedom involves "the existential assertion of one's highly individual will" (Tijsterman and Overeem 76). In terms of values, Weber is a pluralist in that he did not believe that science could determine the optimal choice for all people. Weberian freedom is therefore based on choice, but it is the manner of choosing rather than the content of the choice that matters (Tijsterman and Overeem 76-7). With this view of freedom, Weber interprets the order of bureaucracy as a threat to freedom because it "forces people to live heteronomously" (Tijsterman and Overeem 80-1).

Like Weber, Milton is interested in how institutions impact freedom. Milton's writings acknowledge and endorse both sides of the conflict between institutions and individuals by separating religious from political liberty. In the political sphere Milton sees only the positive side of powerful, rational institutions, as only they can ensure that people recognize and pursue their ultimate political purpose and become free. What the population claims to want is less important than what Milton knows their interests truly to be. In contrast to Weber's existential freedom, Miltonic political freedom is more concerned with the content of a choice than the manner of choosing. A coerced good choice is, for Milton, consistent with political freedom. As Weber points out, a rational bureaucracy tends to conflict with democracy. Bureaucrats are experts who hold their positions for life, while democracy strives to shorten the term of office through elections and does not require officials to possess specialized knowledge (Weber 226). The tension between bureaucracy and democracy explains the anti-democratic tone of Milton's late prose. By proposing a perpetual senate in 1660, Milton embraces the full implications of bureaucracy at the expense of democracy and individual choice.

In religion, conversely, Milton views those same rational institutions as diminishing liberty. The only sure way to salvation (the ultimate end for a Christian) was to follow one's conscience; therefore, Miltonic religious freedom protects the individual conscience from institutions. Unlike with political goals, Milton sees the potential in Christians to understand and follow God's will through their own individual conscience. Institutions could protect, persuade, and admonish with the intention of helping people reach salvation, but they could not compel anyone to act against their conscience. Milton's anxiety that institutions might impose a uniform national religion is similar to Weber's fear that bureaucracy "forces people to live heteronomously."

Milton's interest in freedom extends beyond seventeenth-century institutions to theological issues. Theological freedom differs from religious freedom in that religious freedom addresses a Christian's relationship with the church and state while theological freedom considers a Christian's relationship with God. By endowing each person with a conscience, God gives everyone the potential, but not the obligation, to understand and follow the divine path. Although Milton, when describing conscience, uses language that suggests that it functions like a persuasive institution (it admonishes but does not compel people to live a certain way), conscience is different from any human institution. Conscience not only persuades, it creates the capacity for fallen humanity to be persuaded. Institutions like the church are, when properly constituted, godly institutions in that they can assist people in comprehending the divine message, but they are not required to adhere to God's will; conscience is all that is needed. Without a church, people could still choose to follow God through their consciences. Without a conscience, fallen humanity could not choose to follow God. A person's freedom is beholden to God in a way that it is not beholden to the church, rendering theological freedom more complex

than merely freedom from coercive institutions. Theological freedom sounds like religious freedom (that is, it relies on persuasion rather than coercion), but it reduces individual autonomy while increasing dependence on God.

The neat division in Miltonic liberty outlined above was not present at the beginning of Milton's career. It formed gradually as Milton witnessed the dramatic changes of the English Revolution. The first three chapters of this dissertation analyze how Milton's prose engages with and eventually separates the concepts of religious and political liberty. Chapter 1 addresses Milton's early prose, which includes the antiprelatical tracts (*Of Reformation, Of Prelatical Episcopacy, Animadversions, Reason of Church Government, and An Apology*), the divorce tracts (*The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, Tetrachordon, and Colasterion*), *Of Education*, and *Areopagitica*. In this early phase of his career, Milton generally expresses disapproval of institutions that infringe upon individual choice. His main targets are the prelates, divorce laws, and press licensers. Despite his anger towards coercive institutions, Milton does envision a positive role for the church, when it functions properly. As long as the church only exercises persuasive rather than coercive influence over its congregation, it can balance conscience with salvation. *Of Education* is the one early tract in which Milton looks to an institution to actively shape individuals so that they can perform a higher purpose. Although much of Milton's early prose addresses religious and political liberty simultaneously, *Of Education* and *Areopagitica* begin to separate religious from political freedom based on the role of institutions.

Chapter 2 moves to Milton's commonwealth prose, which includes *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, Observations, Eikonoklastes, Defensio*, and *Defensio Secunda*. For *Defensio* and *Defensio Secunda*, I have used the translation in the Yale edition of Milton's prose, and I have consulted the Columbia edition when I wished to examine the original Latin. With the



exception of *The Tenure*, Milton wrote all these tracts at the behest of various governments of the Interregnum. Consequently, they accommodate both his own views and the needs of his employers. When discussing religious freedom, Milton continues to stress the importance of one's conscience being free from institutional coercion. He does so, however, by highlighting the limits rather than the vastness of religious liberty, as the English Commonwealth was not as eager as Milton to extend religious liberty to all Protestants. Politically, Milton presents a philosophical basis for liberty, which is based on people having the right to select their own governments. At the same time, the English people's sympathetic reaction to Charles I convinces Milton that most people are not capable of political freedom on their own. Since true popular sovereignty would result in a return of the Stuart monarchy, Milton grounds freedom in institutions such as parliament and the army, who act in the name of the people and compel the actual English people to accept a commonwealth.

Chapter 3 explores Milton's late prose, which include the tracts he published in 1659-60 (*A Treatise of Civil Power, Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means, A Letter to a Friend, Proposals of Certain Expedients, The Readie and Easie Way, The Present Means, and Brief Notes upon a Late Sermon*) as well as *De Doctrina Christiana, Of True Religion, and The History of Britain*.<sup>8</sup> For *De Doctrina*, I have used the translation in the new Oxford edition of Milton's works. Milton's late prose writings continue the separation of religious and political liberty, but with an even greater emphasis on the individual in religious freedom and powerful institutions in political freedom. Religious freedom, particularly in *De Doctrina*, places the individual above all institutions, including the church. In the months leading up to the Restoration, Milton calls on institutions like the army to act against the popular will in the name of political freedom and looks to other institutions like a perpetual parliament and schools to

preserve political freedom and re-shape the population. He still attempts to find ways to reconcile these powerful institutions with popular sovereignty, but in his final tract before the Restoration, *Brief Notes*, he has to face the reality that popular sovereignty and a free commonwealth are irreconcilable.

The final two chapters analyze how *Paradise Lost* presents some of the principles regarding institutions and freedom that appear in Milton's prose while ultimately endorsing a dimension of freedom centered in theology. As an epic poem, *Paradise Lost* can, through its narrative and characters, illustrate theological freedom in a way that polemic prose cannot. The illustrative quality of *Paradise Lost* enables the poem to generate a sense of dependency in the reader, which is a crucial component of theological freedom. Chapter 4 examines the character of God and how his speeches and actions illustrate theological freedom more effectively than Milton's prose could. God's speeches connect free choice to dependence while also articulating God's personal concern with human freedom. Although at some moments in the poem God expresses the values of religious liberty, an all-powerful deity who is personally invested in his creations' choices is not compatible with the autonomy of religious freedom. In particular, God's arbitrary distribution of grace reduces the role of the individual in freedom, as any free choice that humanity does possess is dependent on God.

Chapter 5 turns to the two failures in theological freedom in *Paradise Lost*, Satan's rebellion and Adam and Eve's fall. Satan rejects the freedom God offers, believing that he and the angels will only be free through institutions that allow the angels' true nature to express itself. Viewing God not as the creator but as an oppressive political institution, Satan launches a rebellion that leads to bondage and blasphemy. Since all the angels except for Satan initially accept the rule of God and the Son, Satan assumes a dominant position of leadership, which the

rebel angels accept as a means of achieving freedom. Adam and Eve begin the poem by displaying Milton's two types of freedom; Adam is free to make choices without any interference, while Eve experiences freedom through her husband. In the separation scene of Book IX, this initial state of freedom breaks down, as Adam faces an unwinnable dilemma. This situation renders the possibility of following God's will and maintaining theological freedom doubtful. At the close of the poem, Milton tries to restore a degree a human agency through Michael's final words to Adam, but these words also create a feeling of greater dependence on God. This dependence, however, is in some ways just as free as Adam's and Eve's prelapsarian freedom, allowing the poem to end on a positive note.

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<sup>1</sup> I will use the terms freedom and liberty interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> The nature of the English Civil War is a complex question that has sparked a variety of interpretations. In his pioneering essay, John Morrill argued that the English Civil War was in fact Europe's last war of religion, pointing out that religious beliefs played the greatest role in motivating people to take up arms (68-9). At the other end of the spectrum, Quentin Skinner views the conflict as a struggle for political liberty, as parliament desired to free itself from the subjugation of monarchy ("Classical Liberty" 13-4). Other historians have sought a balance between these two positions by including elements of both religion and politics. Glenn Burgess notes that although most Puritan divines justified the war on legal rather than religious grounds, the war still had a religious dimension to it. These Puritans viewed Christianity as being part of the law, so they defended religion by defending the law (Burgess 200-201). John Coffey argues that it is possible to view the Civil War as both a war of religion and a war of liberation from servitude. Parliament feared both political and ecclesiastical slavery and turned to the Book of Exodus as a guiding narrative of divine deliverance (Coffey "England's Exodus" 258-62).

<sup>3</sup> For examples, see Armitage, Himy, and Skinner, eds., *Milton and Republicanism*. For a detailed exploration of republican liberty, see Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*.

<sup>4</sup> For other similar readings of the theological dimensions of Miltonic freedom, see Danielson, *Milton's Good God*, and Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom*.

<sup>5</sup> For critical responses to Berlin, see MacPherson, *Democratic Theory*, 98-109; Taylor, "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty," 175-193; MacGilvray, "Republicanism and the Market in 'Two Concepts of Liberty,'" 114-26; Skinner, "The Idea of Negative Liberty: Philosophical and

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Historical Perspectives.” For a defence of Berlin, see Dimova-Cookson, “Defending Isaiah Berlin’s Distinctions between Positive and Negative Freedoms,” 73-86.

<sup>6</sup> For discussion on Milton’s attitude toward the English people, see Hammond, *Milton and the People*.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Levine offers a qualification to the general view that Weber viewed a rational bureaucracy in opposition to freedom. Levine argues that when Weber notes the threat of rationalization to freedom, he is referring specifically to formal, objectified rationalization. In some instances, views rationalization as increasing freedom. See Levine, “Rationality and Freedom,” 16-8.

<sup>8</sup> The exact date when Milton wrote the various sections of his *History* is unknown, but there is no shortage of theories (see Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England*, and von Maltzhan, *Milton’s History of Britain*, for different theories about the composition of Milton’s *History*). All that is certain is that Milton published *History* in 1670. Milton may, as Blair Worden suggests, have added or re-written some of the commentary in *History* as he was preparing it for publication in the 1660s (*Literature and Politics* 424-5). At the very least, the content of *History*, regardless of when Milton wrote it, reflects Milton’s thought in the Restoration, otherwise he would not have published it.

## Chapter 1

### The Early Prose: Institutional Obstacles to Liberty

Milton's early prose differ from his late writings in that there is no clear separation of religious and political liberty, and he even refers to the two liberties as being "inseparably knit together" (*CPW* 1:923).<sup>9</sup> Only in the mid-1640s are there hints at a future differentiation between the effects of institutions on religious and political liberty. Milton's early prose attempts to navigate the complexities of freedom by defining which areas of a person's life must be protected from any institutional interference and which areas could benefit from non-coercive institutional guidance. Miltonic freedom needs to be analyzed by more than just its limits (that is, to whom Milton extends liberty), as the nuances in Miltonic freedom are only clear when seen through the lens of institutions. For Milton, the extent of freedom is determined by how institutions engage with people. In certain spheres of life Milton accepts and even promotes institutions using persuasion and admonition, so long as the institution respects and works cooperatively with a person's individual conscience. In other areas Milton sought to protect the individual from any institutional interference. The one common thread across Milton's early prose is his refusal to allow any institution to use coercive force to control a person's decisions. At this early point in his career, Milton is generally suspicious of coercive institutions, seeing them as a threat to liberty. At the same time, there are still moments when he recognizes the positive contribution that institutions make to liberty, particularly when he is unsure if the English people can reach their potential without institutional help.<sup>10</sup>

Although institutions are crucial to understanding Miltonic freedom, much of the work on religious freedom in Milton's early prose focuses on the limited scope of religious liberty. Ben LaBreche identifies a tension in *Areopagitica*, as Milton struggles to combine "religious

pluralism and the free, open competition of rational discourse” (141). Miltonic pluralism could lead to intolerance, especially of Catholics, as pluralism had to be protected from intolerant opponents (LaBreche 141). Elizabeth Sauer asserts that Milton’s understanding of England as a divinely chosen nation renders his religious toleration in the early 1640s more restrictive than many scholars assume (*Milton, Toleration* 40-47). For Nigel Smith, Milton’s focus is not toleration at all, but education, and his work is markedly different from that of Roger Williams and other tolerationist writers (“*Areopagitica*” 105-6). Studies that point to the limits on Miltonic religious liberty offer an important corrective to any claim that Milton was promoting something akin to modern religious pluralism, but they overlook the complex relationship between institutions and liberty in Milton’s prose.

In terms of political freedom, most scholarship centres on the extent to which Milton had already adopted republican principles in his early writings. Chief among these scholars is David Norbrook, who detects republican elements, including active citizenship and the subordination of monarchy to the people, in Milton’s early tracts (113-15, 127-31). Smith agrees that Milton’s acceptance of a monarchy in the early 1640s does not detract from the republican nature of his early writings, as Milton considered classical rather than English governments as the benchmarks for stability (“The Anti-Episcopal” 166-8). Rosanna Cox and Antti Tahvanainen apply Quentin Skinner’s interpretation of republican liberty to Milton’s divorce tracts and *Areopagitica* respectively (Cox 160-5; Tahvanainen 140-1). While significant, republican approaches are driven by a desire to connect Milton’s early writings to his later republican tracts. Consequently, they tend to read republican language into the early prose, knowing that Milton will later espouse such ideas.

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The first institution that Milton charged with restricting liberty was episcopacy. At the start of the Long Parliament, there was a consensus among the MPs that certain aspects of the church which had been created by Archbishop William Laud, such as the Court of High Commission, needed to be abolished. Beyond this initial agreement, however, there was significant division. Some MPs were not content with simply sweeping away Laudian innovation, as they also hoped to bring further godly reform to England, including the destruction of episcopacy. None of the members of the Long Parliament, however, were initially interested in religious liberty. Their goal was not liberty, but uniformity and victory over popery (Coffey *Persecution and Toleration* 138). Outside of parliament, religious radicals demanded more dramatic reform. There were reports from the counties around London of sporadic attacks on the prayer book, which had been a staple of English worship since 1549, as some radical Protestants became convinced that all set forms of worship were idolatrous (Hirst *England* 176). The Root and Branch Petition, which attacked the entire structure of the church and was signed by 15,000 Londoners, argued that episcopacy had injured the people “in their own consciences, liberties and estates” (Gardiner 137). In sum, the question of episcopacy was a source of much tension both inside and outside of Parliament. It was also a controversy into which Milton was eager to wade.

Milton engaged with the episcopacy debates through his antiprelatical tracts. These tracts contrast how the church was governed in seventeenth-century England (with the prelates dominating) with how the church should function. The church, in Milton’s writings, could be a source of liberty, but only if the clergy understood the limits of their office. Milton envisions a limited, but important, role for pastors in the spread of religious doctrine. In *Animadversions*, published in July 1641, Milton outlines a pastor’s jurisdiction: “to watch over his flock in

season, and out of season, to deale by sweet, and efficacious instructions; gentle admonitions, and sometimes rounder reproofs ... In summe, his jurisdiction is to see to the thriving and prospering of that which he hath planted” (*CPW* 1:716). Although Milton includes a range of specific actions for pastors, a pastor’s primary purpose is to spread Christian doctrine, not to micro-manage every member of the congregation. The word “planted” focuses on the initial act of teaching doctrine, not the continual enforcing of it.

Milton proceeds to tell the story of a gardener, which not only challenges the prelates’ claims to authority, but also elevates the act of planting over that of tending. The parable mocks a strange gardener who comes to a garden that already has a gardener and claims for himself the right of maintaining it. The purpose of this story is to reveal the ridiculousness of “the blind and undiscerning Prelates,” who claim that “tend[ing] that which is planted” is their “jurisdiction,” but it goes much further (*CPW* 1:716). In responding to the stranger, the honest gardener points out that “it is well knowne to be a matter of lesse skill and lesse labour to keepe a Garden handsome, then it is to plant it, or contrive it” (*CPW* 1:717). Planting is the most important work, as it requires significant skill. The stranger and the prelates, however, mistakenly diminish the status of planting Christian doctrine and “appropriate [tending the garden] to themselves as a business of higher dignity” (*CPW* 1:716). By privileging planting over tending, Milton presents ecclesiastical institutions as doing their best work when they are the least invasive in the lives of the congregation. Although Milton is not advocating that pastors simply preach the Word of God and then leave their congregations to their own devices, he is establishing a hierarchy of the pastor’s duties. The pastor contributes most to the Christian faith when he plants ideas within his congregation, not when he resorts to “rounder reproofs.”



Milton's story of the gardener reveals how the clergy should be operating, but the prelates in England were far from this ideal. Milton employs a variety of tropes to portray the prelates as negatively as possible. Barbara Lewalski notes Milton's use of monstrous body images, which produce a sense of revulsion in his readers (*The Life* 143). Milton's primary complaint against the prelates was that they usurped the temporal power that rightly belonged to civil magistrates. To stress the prelates' use of temporal power, Milton utilizes the language of military conquest when describing the prelates' quest for power. Any activity by the clergy beyond their jurisdiction of planting and watching their garden is "an invasion upon the temporall Magistrate" (*CPW* 1:716). The word "invasion" suggests an aggressive military expansion on the part of the prelates. Once they acquire temporal power, the clergy have means beyond ecclesiastical censure to control their congregation. The result of this situation is spiritual tyranny. Milton warns that once the prelates have "fleshy strength," they will not teach true religion, but rather "subdue your spirits by a servile and blind superstition, that again shall hold dominion over your captive minds" (*CPW* 1:850). Again, the words "subdue" and "dominion" present the prelates as a conquering army that seeks to extend its territory. When describing the efforts of "Popish Priests" and the prelates to defend bishops, Milton notes that it was "as if they had joyn'd their forces like good Confederates" (*CPW* 1:528). In this case, the priests and prelates' arguments transform into military "forces" as the two "Confederates" work together. Such language is the opposite from the "sweet" and "gentle" actions that Milton envisions pastors taking. The prelates, in Milton's account, restrict religious liberty because they apply a military approach to an area that requires "gentle" care.

To further explain how the prelates restricted religious liberty, Milton describes them as inspiring fear. For Milton, fear led to slavery. Throughout his early prose, he refers to "thral-

like feare,” “slavish fear,” and “servil feare” (*CPW* 1:522, 843, 2:636). Fear reduces people to a slavish state because they act out of the dread of punishment, not genuine conviction. When one is possessed by fear, one engages in “such a worship as is most agreeable to remedy his feare” (*CPW* 1:522). This situation causes all worship to “harden into Formallitie” as people simply go through the motions of religious worship in the hope of avoiding punishment (*CPW* 1:522). Although Milton connects fear with slavery, fear could be consistent with true religion. In *Reason of Church Government*, Milton criticizes priests who “fear religion with such a fear that loves not” (*CPW* 1:746). Milton’s wording reveals that there is a type of fear that is compatible with love. One could simultaneously fear and love God. The fear stirred up by the prelates, however, left no room for love, and placed people in a servile state. With an understanding of the power of fear, the prelates, according to Milton, compelled the English to adhere to the official interpretation of scripture out of “fear of displeasing the verbal straightness of a text, which our owne servil feare gives us not the leisure to understand aright” (*CPW* 2:636). Paralyzed with fear, English Christians cannot engage in religious worship properly. The prelates’ control over religion and the scriptures causes the laity to “have an unworthy and abject opinion of themselves” because they fear that they will “profane” holy elements of the church, such as “carpets, and tablecloths,” by touching them (*CPW* 1:843). Consequently, the laity “approach to holy duties with slavish fear” (*CPW* 1:843). Much of the prelates’ power, in Milton’s estimation, derives from fear that enslaves the laity.

The prelates’ reliance on fear transforms the church from a persuasive to a compulsive institution, as it mimics the Mosaic Law, an institution that controlled people through terror.<sup>11</sup> Milton contrasts the Christian and Jewish approach to reforming people: “the perswasive power in man to win others to goodnesse by instruction is greater, and more divine, then the compulsive

power to restraine men from being evill by terrour of the Law; and therefore Christ left Moses to be the Law-giver, but himselfe came downe amongst us to be a teacher” (CPW 1:722). Milton associates both Moses and Christ with a set of institutions (legal and educational), but only the persuasive institution, of which Christ is a part, allows for liberty. The “terroure of the Law” is “old,” “dead” (CWP 1:843) and inappropriate for the “adoptive and cheerfull boldnesse which our new alliance with God requires” (CPW 1:522). By linking the prelates to the Mosaic Law, Milton frames them as resurrecting a “dead” institution that Christ destroyed precisely to provide Christian liberty: “the Gospell is the end and fulfilling of the [Mosaic] Law, our liberty also from the bondage of the Law I plainly reade” (CPW 1:763). Here, Milton is responding to Lancelot Andrewes, Bishop of Winchester, who defended Episcopacy on the grounds that it was in the Old Testament (CPW 1:761). For Milton, however, episcopacy derived from the Old Testament was a form of institutional “bondage” from which the Gospel freed each Christian.

Rejecting the “terroure of the Law,” Milton constructs a version of religious governance that follows the precedent of persuasion from Christ and frees the entire laity, regardless of social status. In the Preface to *Reason of Church Government*, Milton refers to Plato’s advice that “persuasion certainly is a more winning, and more manlike way to keepe men in obedience than feare ... as true eloquence ... [can] charme the multitude into the love of that which is really good” (CPW 1:746). Milton frames his goal as “obedience” rather than freedom, but it is an obedience “not of custome and awe ... but of choice and purpose” (CPW 1:746). Obedience could be consistent with freedom if it was based on choice and not fear. Paul Hammond discerns two different meanings of the word “multitude” in Milton’s antiprelatical tracts, one positive and one negative. Hammond argues that in this instance, Milton means the “rude multitude” who are incapable of understanding anything good unless they are persuaded by wise

men (57). The manner in which Milton frames persuading the multitude, however, reveals that he is not as dismissive of the multitude as Hammond suggests. The close proximity of “manlike” and “men” suggests that persuasion allows both the persuader and the persuaded to maintain their status as men, that is, their active engagement with issues and ability to make a rational choice. Milton’s subsequent example of how this persuasion works further reveals that he is not disdainful of the multitude who require a degree of education. Following the reference to Plato, Milton looks to Moses who knew “how vaine it was to write laws to men whose hearts were not first season’d with the knowledge of God and his works” (*CPW* 1:747). Moses taught the ancient Hebrews “the universall goodnesse of God to all creatures in the Creation, and his peculiar favour to them in his election of Abraham their ancestor” so that they “might be mov’d to obey sincerely by knowing so good a reason of their obedience” (*CPW* 1:747). Nowhere in this description does Milton present the ancient Hebrews as ignorant or flawed, they simply required knowledge to understand “so good a reason” to obey God. Rather than presenting the multitude as incapable of comprehending any good by themselves, Milton acknowledges that a basic level of knowledge was necessary to consider anything “really good.” There is a level of institutional guidance and advice, yet the choice of obedience rests with the individual.

Plato’s comments regarding persuasion were made with reference to civil laws, but Milton describes this principle in a Christian context. Milton offers a program of persuasion built on Christian understanding rather than servile fear: “no better way doubtlesse then to let him [a Christian] duly understand that he is call’d by the high calling of God to be holy and pure” (*CPW* 1:843). The church must “let” each Christian “duly understand,” which implies that the understanding is done by the individual Christian, not the church, prelates, or any other institution. This letting, as mentioned above, can still involve certain actions, such as preaching,

but the onus is on the individual Christian to understand; the church simply creates the conditions under which such understanding is possible. Once a Christian understands God's calling, Milton believes that he can begin to worship God honestly, "not fearing lest he should meet with some outward holy thing in religion which his lay touch or presence might prophane" (*CPW* 1:844). Milton's position here is consistent with other tolerationists. Henry Robinson argues that if religion, even "true Religion," "were forced" on people, "it will do us little good" (3). "Free election" rather than "compulsion" were the only forms of service that God accepted (Robinson 3). Similarly, the Leveller William Walwyn views "compulsion" as "the most unlikely [way] to beget unity of mind" (105). Conscience could "only be convinced or perswaded," any use of "force makes it runne back" (Walwyn 105). At this point in his career, Milton, like other tolerationists, views episcopal churches that use force and impose ideas upon people as the primary threat to liberty. Once compulsion is removed and the church "let[s]" each Christian "understand" that they are called by God, the "slavish fear" of institutions is lifted and Christians are free.

Milton's discussion of the church highlights the key point of tension in freedom: individual wishes versus collective achievement. Although Milton seeks to protect the individual Christian from the coercion of prelates, he still notes the value of the communal aspects of the church in pursuing religion. As long as a hierarchy of prelates and temporal power are absent from the church, it was one of the few institutions that could balance the individual and the collective. Nigel Smith argues that Milton's understanding of the church in 1640s begins not with individual Christians, but with the constitution of the church. Individual piety is, for Milton, less important than "patterns and shapes of social collectives" (Smith "The Anti-Episcopal" 171). Elizabeth Sauer connects the spiritual community in Milton's antiprelatical

tracts to Milton's belief that England was a specially chosen nation, which prompts Milton to call for national unity among God's chosen people (*Milton, Toleration* 22-3, 28). This communal component is present in many of Milton's discussions of congregational activities. Milton appeals to his readers to recognize their own ability to read the scripture: "If we will but purge with sovain eyesalve that intellectual ray, which God hath planted in us, then we would believe the Scriptures protesting their own plainness" (*CPW* 1:566). By using the first-person plural, Milton situates himself within an active Christian community that collectively engages with the scripture. Although the right to interpret the scriptures belongs to each individual Christian, Milton imagines the entire laity working together to remove any vestiges of ignorance and appreciate the scriptures' plainness.

Milton expresses a similar position when he describes the role of the laity in determining the structure of ecclesiastical institutions. Since the English people make important political decisions (through the election of MPs), Milton, in *Of Reformation*, questions: "why should not the Piety, and Conscience of Englishmen as members of the Church be trusted in the Election of Pastors to Functions that nothing concerne a Monarch" (*CPW* 1:600). Decisions regarding ecclesiastical positions, according to Milton, belong in the hands of the Christian laity, not senior prelates. Yet the decision-making process is less about individual Christians expressing their opinion than a Christian collective determining the best course of action. Milton empowers "Englishmen as members of the Church" to elect pastors, not as individuals who have the right to vote. Collective membership in an institution, specifically the church, is the source of their religious liberty. When discussing the removal of episcopacy in *Of Prelatical Episcopacy*, Milton notes that "we have the same humane priviledge" to consult with "our owne occasions" "for the prevention of our owne dangers" (*CPW* 1:624). The use of the first-person plural again

presents these acts as being done by the English collective. The “occasions” and “dangers” belong not to individual Englishmen, but to all members of the English nation. Milton is not celebrating the dignity and rights of the individual, but rather detecting a power and legitimacy in the entire laity when it acted collectively through the institution of the church.

Smith and Sauer correctly note the communal nature of Miltonic liberty in the antiprelatical tracts, but Milton’s collective approach does not erase the presence of the individual Christian, who maintains the right to judge religious matters for himself. Milton criticizes the bishops, both historic and contemporary, who view “the search of divine knowledge as a mystery too high for their [the laity’s] capacity’s, and only for churchmen to meddle with” (*CPW* 1:548).<sup>12</sup> With this lowly view of the laity’s abilities, the bishops, in Milton’s estimation, seek to convince all Christians to “commit to their disposal the whole managing of our salvation” (*CPW* 1:548). The act of management becomes a violation of religious liberty because it deprives individual Christians of their right to direct their own salvation. For Milton, the prelates are not needed to manage salvation because the Bible already provided each Christian with all the necessary information regarding religion and salvation. Knowledge of God, according to Milton, “ought to be so in proportion as may bee wielded and manag’d by the life of man without penning him up from his duties of humane society, and such a rule and instrument of knowledge perfectly is the holy Bible” (*CPW* 1:699). Milton drops the first-person plural in favour of the more generic “man” who can manage religion without neglecting “his” obligations. Similarly, in *An Apology*, Milton employs the third-person singular when describing individual Christians judging their teachers: “none can judge of a Christian teacher, but he who hath, either the practize, or the knowledge of the Christian religion ... thereby he may easily attaine to know when he is wisely taught and when weakly” (*CPW* 1:933).

In this instance, the individual Christian rather than the collective congregation judges teachers. The congregation could assist and advise an individual in religious matters, but this congregational involvement did not compromise the individual Christian's liberty. In Milton's ideal church, Christians receive institutional support to achieve salvation, but that support does not come at the expense of individual liberty.

The communal importance of the church is most evident in Milton's discussion of discipline. Kenneth Graham demonstrates that discipline, for Milton, was perfectly consistent with the principles of liberty. Milton understood discipline not as coercion, but as a conversation that valued both individual belief and the needs of the congregation (Graham 127). True discipline, Graham notes, preserves Christian liberty "by replacing legal restraint with the gentler encouragements and censures of pastoral and congregational care" (130). Additionally, discipline is not solely the responsibility of the pastor. As with interpreting scripture and selecting church officials, the entire congregation participates in discipline. The process of discipline begins with the pastor trying to persuade the individual member, then "two or three [of] his faithful brethren" speak with him, then "the counsel of more assistants" try to reach him, then "his brethren and friends" engage with him, and finally "the whole Church beseech him, beg of him, deplore him, deplore him, pray for him" (*CPW* 1:847). Milton allows for institutional engagement in religious practice, but it is "gentle" and communal rather than coercive and hierarchical.

Yet even this engagement would not continue indefinitely. If after all attempts to persuade the member, there was "no relenting on his part," the congregation must "dissolve their fellowship with him" (*CPW* 1:847). At some point, the congregation simply had to accept that they could not persuade the individual to change his mind and excommunicate him. Although



the excommunication that followed involves no physical sentence, it is, for Milton, a “horrid sentence” that “scorches the inmost soul” (*CPW* 1:847). Since many of the Christian freedoms that Milton outlines are connected to membership in a church, excommunication results in the loss of those freedoms. An excommunicated member can no longer collectively engage in reading the scripture or selecting church officials. Denied access to the church, the member will be “in the custody of Satan till he repent” (*CPW* 1:847), which suggests that salvation is impossible until the individual repents and rejoins the church. Milton, in the early 1640s, believes that an individual could not pursue the ultimate end of a Christian without the support of the church. The freedom to achieve salvation is contingent upon institutional membership.

The power of the prelates restricted not only the liberty of Christians in church, but also the liberty of citizens in England. Political tyranny concerned English politicians and philosophers long before the Civil War. There were two major anti-absolutist ideologies in pre-Civil War England which promoted the protection of subjects’ liberties: government by consent and the Ancient Constitution. Both ideologies sought to curtail the power of the king, but government by consent employed the principles of popular sovereignty while the ancient constitution looked to legal institutions. According to the theory of government by consent, political power originally lay in the people, who later transferred it to the monarch under certain conditions. If the monarch did not meet these conditions, the people could resist him (Sommerville *Royalists and Patriots* 59). Before 1640, English politicians and philosophers were aware of this concept, but only rarely expressed it in writing (Sommerville *Royalists and Patriots* 71-2). The Ancient Constitution, comparatively, was a regular feature in English political theory. The Ancient Constitution was not a formal written document (although documents such as the Magna Carta were part of it), but a general understanding of how the

English government should function. Despite its informality, the Ancient Constitution relied on institutions like the common law. In this case, the institution of the common law protects people's rights, particularly with regards to property, to achieve the goal of greater prosperity. Supporters of the Ancient Constitution believed that the law was above all citizens, including the king, and the king's prerogative powers were only the rights that he held by law (Sommerville *Royalists and Patriots* 83-4, 96). The primary purpose of English law was to protect the life, liberty, and property of the subject from both other subjects and the king (Sommerville *Royalists and Patriots* 98). Defending the Ancient Constitution against encroachments from the king did not necessarily make one a republican, as many supporters of the Ancient Constitution believed that monarchy could exist with and was part of English political liberty. The Ancient Constitution, as Johann Sommerville points out, was a distinctly English version of liberty, that drew on native rather than Roman traditions ("English and Roman Liberty" 214-6).

Appeals to traditional English political institutions in the 1640s were not always conservative, as this period witnessed new interpretations of how institutions could support liberty. Rachel Foxley shows that the Leveller John Lilburne drew on English legal traditions to justify radical political thought (101). For Lilburne, liberty was rooted in the law, which protected all Englishmen, not just the wealthy. Consequently, the law needed to be in English, not Latin, "so every Free-man may read it as well as Lawyers (seeing they have Lives, Liberties and Estates as well as the other)" (Lilburne 8). The Levellers' focus is on expanding the protective capacity of English institutions so that the benefits of property, voting, and freedom from arbitrary arrest could be experienced by a broader segment of the population. Lilburne's fellow Leveller William Walwyn associates traditional liberty with the Magna Carta, which many supporters of the Ancient Constitution viewed as the bedrock of English liberty, but

Walwyn believes that such liberty was insufficient. He even refers to English liberties as being “deceitfully and improperly called MAGNA CHARTA” (Walwyn 147). As the Civil War progressed, Walwyn questioned another traditional English institution, parliament. He became concerned with the increasingly arbitrary nature of parliament’s power. In *England’s Lamentable Slaverie*, he rejects any argument “that a Parliament being once chosen, have power over all our lives estates and liberties, to dispose of them at their pleasure whether for our good or hurt” (147). The Levellers were not satisfied with the existing institutions in England as they either did not protect the freedom of all citizens, or were becoming so powerful that they reduced what little liberty was in England.

Throughout the 1640s, the Levellers sought to create a written constitution that would better protect liberty than the current English law. Such a constitution was novel to England. Between 1647 and 1649, the Levellers drafted three versions of “An Agreement of the People.” The first Agreement in 1647 reiterates and challenges the traditional basis of liberty. Following a traditional perspective, the Agreement ties freedom to parliament, although it calls for a more equitable distribution of seats and elections every two years (93-4). Previous “oppressions” of the English people resulted from either the “obscurity and doubtfulness” of the people’s right to elect a parliament or the chosen MPs lacking sufficient “courage” (*An Agreement* 95-6). To remedy the situation, the Agreement calls on all Englishmen to embrace the new constitution. In justifying itself as a protector of liberty, the Agreement presents itself as moving beyond the capacity of parliament:

No Act of parliament is or can be unalterable, and so cannot be sufficient security to save you or us harmless from what another parliament may determine if it should be corrupted ... therefore, both necessity for your security in these freedoms that are essential to your well-being, and woeful experience of the manifold miseries and distractions ... require this agreement (97).

By painting parliament as flawed when it comes to securing liberty permanently, the authors of the Agreement establish a new basis for liberty, a written constitution. Although none of the versions of the Agreement became the law of the land, they reveal the Levellers' impulse to erect additional institutional safeguards for liberty.

Like Walwyn, parliament's chief propagandist, Henry Parker, addresses the issue of Parliament's arbitrary power, but for him, arbitrary power in the appropriate institutions is necessary for the preservation of liberty. Parker was critical of the king's prerogative power: "if Kings bee so inclineable to follow private advise rather then publique ... all Charters and Lawes of publike safetie and freedome are voyd" (30). For Parker, it was essential that parliament have power to contain the arbitrary ambitions of a king, but he went much further than the Levellers in empowering parliament to protect the interests of the state. In defending parliament's position in 1642, Parker asserts: "That there is an Arbitrary power in every State somewhere tis true, tis necessary, and no inconvenience follows upon it" (34). Arbitrary power, according to Parker, is only dangerous if it was in the hands of one man. Since "the Parliament is neither one nor few, it is indeed the State it self," there was no need to fear the arbitrary power of parliament (Parker 34). Parker's willingness to define parliament as "the State if self" and grant parliament arbitrary power has prompted Michael Mendle to view Parker as promoting not parliamentary sovereignty, but parliamentary absolutism. Parliament, according to the doctrine of parliamentary absolutism, can act in an extra-legal manner to protect the state (Mendle 70-1). The Levellers and Parker present two new interpretations of the role of institutions in achieving liberty. The Levellers challenge the institutions traditionally charged with protecting liberty and look to new institutions, while Parker views arbitrary power within certain institutions as

consistent with and essential for liberty. Their writings reveal the possibilities for re-imagining liberty in the early 1640s.

Compared with the Levellers and Parker, Milton's early political liberty is conservative, as he focuses on citizens' property and bodies. Based on Milton's references in his *Commonplace Book*, Peter Herman demonstrates that Milton had a profound understanding of English political traditions and he situates Milton's antiprelatical tracts within that tradition (72-5). Herman's approach reveals that Milton's early political thought drew on more than classical republicanism. Following the rhetoric of the ancient constitution, Milton describes the prelates as trampling "under foot all the most sacred, and life blood Lawes, Statues, and Acts of Parliament ... confiscating from us all the right we have to our owne bodies, goods, and liberties" (*CPW* 1:592-3). Specifically, the prelates will "do their best to repeal and erase every line and clause of both our great charters [Magna Carta and Carta de Foresta<sup>13</sup>]" as they "breed the heaviest yoke and most quelling tyranny not only upon the necks, but even to the souls of men" (*CPW* 1:851-2, 833-4). Sommerville has illustrated that a subject's security from arbitrary arrest became a part of English liberties when the House of Commons resolved in 1628 that no freeman should be arrested without cause (*Royalists and Patriots* 156-7). Even though Milton does not mention imprisonment, the words "owne bodies" and "necks" connect prelatial oppression to the subject's body, which suffers from imprisonment. The body was not just another area that English laws protected, it was a site of self-fashioning in early modern England. Focusing on the role of Galenic physiology, Michael Schoenfeldt demonstrates that early modern writers viewed control over the body with regards to eating and excretion as authorizing individuality (*Bodies* 11). When the prelates exercise tyranny over "bodies" and "necks," they deprive Englishmen of the opportunity to seek liberation through controlling their bodies. Milton portrays the prelates

as targeting the core components of the Ancient Constitution, laws and statutes that protect the property and bodies of English subjects. Unlike the Levellers, Milton is content with Magna Carta and other similar pieces of legislation. He does not want an overhaul of existing legal institutions, he just wants current laws to be respected.

When Milton discusses the institution of monarchy and its relation to liberty, he again outlines a traditional perspective. Milton only addresses monarchy once in his early prose, in *Of Reformation*. Norbrook is eager to point to this instance as evidence of Milton's republicanism, asserting that although Milton's arguments are consistent with a limited monarchy, the fact that the monarch is subordinate to the whole nation reveals his early republicanism (113). *Of Reformation*, however, does not challenge existing assumptions about government structure. Milton makes no reference to the king undermining liberty and instead connects the English monarchy to liberty: "Monarchy is made up of two parts, the Liberty of the subject, and the supremacie of the King" (CPW 1:592). Here, monarchy encompasses liberty as well as the king's power. The king can hold "supremacie" while the subjects have liberty. Rather than threaten liberty as it does in Parker's tracts, monarchy in *Of Reformation* is a part of England's traditional political institutions and therefore a part of English liberty. To align the traditional institution of monarchy with the English people against the innovative institution of prelacy, Milton describes prelatical tyranny extending to the monarchy itself. Milton provides the example of Pope Zachary, who was "hindering the Westerne Princes from ayding them [the Byzantine Empire] against the Sarazens, and Turkes, unless when they humour'd him" (CPW 1:579). In this instance, the Pope prevents kings in western Europe from acting in ways consistent with their liberty and their mandates as rulers. Traditional English liberties include the right to one's goods and land, and in this regard, prelates also interfered with the liberty of

monarchs. Milton refers to the prelates as having two leeches that “suck [the wealth of] the Kingdome” (*CPW* 1:589). Prelates drain the wealth of both subjects and kings; consequently, they deprive both king and commoner of liberty. Monarchs, in Milton’s early prose, do not impose limitations on liberty, but are themselves limited by the prelates just as all subjects are.

Although he does not view the king as a threat to liberty, Milton endorses a limited monarch who rules alongside other English institutions. This limited monarchy, however, differs from Parker’s parliamentary absolutism. Unlike the writings of Parker and other parliamentary declarations, which appropriate the language of Stuart absolutism (Mendel 81), Milton’s early prose portrays the relationship between parliament and the monarch in moderate, traditional terms. Milton presents the Commonwealth of England as “more divinely and harmoniously tun’d, more equally ballanc’d as it were by the hand and scale of Justice” than even ancient Sparta or Rome (*CPW* 1:599). Milton refers to Polybius’ praise of Sparta and Rome, linking his ideas of government to the mixed constitution advocated by Polybius. Polybius believed that a constitution that combined elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy was best able to preserve freedom (*CPW* 1:599 n.106). Smith argues that the reference to Polybius demonstrates Milton’s preference for classical over English forms of government (“The Anti-Episcopal” 166-7). Milton’s insistence that the English Commonwealth is better “ballanc’d” than Sparta or Rome, however, suggests that English traditions and institutions are superior to classical ones. Polybius may have provided the framework with which to evaluate governments, but Milton views the English Commonwealth as rising above all classical precedents. In *An Apology*, Milton continues to stress the supremacy of the English parliament, asserting that it is greater than the liberators from antiquity because parliament, in addition to freeing England from outward tyranny, “freed us from a doctrine of tyranny that offer’d violence and corruption even

to the inward persuasion” (CPW 1:925). Although he admired the great statesmen of Greece and Rome, Milton ranks the parliament of his native England as superior due to its pursuit of religious liberty. Earlier in *An Apology*, Milton frames civil liberty as a distinctly English. He praises “those that lov’d religion, and their native liberty” and then notes that those “two things God hath inseparably knit together, and hath disclos’d to us that they who seek to corrupt our religion are the same that would intrall our civill liberty” (CPW 1:923-4). “Native liberty” and “civill liberty” become interchangeable. Political liberty derives less from antiquity and more from English traditional institutions.

In the early 1640s, then, Milton had yet to turn to classical republicanism as the basis for political liberty. The primary threat to political liberty comes from the institution of prelacy, which undermines the liberty of Ancient Constitution, not monarchy, which was a part of the Ancient Constitution. Under a free English monarchy, the “noblest, worthiest, and most prudent men” are able to have the “finall determination of highest Affairs” (CPW 1:599). This image of the monarch is not the tyrant who feels threatened by the most virtuous men and hinders their advancement, which will appear in Milton’s commonwealth prose, but the rational leader who encourages the men of highest quality to assume positions in government. In his subsequent early tracts, Milton never discusses monarchy in general or Charles I in particular. Henry Parker, comparatively, explicitly refers to Charles I’s misdeeds in crafting his defence of parliament (25-8). Several of Milton’s divorce tracts and *Areopagitica* are addressed to parliament, but this does not signal an early embrace of republicanism. In *Areopagitica*, Milton frequently praises parliament and credits it with restoring liberty, but he always refers to parliament as “Lords and Commons” (CPW 2:487). Milton is not yet envisioning the unicameral system of the Commonwealth; the House of Lords is still very much a part of the parliament and its effort to



secure liberty. When Milton contrasts the effective rule of parliament compared to previous regimes in *Areopagitica*, he notes parliament's superiority over the "the jealous hautinesse of Prelates and cabin Counsellours," not the king (*CPW* 2:489). *Areopagitica* was written in 1644, two years after the Civil War began, but Milton still makes no reference to the king. Milton's silence on monarchy between *Of Reformation* and *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* reflects an uncertainty about the relationship between the institution of monarchy and liberty rather than outright republicanism. Many parliamentarians in the early 1640s were unsure what the Civil War meant for the king's future, and Milton may very well have been one of them.

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The prelates were the first institutional obstacle to liberty to which Milton objected, but he soon turned to canonical laws that prevented divorce and forced people to remain in unhappy marriages. Although his own unhappy marriage to Mary Powell may have motivated Milton to tackle the subject of divorce, he does so in a manner that transforms marriage into a question of liberty. The issues of marriage and divorce were becoming prominent on the national political stage, as the Westminster Assembly began debating the principles of marriage. Marriage soon became bound up with religious schisms and political divisions as the Westminster Assembly failed to reach a consensus (Achinstein "'A Law'" 180-4). Within the debate over marriage, Milton was one of the most radical voices. An unhappy marriage, according to Milton, affected both religious and political liberty. Due to an unhappy marriage, "a Christian may be brought into unworthy bondage, and his religious peace not only interrupted now and then, but perpetually" (*CPW* 2:339). Similarly, marriage also affected political freedom, as "no effect of tyranny can sit more heavy on the Common-wealth, then his household unhappiness of the family" (*CPW* 2:229). Just as Milton seeks to free his fellow countrymen from the religious and

political bondage of the prelates in his antiprelatical tracts, he also attempts to free all those who were enslaved by an unhappy marriage in his divorce tracts.

Scholars have recognized the political component in Milton's divorce tracts, often linking these works to republicanism. Norbrook stresses the connection that Milton draws between a happy marriage and the active public life (115). Rosanna Cox continues this republican reading of the divorce tracts, but highlights the gendered nature of Milton's republicanism. For Cox, Milton's republican freedom is distinctly masculine as Milton views marriage as creating the ideal conditions for men to be manly, active citizens (149-66). Expanding on the gendered nature of the divorce tracts, Diane Purkiss questions whether the divorce tracts should even be celebrated as works of liberty since Milton's rhetoric focuses on securing public liberty for men, while denying that same liberty to women (189-95). Civic engagement is a part of the divorce tracts, but Milton does more than simply warn of the public turmoil that accompanies unhappy marriages. The gendered approach to the divorce tracts comes closer to the core of Miltonic freedom. Although all of Milton's prose works place limits on who is eligible for liberty, the divorce tracts are perhaps the most explicit in restricting liberty to one gender. In the divorce tracts, Milton's interest is in understanding what choices a man is entitled to make as a man. Being a man permits one, in Milton's opinion, to decide certain things for himself without the input of any institution that seeks to influence the decision. The divorce tracts express a more personal liberty than the antiprelatical tracts, as Milton empowers the individual man rather than a communal institution like the church to choose whether or not divorce is in his best interest. Sharon Achinstein notes the focus on the individual in the divorce, as "Milton makes one's individual experience the basis of his ethics" ("A Law" 180). Any institutional interference in a man's choice regarding divorce disrupts freedom.

Milton's focus on the individual in matters of divorce reflects his interpretation of marriage and the problems within a marriage. While a church congregation could fall into a disagreement that could be resolved through persuasive disciplinary mechanisms that stopped short of excommunication, Milton views marriage as either pure bliss that needs no discipline or extreme misery that cannot be corrected. Looking at nature, Milton, in *Doctrine and Discipline*, detects "a twofold Seminary or stock in nature, from whence are deriv'd the issues of love and hatred distinctly flowing through the whole masse of created things" (CPW 2:272). Some people will naturally feel love for each other, while others will naturally feel hate for each other. Milton does not recognize any middle ground in marriage. For those in a bad marriage, Milton presents them as "know[ing] no remedy" to their predicament (CPW 2:254). No institution like the church can step in to help those who are trapped in a bad marriage, and any effort to fix a bad marriage is destined to fail: "how miserably doe we defraud our selves of that comfortable portion which God gives us, by striving vainly to glue an error together which God and nature will not joyne" (CPW 2:256). Milton employs similar language in *Tetrachordon*: "all the Ecclesiastical glue, that Liturgy, or Laymen can compound, is not able to soder up two such incongruous natures" (CPW 2:606). Milton's reference to "glue" in both *Doctrine and Discipline* and *Tetrachordon* emphasises the futility and ridiculousness of trying to fit two incompatible people together. The solution to a bad marriage was not be found in institutional guidance, but in each individual man who should not "hear any judge therin above himself" (CPW 2:347). Only the individual man in a marriage could decide if divorce was the right course of action because "the causes of seeking divorce reside so deeply in the radical and innocent affections of nature, as it is not within the diocese to Law to tamper with" (CPW 2:345).

In decisions of divorce, Milton completely removes institutions from the process and permits individual men complete freedom of choice.

The limited capabilities of any institution contributed to Milton's belief that men must have free choice in divorce. God permitted the ancient Hebrews to divorce, according to Milton, because laws could not change people in such a way as to bring joy to an unhappy marriage: "law cannot command love, without which, matrimony hath no true meaning being ... Law cannot inable natural inability either of body, or mind, which gives the grievance; it cannot make equal those inequalities, it cannot make fit those unfitnesses" (*CPW* 2:632). Milton's stress on the inability of human nature to change has prompted Stephen Fallon to identify an element of determinism in the divorce tracts ("The Metaphysics" 78). Jennifer Nichols acknowledges the presence of determinism, but she also correctly asserts that Milton later abandons determinism to argue that men can change their nature through moral choices (195-6). These choices, however, occur through individuals rather than institutions. Milton repeats the word "cannot," stressing the limits of institutions and encouraging his readers not to put all their faith in an institution to save them from their miserable state. Only an individual choice can free a man from the bondage of an unhappy marriage. The verbs Milton uses to describe what the law "cannot" do are also noteworthy. The law cannot "command," "inable," or "make." "Command" relates to the ideas of territory, dominion, and military power. The law "cannot command love" because it does not have dominion over the inner feelings of a man. A man's inner feelings will never respond to the commands of the law because they are under the jurisdiction of the individual, not an institution. The words "inable" and "make" emphasize the law's inability to transform human nature. If a married couple is unhappy, there is something in their natures that renders them incompatible. To overcome this incompatibility, one or both of the couple's natures would have

to be made “fit” for this particular marriage. A transformation on that level was beyond the scope of the law or any other institution.

Although the divorce tracts associate freedom with individual choice, they still tie freedom to higher goals for the entire society. The difference is that these ultimate objectives (in both religion and politics) are achieved exclusively through individual choice, rather than the combination of institutional guidance and individual conscience as in the antiprelatical tracts. God, according to Milton in *Tetrachordon*, calls humanity “To peace, not to bondage” (CPW 2:688). If a man is in an unhappy marriage, he is not at peace, and therefore he cannot fulfill God’s command. The only way to follow God’s command was the freedom to divorce. Milton questions why anyone would remain in the bondage of an unhappy marriage when God wishes man to be at peace: “If God hath call’d us to peace, why should we not follow him, why should we miserably stay in perpetual discord under a servitude not requir’d?” (CPW 2:689). In his subsequent divorce tract, *Colasterion*, Milton reiterates that marriage is supposed to bring peace, and if it instead brings discord, “which God hates to dwell with . . . we ought to fly and pursue peace” (CPW 2:739). Permitting divorce enables a man to follow the path of peace that God has set for him. In *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton provides some details of the benefits of divorce to society more broadly: “peace and love, the best subsistence of a Christian family will return home from whence they are now banisht; places of prostitution will be lesse haunted, the neighbours beds lesse attempted, the yoke of prudent and manly discipline will be generally submitted to, sober and well order’d living will soon spring up in the Commonwealth” (CPW 2:230). Removing institutional interference increases the potential for men both to comply with God’s wishes and strengthen the nation. Divorce based on individual choice without interference becomes the optimal means for man to achieve his ultimate end as a Christian and a political

citizen. Milton believes in a larger purpose to which all men are striving, but he argues that in matters of divorce free choice rather than institutional direction would lead to that purpose.

Institutions can constrain liberty, but they can also protect it. As mentioned earlier, the Ancient Constitution secured political liberty by protecting property rights. In the divorce tracts, Milton points to the Law of God as a model for how human laws should handle questions of divorce. In the case of an unhappy marriage, the Law of God permits divorce, because it “enact[s] the restorement of a free born man” to “rightfull liberty” (*CPW* 2:626). Milton’s reference to a “free born man” goes further than anything in his antiprelatical tracts in stressing individual liberty. The freedom to decide whether or not to remain married becomes a right held by each individual man, a right that the divine law grants and protects. This freedom is connected not to being part of any church collective, but simply to being a man. Milton cautions against any effort to infringe on a man’s “rightfull liberty”: “He who wisely would restrain the reasonable Soul of man within due bonds, must first himself know perfectly, how far the territory and dominion extends of just and honest liberty” (*CPW* 2:227). Here, Milton conceives of liberty as a “territory” that each man owns. Being “free born,” each man is entitled to a certain “territory.” Marriage and divorce are, for Milton, within “the territory” of liberty: “For ev’n the freedom and eminence of mass creation gives him [man] to be a Law in this matter [divorce] to himself, being the head of the other sex which was made for him” (*CPW* 2:347). Man is a law “to himself” because he has dominion over this territory and can decide for himself which rules govern it. While the Law of God created this territory, institutions like canon law sought to decrease it: “that power which Christ never took from the master of family, but rectify’d only to a right and wary use at home, that power the undiscerning Canonist that improperly usurpt into his Court-leet” (*CPW* 2:318). Milton also blames the existence of laws against divorce on the

Catholic Church: “a papal encroachment it was, to pluck the power & arbitrement of divorce from the master of the family” (CPW 2:343). Canon law and the Pope’s usurpation of the “power” of “the master of the family” result in a reduction of the area in which a man chooses without interference; such laws take the decision of divorce out of an individual’s hands and give it to an external institution.

The language of “territory and dominion” and “usurpt” places the freedom to divorce under the umbrella of the Ancient Constitution. The laws of the Ancient Constitution protect the property of individual Englishmen, and in Milton’s divorce tracts the body of the married couple becomes a territory of free-hold land. Seventeenth-century English law considered a married couple to be one person, the husband; or as the anonymous pamphlet *The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights* put it, the law “affirmes them [husband and wife] to be una Caro, regarded to many intents merely as one individed substance ... and the Feme taketh nothing but by agreement of the husband” (116-19). Although Milton views the union of marriage as deriving more from the mind than the body (CPW 2:605-6), he still frames marriage and its governance as functioning like a piece of land that is protected by English traditions: “Let this [the Law of God permitting divorce] therefore be new examin’d this tenure of free-hold of mankind, this native and domestick Charter giv’n us by a greater Lord then that Saxon King the Confessor” (CPW 2:230). The freedom to divorce is a “free-hold,” rendering it a property and part of the Ancient Constitution. Since “free-hold” land was held outright without any rents, obligations, or restrictions on inheritance, owners of such land could choose how to use it without permission, just as husbands, in Milton’s view, could choose to divorce without “hear[ing] any judge therin above himself” (CPW 2:347). Both free-holders and husbands have total dominion over a certain territory. By referring to the divine law that permits divorce as a “native and domestick

Charter,” Milton transforms a provision for “mankind” into a distinctly English freedom that the Ancient Constitution guarantees. English legal traditions become the protectors of not only actual territory, but also the territory of the body as well. By framing the freedom to divorce as an English liberty, Milton looks to parliament, to whom *Doctrine and Discipline* was addressed, to codify this additional type of free-hold.

God’s Law and human laws that followed it freed men from the bondage of an unhappy marriage, but the divine law could also be misinterpreted and become a source of slavery. To overcome any misinterpretation of God’s Law, Milton encourages his readers to re-examine the scriptures. Arthur Barker detects a shift in the divorce tracts, as Milton moves from doubting human reason and relying on scripture to using human reason to question and interpret scripture (75). The antiprelatical and divorce tracts, however, are not as different as they appear. Susanne Woods asserts that Milton maintains his earlier commitment to the scriptures’ plainness in the divorce tracts, but he also incorporates “study, comparison, reason, and decisions about contextual meaning” into reading the scriptures. For Woods, the application of reason to the scriptures is part of Milton’s effort to encourage his readers to take responsibility in interpreting a text (*Milton and the Poetics* 94). Milton’s concern with individual responsibility stems from his distrust of institutions. The human reason to which Milton objects in the antiprelatical tracts is the reason of the prelates, who distort the meaning of the scriptures to secure their own power over men’s necks and souls. Milton’s divorce tracts, likewise, attack those who misinterpret the Gospel as a strict set of rules. In both cases, Milton encourages the laity to correct a common misinterpretation.

To stress the necessity of re-evaluating the conventional wisdom on divorce, Milton, in *Doctrine and Discipline*, argues that “the statutes of God” needed to “be scann’d new” and not



just by “narrow intellectuals” but “by men of what liberal profession soever” (*CPW* 2:230). As with the antiprelatical tracts, Milton takes the interpretation of the scriptures out of the hands of a small group of clergymen and encourages more people (although in the case of divorce tracts, only men with a “liberal profession” could re-interpret the scriptures) to make their own judgements without interference. Religious liberty hinged on a correct reading of the scriptures, and involving more men in the process of re-examination increases the likelihood of discovering liberty. Milton acknowledges that opening the review of the “statutes of God” to a broader group will result in a greater diversity of interpretations because each person was “created so different from each other” (*CPW* 2:230). Despite these differences, Milton insists that “by the skill of wise conducting, all to become uniform in vertue” (*CPW* 2:230). The possibility that the readers of scriptures will not be able to reach an agreement never enters his mind. Religious liberty (that is, the freedom to read and interpret the scriptures without interference) leads to uniformity because Milton is confident that all men of a “liberal profession,” when they are not subject to institutional inference, will understand the scriptures identically.

Milton’s desire to re-examine the scriptures stems from his commitment to interpret the scriptures in a manner that grants the broadest liberty to Christians. This commitment occasionally meant relying on the Mosaic Law rather than the Gospel. Since the purpose of Christ was to remove the harsh bondage of the Mosaic Law, and since the Mosaic Law was not restrictive on the issue of divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1 allows a man to divorce a woman “because he hath found some uncleanness in her” [*CPW* 2:242]), Christ had no reason, in Milton’s view, to dissolve the divorce provisions of the Mosaic Law: “If our Saviour tooke away ought of law, it was the burthensome of it, not the ease of burden, it was the bondage, not the liberty of any divine law that he remov’d” (*CPW* 2:642). The liberty brought by Christ did not establish

additional laws, but left Christians “victorious under the guidance of his living Spirit ... to follow that which most edifies, most aides and furdurs a religious life” rather than be “captive to civill and subordinat precepts” (CPW 2:588). This description portrays individual Christians as utilizing the divine spirit within them rather than any institution when deciding how to live “a religious life.” Milton’s willingness to maintain part of the Mosaic Law in his formulation of religious liberty differentiates him from other radical Protestants. The scriptures were the highest authority in religious matters, but Milton insisted that they had to be read in a way that allowed the largest territory of liberty possible.

With such a sizable territory given to each man, there is the potential for abuse of this freedom, yet this fact did not deter Milton. Hammond, who interprets the divorce tracts as expressing Milton’s contempt for the uneducated public, argues that the divorce tracts present laws prohibiting divorce is a means of restraining the impulses of the common people, which should not be placed on virtuous men like Milton (66). Milton’s contempt for the multitude, however, did not prevent him from extending the liberty to divorce to all men, even the vulgar. An objection to individual liberty, which Milton anticipates in *Tetrachordon*, is that it “opens a dore to all licence and confusion” (CPW 2:633). Despite the potential for “confusion,” Milton asserts that freedom must be protected even when it leads to abuse.<sup>14</sup> God designed the Law to relieve “the just complaints of good men,” not “curb the licence of wicked men” (CPW 2:634). What mattered most was the existence of free choice in divorce, not subsequent responsible decision-making. In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton looks back to the moment when Moses first permitted divorce. Moses knew that some “men took hold of this Law to cloak thir bad purposes” but “he held it better to suffer as by accident ... rather then good men should lose their just and lawfull privilege of remedy” (CPW 2:307). Abuses in liberty are reduced to

“accidents,” rendering them tolerable side-effects of liberty. The “accidents” and “confusion” that result from the freedom to divorce appear less significant than the ability to follow God’s call to peace. Milton recognizes that individual liberty produces both positive and negative consequences (particularly when it is granted to all men), but in the case of divorce he believes that the overall impact of individual freedom will produce more good than harm.

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Throughout his career, Milton maintained an interest in education, but it is his tract *Of Education*, published in 1644, that contains his most detailed discussion on the topic. While much of Milton’s early prose criticizes institutions, *Of Education* presents schools as having a positive impact. Although *Of Education* does not address the issue of liberty directly, it does offer further insight into Milton’s understanding of institutions. Like many of Milton’s other early tracts, the republican features of *Of Education*, such as the cultivation of civic virtue and serving the commonwealth, have attracted scholarly attention, chiefly from Martin Dzelzainis (“Milton’s Classical” 14). Gauri Viswanathan also discusses the importance of state service in *Of Education*, arguing that the state replaces spiritual regeneration as the purpose of education. Education still involves overcoming moral abasement, but Milton secularizes education by directing educated pupils to careers in which they can serve the state (Viswanathan 355). Timothy Raylor stresses the political training in *Of Education*, but moves away from the tract’s republican aspects and notes its similarities to French aristocratic academies (386). University education in seventeenth-century England tended to focus on theology and law, while doing little to equip the nobility with the skills necessary to lead the country. For Raylor, Milton’s school system is an aristocratic alternative to the university, and its purpose is to develop the nobility into national leaders (399). Milton’s desire to reform the nobility renders *Of Education* unique

among Milton's early prose as it allows for the greatest level of institutional control at the expense of individual choice.

Many English writers were interested in educational alternatives to the university system, notably Sir Philip Sidney who hoped to instill virtue through poetry. Although Milton's curriculum includes studying literature, Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* differs from Milton's *Of Education* in that it places poetry above all other disciplines, proclaiming it to be the "monarch" of "all sciences" (95). Sidney's insistence on the superiority of poetry causes him to be dismissive of other disciplines (88-90), while Milton promotes a balanced education that prepares pupils for specific careers in the civil service rather than the general cultivation of virtue. During the Civil War, Walwyn also criticized the university system in England, but his chief objection was religious, namely that the clergy were "brought up in the Universities" for the purpose of "further[ing] that difference between Protestant and Puritan" (73). Milton goes beyond Walwyn's critique to imagine an education system that not only does not breed religious intolerance, but molds its pupils for a specific civic purpose that has a timeless value "to all ages" (CPW 2:385).

Despite its numerous political components, *Of Education* opens with a religious framework. The need for education, according to Milton, arose from the fall of Adam and Eve: "The end then of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright" (CPW 2:367). Although education is connected to God, the overwhelming majority of subjects in *Of Education* are secular and often draw on classical sources. Milton's curriculum is quite strenuous, but when he mentions the study of religion, he refers to it as "the easie grounds of Religion," suggesting that religion is the least difficult subject that students will encounter (CPW 2:387). As he explains the subjects to be taught, Milton emphasizes how a properly

educated person could serve the state, but says nothing specific about serving God. Studying agriculture, for example, “will be an occasion of inciting and inabling them [the students] hereafter to improve the tillage of their country” (CPW 2:389). Similarly, if students “know the tempers, the humours, the seasons, and how to manage a crudity,” they will be able to “save an Army by this frugall, and expencelesse meanes only” (CPW 1:819). The entire purpose of education is to know God, yet Milton provides few details about how his curriculum achieves this goal. Milton hopes that the students will develop “that act of reason” so that they could “with some judgement contemplate upon morall good and evill” (CPW 2:396), but in *Of Education* he is chiefly concerned with good and evil as they pertain to being a political citizen rather than a religious Christian. Consequently, secular subjects receive more attention than the “easie grounds of Religion.”

Milton’s discussion of morality in *Of Education* deviates from his other early prose in that institutions play a more active role in shaping an individual’s moral choices. Jeffrey Gore notes the high level of discipline and obedience training in *Of Education*, arguing that obedience is less about obeying external rules and “more the very potential for relation among human beings, God, and the cosmos” (3). In the case of *Of Education*, students become capable of achieving their potential through the work of institutions. Milton describes the students using reason to make a choice, but he also desires a guarantee that they always make the moral choice: “Then will be requir’d a speciall reinforcement of constant and sound endoctrinating to set them right and firm” (CPW 2:396). Simple instruction in moral virtue was not sufficient for Milton to trust students’ future judgment; the teachers need to be “endoctrinating” the students. Successful indoctrination requires skilled teachers. Julian Koslow views Milton’s depiction of teachers leading students to virtue as exemplifying humanistic ideals, which stressed learning languages

as a means of moral training (43). To inspire and motivate students, teachers can use both “mild and effectual persuasions” and “the intimation of some fear” (*CPW* 2:385). Within educational institutions, fear produces virtue rather than servility. The teacher’s control over students differs from the work of a pastor and the broader congregation in the antiprelatical tracts, which was based on only “perswasive power” rather than fear and “endoctrinating.” Schools lack the dialogue of the church and school discipline is much more hierarchical than Milton’s ideal church. *Of Education*’s focus on training the nobility may account for the difference between it and Milton’s other early tracts. In *Animadversions*, Milton presents Christ as a teacher who employs persuasion rather than fear and compulsion, but Christ was not teaching political principles. Since the nobility were going to use their political education to lead the nation, the stakes of their actions were much higher. Consequently, Milton crafts institutional guarantees to ensure that the nobility remain “right and firm.” *Of Education* represents the first instance of Milton imagining institutional liberty.

Although *Of Education* has a strict curriculum with a clear purpose, Milton assumes that attending these schools will be a pleasant experience for the students and it will not be necessary to coerce them. *Of Education* even contrasts Miltonic education, which the youth would enjoy, with the forced learning of seventeenth-century England:

I doubt not but ye shall have more adoe to drive our dullest and laziest youth, our stocks and stubbs from the infinite desire of such a happy nurture, then we have now to hale and drag our choicest and hopefulest wits to that asinine feast of sowthistles and brambles [that is, current education in England] which is commonly set before them” (*CPW* 2:376-7).

This description of the “laziest youth” not wanting to leave Milton’s schools is obviously idealized, but it reveals Milton’s conviction that all young Englishmen desire, at some level, to receive an education that enables them to reach their potential. Once the youth experience such

education, they would, according to Milton, embrace it because it meets their “infinite desire” to be an effective citizen. Despite the fact that Milton’s educational policies avoid the coercion, Milton still imagines his system as one that “fits” the “dullest and laziest youth” “to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously all the offices both private and publike of peace and war” (CPW 2:378, 376, 378-9). Transforming the “dullest and laziest youth” into great leaders is no mean feat, and it requires firm adherence on the part of the students to the curriculum and rules. Entering the school may not have been coercive, but within Milton’s schools, to quote Gore, “obedience is not a matter of voluntarism” (4). Milton seeks to shape the youth so that they could achieve their full potential, but he assumes that all noble youth are at their core rational beings and, therefore, eager to partake in a rational education that enables them to reach their full potential. Coercion is not required in such circumstances. *Of Education* promotes institutional liberty, but Milton, at this point, believes such liberty is possible without force.

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The final institution that Milton discussed in his early prose was the system of pre-publication licensing, which had collapsed at the start of the Civil War, but was being revived by parliament in 1643. This system was based on a Star Chamber decree from 1586. The decree ordered that Stationers could not publish any book unless it “hath been heretofore allowed, or hereafter shall be allowed, before the ymprintinge thereof, according to thorder appoynted by the Queenes majesties Injunctyons, And been first seen and pervsed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and Bishop of London” (Kemp and McElligott 110). This licensing system did not equal strict control of the press, as licensers had to maintain and negotiate the complex alliances of printers, booksellers and writers (Johns 239-40). After the Star Chamber was abolished in 1641, the licensing system ceased to exist, leaving no effective controls on the press. With the

removal of the traditional means of censorship, the number of printed tracts exploded. Compared with 1640, the year 1641 witnessed an increase of one hundred and forty percent in the number of titles printed. In 1642, the number of printed tracts increased by ninety-eight percent over 1641 (Raymond *Pamphlets* 165). Throughout the 1640s, the Long Parliament attempted to restrict the expanding print industry by passing its own printing regulations in 1643 and 1647. The ordinance of 1643, to which Milton responded, ordered that all books must be licensed and entered into the Stationers' Company's register, and that no book belonging to English stock could be printed without the consent of the Company; it also provided the Company powers of search and seizure (Raymond *Pamphlets* 257-6). Parliament's ordinance attempted to recreate the system of licensing from the sixteenth and early seventeenth century (Blagden 146).

Milton presents his objections to the printing ordinance in *Areopagitica*, published in 1644.<sup>15</sup> Although nominally about liberty in printing, *Areopagitica* expands beyond its initial premise to encompass politics and religion. Sharon Achinstein and Susanne Woods note how the tract combines religious and republican elements in its construction of both the revolutionary public sphere and liberty (Achinstein *Milton and the Revolutionary* 58; Woods *Milton and the Poetics* 101-2). Blair Hoxby goes even further, viewing *Areopagitica* as a "broad vindication of liberty," which draws on the Bible, antiquity, and the common law to form the ideal liberty ("*Areopagitica*" 221). Milton uses many sources to frame his interpretation of liberty, but by the close of the tract, his interest in liberty becomes narrow, as religious liberty takes centre stage while all other freedoms are shuffled off to the wings. In this sense, *Areopagitica* is the structural opposite of *Of Education*. While *Of Education* begins with a religious framework before shifting the focus to secular subjects, *Areopagitica* opens by outlining "the utmost bound



of civill liberty” (CPW 2:487) and then moves to religious beliefs. The different structures and distinct perspectives on institutions in *Of Education* and *Areopagitica* reveal the beginning of the separation of political and religious liberty in Milton’s thought.

*Areopagitica* continues to extend the freedom from coercive institutions to Englishmen broadly. Milton refers to “every grown man” (CPW 2:513) as having the freedom to read, but he does not believe that all men are equally qualified to make wise reading choices. Milton’s focus on virtuous choices has led many scholars to assert that he is only concerned with the liberty of a fit few readers. Hammond, Susanne Woods, and Barbara Lewalski all view Milton as addressing a small, scholarly group of like-minded readers (Hammond 86; Woods *Milton and the Poetics* 98; Lewalski *The Life* 196). Sharon Achinstein provides an alternative reading, arguing Milton’s “fit” reader is “on the plane of the ideal” so that it could encompass as broad a range of English citizens as possible (*Milton and the Revolutionary* 65). The question of Milton’s audience, although important, obscures the issue of to whom Milton’s liberty applied. Milton could address a small group of elite readers while promoting a broad liberty that extended beyond narrow intellectual circles. In describing the freedom to read in *Areopagitica*, Milton does not trust all, or even most, Englishmen to choose well. Despite his lack of faith, however, Milton is committed to protecting the liberty of all Englishmen. As in the divorce tracts, Milton frames God as preferring “the growth and compleating of one vertuous person, more then the restraint of ten vitious” (CPW 2:528). Even if freedom prompts “ten vitious” men to abuse their liberty, it should still not be restricted as long as one good man uses his freedom to exercise virtue. Both good and poor choices accompany freedom from institutions, but since fools will always be fools with or without books, there is “no reason that we should deprive a wise man of any advantage to his wisdom” (CPW 2:521). Milton is unquestionably an elitist who believed that wisdom mainly

resided in men of a certain social standing, but he still extends the liberty to read to those whom he considered foolish so as to ensure that no wise man is inadvertently deprived of his freedom.

Milton's lack of interest in using a licenser to "restrain" (CPW 2:521) foolish men stems from his belief that authoritarian licensers were the wrong type of institution to prepare men to read. Relying on licensers assumes that church pastors are not doing their job properly:

it reflects to the disrepute of our Ministers also, of whose labours we should hope better, and of the proficiencie which thir flock reaps by them, then that after all this light of Gospel which is to be, and all this continuall preaching, they should be still frequented with such an unprincipl'd, unedify'd, and laick rabble, as that the whiffe of every new pamphlet should stagger them out of thir catechism, and Christian walking (CPW 2:537).

Milton's church allows for exhortation and persuasion, but not coercion. Pastors never control what people read, they simply preach the Word of God so that people have the capability to make wise reading choices, but the choice itself is left to the individual. By contrast, aggressive and invasive institutions, like licensers, that "take," "banish," and "shut up" without consulting the individual are powerless to re-model a man: "Though ye take from a covetous man all his treasure, he has yet one jewell left, ye cannot bereave him of his covetousnesse" (CPW 2:527). Norbrook interprets Milton as defining a more active role for political institutions in shaping moral character in *Areopagitica*. He points to Milton's reference to parliament propagating virtue in the people as evidence that Milton views parliament as "an energetic vanguard of institutional change," which "instills a virtù in the people that is at once moral and Machiavellian" (Norbrook 131). In the passage that Norbrook cites, however, Milton refers to the recent "free writing and free speaking," for which he credits parliament (CPW 2:55). If parliament "propagated" its "owne vertu" to the people, it did so by removing restrictions on writing and speaking, not by instilling morals (CPW 2:559). To create virtue, parliament needed

to adopt a passive rather than active approach, because active control of reading choices hinders wise men and does nothing to reform a fool.

Not only did licensers fail to reform character, they and any other institution that controls ideas also could indirectly turn people into heretics by preventing any individual development. Milton opposes relying on institutional authorities to develop religious beliefs: “if he believe things only because his Pastor sayes so, or the Assembly so determines, without knowing other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds, becomes his heresie” (*CPW* 2:543). The value of a belief lies not so much in its veracity as in an individual Christian’s use of reason to choose to follow that belief; therefore, no belief can be true if a system of pre-publication licensing filters information before it reaches the individual readers. A belief free from institutional direction is stronger because it allows a man “to exercise his owne leading capacity” (*CPW* 2:512). Susanne Woods notes the importance of “self-formation” in the liberty of *Areopagitica*. Knowing the truth is essential for freedom, and this freedom is “a continuous process of becoming” (Woods *Milton and the Poetics* 96). Woods is right to stress the role of individual development in Miltonic freedom, and the condition for such personal growth is the absence of coercive institutions. Men improve themselves by constantly working out their beliefs for themselves. The possessive “owne capacity” reveals the individual nature of this development. Coercive institutions denied men the opportunity of self-development and consequently reduced their freedom.

To further undermine the institution of licensing, Milton responds to Plato’s idealized commonwealth by presenting an exaggerated model of institutional control. Although Milton’s other early tracts refer to Plato in laudatory terms, *Areopagitica* argues that Plato’s is admired “least of all for his Commonwealth,” as it “fed his fancie” and has never been adopted by any

city (*CPW* 2:522). Milton separates the “fancie” of Plato’s commonwealth from the reality of government to paint all institutional regulation as absurd theory rather than practical policy. In Plato’s commonwealth, state officials had to approve a poet’s work before the poet could share it. The purpose of such a policy was “to rectifie manners,” but such a goal, Milton points out, should involve the regulation of much more than just printing (*CPW* 2:523). When these principles are applied to all aspects of life, the result, as Milton describes it, is ridiculous: “There must be licencing dancers, that no gesture, motion, or deportment be taught our youth but what by their allowance shall be thought honest ... Our garments also should be referr’d to the licensing of some more sober work-masters to see them cut into a lesse wanton garb” (*CPW* 2:523-6). In a state with complete regulation, men lost the entire territory of their liberty to licensers. The task of such regulation was massive, and Milton mockingly refers to it as “the grave and governing wisdom of the State” (*CPW* 2:526). Pursuing complete regulation becomes “Atlantick and Eutopian,” and has no place in the real world (*CPW* 2:526).

Milton’s critique of Plato contrasts philosophy with reality. Smith interprets *Areopagitica* as presenting Plato’s commonwealth as a fictional effort to train people in natural law. Such a program is ideal, and therefore unattainable, but it still points the way to better possibilities in learning (Smith “*Areopagitica*” 116). Smith’s analysis, however, downplays the contempt with which Milton views Plato’s institutional control. Milton is not trying to find a useful side of Plato’s philosophy, he is illustrating where such philosophy will inevitably lead when practiced in the real world. Since Plato’s philosophy results in excessive institutional regulation, Milton turns being an abstract political philosopher into a weakness when it comes to addressing the actual concerns of a real nation. Critics have long noted that Milton was no philosopher. Milton’s biographer William Riley Parker asserts that Milton “developed no

philosophical system to influence society in ages to come ... Let me say it plainly: Milton was simply not a profound or original thinker” (1:641). Arguably none of Milton’s tracts are true political philosophy (the one exception being a few passages in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*), but Milton does not allow this fact to undermine his proposals. Rather, he elevates himself above Plato and others whose “Eutopian” theory leads to unrealistic and laughable institutional control, while his own practical approach provides a functional solution that has a proven track record.

To give his arguments scriptural support, Milton connects free choice in reading to the free choice in eating meats that God grants to Christians. In ancient Israel, God placed restrictions on which meats the Jews could eat. Such restrictions were meant to maintain purity, but they were not needed after the arrival of Christ, as God “said without exception, Rise Peter, kill and eat, leaving the choice to each mans discretion” (*CPW* 2:512). Milton positions the individual discretion that accompanies Christ against the strict rules of the Old Testament. To render the Gospel’s free choice in meats meaningful to his concept of liberty, Milton must extend the Gospel’s discretion beyond the body to the mind: “when God did enlarge the universall diet of mans body, saving ever the rules of temperance, he then also, as before, left arbitrary the dyeting and repasting of our minds” (*CPW* 2:513). As mentioned above, political liberty is tied to the health and security of the body, but religious freedom, with which *Areopagitica* is primarily concerned, centres on the mind making effective choices. Although the Gospel does not explicitly refer to unlicensed printing, Milton transforms the principle of “mans discretion” in eating into free choice in mental activities. Reading becomes part of the territory of liberty, which God “enlarge[s]” through Christ.

Despite his reference to “the dyeting and repasting of our minds,” Milton also links reading to the body, specifically the eyes. God, according to Milton, granted men jurisdiction over their own eyes so that they could develop virtue. Discussing God’s creation of Adam, Milton notes: “God therefore left him [Adam] free, set before him a provoking object, ever almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his reward, the praise of his abstinence” (CPW 2:527). Adam’s eyes are the part of his body that first engages with the “provoking object” and provides him with the opportunity for “his reward.” In addition to this example from Genesis, Milton points to Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*: “describing true temperance under the person of *Guion*, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon, and the bowr of earthly blisse that he might see and know, and yet abstain” (CPW 2:516). Again, the act of seeing is vital in the cultivation of virtue. Since the eyes read books, they engage directly with the image of God: “hee who destroys a good Booke, kills reason it selfe, kills the Image of God, as it were in the eye” (CPW 2:492). Here, Milton’s focus is on the ability of books to represent “the Image of God,” but he still frames this ability in relation to the eye. It is the interaction between a book and the eye which exposes one to “the Image of God.” Infringements on the freedom to read also centre on the eyes. Milton dates the origins of the pre-publication censorship to 800 CE when the Popes “extended their dominion over mens eyes” (CPW 2:501). Hoxby has shown how the language of *Areopagitica* appeals to the common law by arguing against monopolies (“*Areopagitica*” 227-30), and Milton’s repeated references to the eyes further place the tract within the English legal traditions of protecting the body. In the Galenic physiology that promoted liberation through bodily control, the stomach was the crucial organ in assimilating the food that shaped one’s physical and mental health (Schoenfeldt *Bodies* 25-31). With his emphasis on reading, Milton turns the eyes into the essential body part in identity

formation as books become the food that individuals judiciously choose. Any institution that limits what the eyes are exposed to restricts freedom and, consequently, the potential for virtue. Milton renders freedom in reading a mental and bodily liberty so that it can receive protection from both the scripture and English traditions.

As with divorce, the freedom to print and to choose what to read contributes to a larger goal, the discovery of truth. To illustrate the negative effects of coercive institutions on the search for truth, *Areopagitica* presents truth as analogous to scientific discoveries made through careful observation, particularly in astronomy. After commenting on how “licencing prohibitions” disrupt truth seekers, Milton notes: “if we look not wisely on the Sun it self, it smites us into darkness. Who can discern those planets that are often *Combust*, and those stars of brightest magnitude that rise and set with the Sun, untill the opposite motion of their orbs bring them to such a place in the firmament, where they may be seen evening or morning” (*CPW* 2:549-50). Milton’s description of continually staring up of the stars to discover “things more remote” (*CPW* 2:550) relates to an earlier moment in *Areopagitica* when he recounts his meeting with Galileo, who was “a prisoner to the Inquisition, for thinking in Astronomy otherwise then the Franciscan and Dominican licensers thought” (*CPW* 2:538).<sup>16</sup> Galileo’s arrest provides Milton with a clear example of coercive institutions controlling ideas and compromising truth. Galileo himself viewed scientific enquiry as a never-ending stream of discoveries: “Who indeed will set bounds to human ingenuity? Who will assert that everything in the universe capable of being perceived is already discovered and known?” (187). Milton’s reference to searching for knowledge in the stars takes up Galileo’s mission and becomes an act of defiance against Galileo’s licensers. Although the licensers made Galileo a “prisoner,” Milton, as an Englishman who lives in a moment when parliament led the country “to such a deliverance” (*CPW* 2:538), is

beyond their institutional reach and can continue the search for truth. His reference to Galileo shows the consequences of licensing and becomes a rallying cry for all truth-seekers to resist the tyranny of licensers.

Continuing to associate truth with science, Milton connects the search for religious truth to scientific observations made with one's sense organs (including the eyes), both of which achieve the best results when they are free from institutional control. Galileo was primarily concerned with discoveries in astronomy and physical science, but Milton frames the continual search for truth as "the golden rule in *Theology* as well as in *Arithmetick*," placing theology within the emerging scientific method (*CPW* 2:551).<sup>17</sup> By mentioning Galileo and his conflict with the Catholic Church while discussing religious truth, Milton connects Protestantism to an observable truth that, like Galileo's discoveries in astronomy, needs no institutional help, only open senses. Galileo relies on "sense experience" when pursuing physical truth (186), and Milton presents religious truth as a similarly sensory experience. Milton describes how a group of "deceivers," after Christ ascended, destroyed and scattered the body of truth: "[they] hew'd her [Truth's] lovely form into a thousand peeces, and scatter'd them to the four winds. From that time every since, the sad friends of Truth ... went up and down gathering up limb by limb still as they could find them" (*CPW* 2:549). The scattering of truth's body encourages Milton's readers to utilize their senses as they go "up and down" trying to "find" the fragments of truth. When it comes to actually processing the remains of truth, Milton objects to policy makers attempting to aid truth, as such efforts only distort the visual and oral elements of truth:

she [truth] needs no policies, nor stratagems, nor licencings to make her victorious, those are the shifts and the defences that error uses against her power: give her but room, & do not bind her when she sleeps, for then she speaks not true, as the old Proteus did, who spake oracles only when he was caught & bound, but then rather she turns herself into all shapes, except her own, and perhaps tunes her voice according to the time (*CPW* 2:563).



Sensory perceptions of truth cannot be enhanced by institutional meddling, they can only be disfigured. Once “policies,” “stratagems,” and “licensings” are applied to truth, the sight and sound of truth become unrecognizable.

Returning to the relationship between eyes and reading, Milton describes one’s first encounter with truth as too difficult for the senses to process. Truth is initially “more unsightly and unplausible than many errors” as “our eyes [are] blear’d and dimm’d with prejudice and custom” (*CPW* 2:565). Milton locates the inability to comprehend truth in the eyes rather than the mind. The failure to know religious truth becomes akin to poor observations in science. God’s efforts to communicate with humanity take into account the limitations of human senses. Due to human weakness in perceiving the truth, God seeks “to dispense and deal out by degrees his beam, so as our earthy eyes may best sustain it” (*CPW* 2:566). God takes the necessary steps to ensure that the human eye can process truth; therefore, human institutions do not need to exercise control over books in the name of truth. Milton’s religious truth is not abstract or theoretical, but experienced directly through the senses. Theologians in *Areopagitica* operate like the new scientists, continually making observations to discover an exact, “proportionall” truth (*CPW* 2:551). Such observations are only possible when institutions do not control the information that the senses receive.

Another component in Milton’s pursuit of truth which institutions impede is diversity in opinion. This diversity, however, aids only religious truth, not civil truth. Milton was horrified at coercive efforts that compel everyone to conform to and participate in a single church:

We stumble and are impatient at the least dividing of one visible congregation from another, though it be not in fundamentalls; and through our forwardnes to suppress, and our backwardnes to recover any enthrall’d peece of truth out of the gripe of custom, we care not to keep truth separated from truth, which is the fiercest rent and disunion of all. (*CPW* 2:563-4).

By forbidding individual churches from separating, the national church separated rather than unified pieces of truth. Those churches that did not disagree in “fundamentals” could, in Milton’s estimation, contribute to the search for truth, but only if they were free from the control of a national church. Milton promotes tolerating a range of churches because he is confident that if all ideas contend equally, truth will triumph: “though all the windes of doctin were let loose to play upon the earth ... who ever knew Truth put to the wors, in free and open encounter” (CPW 2:561). The reference to “doctin” suggests that Milton is describing specifically religious truth. To marshal support for his position, Milton cites the parliamentarian John Selden, whose arguments Milton describes as “almost mathematically demonstrative” (CPW 2:513), reinforcing the mathematical certainty Milton attaches to religious discussion. The tract to which Milton refers is Selden’s *De Jure Naturali et Gentium juxta Disciplinam Ebraeorum*, from 1640. Selden’s original text stresses the importance of engaging with “opposed and disagreeing views and ordinances of other sects” (CPW 2:513n.95). The mention of “sects” implies that Selden, and consequently Milton as well, is concerned with religious rather than secular truth. Milton also frames a subsequent reference to free debate in religious terms: “for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making. Under these fantastic terrors of sect and schism, we wrong the earnest and zealous thirst after knowledge and understanding which God hath stirr’d up in this City” (CPW 2:554). By referring to “sect and schism” immediately after “knowledge in the making,” Milton renders explicitly religious knowledge the product of diverse opinions. He makes no similar statement regarding divergent opinions in secular and political matters.

Although Milton prefers to tolerate a range of beliefs than force conformity through one national system of worship, there are limits to his religious liberty, most notably his lack of toleration of Catholics.<sup>18</sup> The limits on Miltonic religious liberty are tied to the discovery of

truth. Milton is much more confident than other tolerationists that religious truth could be located with precision. James Egan notes that Milton transforms the “Truth argument” (that toleration enables people to discover the truth) of tolerationist tracts into a narrative as he imagines the possible realization of the Reformation in the future (179-82). The achievement of truth is not for the next life, but for the present one. Milton’s truth, however, is so exact that only select Protestants can participate in its making. Although Protestant sects disagree on some “not vastly disproportionall” issues, Milton believes that they share a common “gracefull symmetry,” which renders their differences meaningless (*CPW* 2:555). Milton’s willingness to view differences between sects as “not vastly disproportionall” stands in stark contrast to his divorce tracts, which assume that disagreements between a married couple are rooted in nature and are irreconcilable. The “symmetry” of the sects continues to place religious truth in an geometric framework, only now it is “gracefull,” which carries the double meaning of both elegant and full of God’s grace. Rather than seeing it as disruptive and dangerous, Milton sees a level of precision in sectarianism that is normally reserved for geometric calculations. The new religious sects in England were a diverse group, but they were all Protestant, which means they all emphasized the authority of the scripture. For Milton, religious truth lay in the scripture; therefore, only religions based on the scripture are useful in the search for truth, and there is no reason to tolerate non-scriptural religions. *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* expresses concern over the spread of “a multitude of Doctrines that have no ground in Scripture” (*CPW* 1:651). Milton was not promoting a pluralistic society where all beliefs were tolerated. He envisions a “symmetry” of religions, not a mosaic. A narrow truth that is as precise as any scientific discovery sets the limits for Miltonic religious liberty.

*Areopagitica*'s search for the truth does contain a communal component, but it is rooted in the nation working collectively rather than a hierarchical institution imposing a doctrine on the nation. Sauer highlights the nationalist elements of *Areopagitica*, as the tract promotes liberty and reform on a national scale (*Milton, Toleration* 40-2). This interest in the nation, however, does not erase the individual. Milton touts the knowledge of the English nation over that of a group of licensers: "I cannot set so light by all the invention, the art, the wit, the grave and solid judgement which is in England, as that it can be comprehended in any twenty capacities how good soever" (CPW 2:535). A small, elite institution is less capable of comprehending the wisdom of the nation than the population of the nation itself. In the 1650s Milton will reverse this position, but in *Areopagitica* he trusts the abilities of the broader population over an authoritarian institution. Milton encourages the entire English nation to "unite into one generall and brotherly search after Truth" (CPW 2:554), while also describing Englishmen working on both individual and group tasks that contribute to truth. Some were "pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps," while "others [are] as fast reading, trying all things" (CPW 2:554). The desire to learn in England prompts "much arguing, much writing, many opinions" (CPW 2:554). All Englishmen are pursuing truth, but they are sometimes doing so through solitary activities like studying and writing, and other times by engaging in communal activities like arguing. As with the freedom from a coercive church in the antiprelatical tracts, the freedom from licensers in *Areopagitica* incorporates both the individual and the community.

Why would Milton, after asserting that licensers restrict both religious and political truth, not discuss the value of diverse opinions in civil matters? The historical context offers some insight. Under Charles I, English religious policy did not tolerate division. Charles, with the assistance of Archbishop William Laud, introduced a program of religious uniformity that forbid

theological controversy and attacked Calvinist preaching (Scott *England's* 128-9). With the collapse of the pre-publication licensing system and the abolition of the ecclesiastical courts in the early 1640s, the laity could now challenge orthodox beliefs and practices, such as predestination and tithes (Hirst *England* 217). The new prominence of sectarian beliefs was an unanticipated result of dismantling Charles' and Laud's system of control, and it troubled many religious conservatives. In responding to the *Declaration of General Assembly of Scotland, about Church Government*, the House of Lords, on September 10, 1642, promoted "more constant Security of Religion, against the bloody Practices of Papists, and deceitful Errors of other Sectaries" (*Lords* 5:349). Later, a *Paper from the Commissioners of the Church of Scotland*, which was read in the House of Lords on August 16, 1644, warned that "Sects and Sectaryes are daily encreased and multiplyed in this Kingdome" (*Lords* 6:674). Such fears were greatly exaggerated, as most Protestants continued to endorse a national church, but these concerns did represent a common perception among those who supported religious orthodoxy (Hirst *England* 217).

As new religious sects emerged, arguments for religious toleration were also appearing in printed pamphlets. All the English proponents of religious liberty in the seventeenth-century, including Milton, wrote within a Protestant context. They did not advocate toleration on the grounds of modern secularism or rationalism; instead, they viewed toleration as biblical and theological (Coffey *Persecution and Toleration* 59). Traditionally, Protestants viewed conscience as the voice of God within an individual. Tolerationists did not reject this position, but they also began to conceive of conscience as subjective, that is, one sinned by going against one's conscience, even if one's beliefs were mistaken (Murphy 112). Henry Robinson points to Paul's letter to the Romans, which stresses the importance of persuading every man "in his owne

minde” before the man partakes in eating meats (21). Since Paul showed that “eating with a doubting conscience only be sinne,” Robinson concludes that worshipping in a church that one believes “to be flat Idolotry” is a “much greater sin” (21). Walwyn similarly opposes compelling a person to act against his conscience, even if it is in the pursuit of a greater good: “for though the thing may be in it selfe good, yet if it doe not appeare to be so to my conscience, the practice thereof in me is sinfull” (114). These tolerationist writings have much in common with Milton’s arguments in *Areopagitica* and they became prominent features of print culture in the mid-1640s. John Coffey notes that while the years 1640-2 featured a campaign against popish idolatry and the promotion of godly uniformity, the years 1642-6 witnessed the “growth of religious pluralism and calls for toleration” (*Persecution and Toleration* 146).

The historical context explains *Areopagitica*’s focus on diversity and free discussion in religious matters, but the political situation was equally contentious in 1644. Parliament was divided between the peace party, the war party, and the middle group, who had different ideas about how to prosecute the war against the king. As their names suggest, the peace party was distraught by the mere fact that parliament had to fight the king and they hoped that a defensive war would force Charles to compromise. The war party, on the other hand, was eager to pursue the war aggressively, as they did not trust the king and were motivated by religious zeal. The middle group sought to work with both sides to keep negotiations with the king open and strengthen parliament’s war effort (Hirst *England* 206-207). In the weeks immediately before *Areopagitica*’s publication on November 23, 1644, these tensions in parliament increased. After the disappointing Second Battle of Newbury, both Oliver Cromwell, whom the war party celebrated, and Earl of Manchester, who was aligned with the peace party, blamed each other for

parliament's recent struggles on the battlefield (Hirst *England* 221). Cromwell expressed his frustration with Manchester to the House of Commons on November 25, 1644:

his Lordship [Manchester] had (both in words and actions) expressed much contempt and scorn of commands from the Parliament, or the Committee of Both Kingdoms . . . he hath declared his dislike to the present war, or the prosecution thereof, and his unwillingness to have it prosecuted unto a victory or ended by the sword, and desire to make up the same with some such a peace as himself best fancied (Abbott 1:303).

These comments were made two days after the publication of *Areopagitica*, but they illustrate the political tensions that were brewing as Milton was preparing *Areopagitica*. Surely if free debate created the opportunity to discover religious truth, it could also help solve the leading political problems.

Milton's lack of engagement with parliamentary issues in *Areopagitica* anticipates a development that occurs in his commonwealth writings. Milton assumed that in a free and open religious debate, the truth would always triumph, but he may not have been so sure with politics. His other tract from 1644, *Of Education*, suggests that Milton had little faith in the political judgement of Englishmen, unless they received extensive institutional guidance. The close proximity of the publication of *Of Education*, with its structured curriculum, to *Areopagitica*, with its celebration of free choice, is, for some scholars, difficult to reconcile. Lewalski suggests that *Of Education* is compatible with *Areopagitica* as Milton frames a regimented education as necessary prerequisite to engage in free debate (*The Life* 181). Similarly, Gore views the strict program of *Of Education* as targeting specifically adolescents in an effort to "socialize" them so that they can later become fit readers (9). Milton's comments regarding children and teachers in *Areopagitica* render Lewalski and Gore's explanation attractive, but if that were the sole reason for the difference in the two tracts, *Areopagitica* should address free debate with reference to contemporary politics as well, and *Of Education* should outline how to indoctrinate students with

religious beliefs. *Of Education* and *Areopagitica* differ not only in the populations they target (boys and men respectively), but also in the subjects they address. While *Of Education* centres on secular subjects, *Areopagitica* focuses on religious truth. At this early stage in his career, Milton's ideas are still in flux, but he is starting to consider institutional direction as necessary to achieve one's political potential, while questioning the value of institutional guidance in the search for religious truth. *Areopagitica* marks the beginning of Milton's division of political and religious liberty.

Milton's early tracts show his first attempt to work out the relationship between institutions and liberty. Most of these works stress the restrictive role of institutions that invade the territory of liberty and prevent individual men from making choices. There are still moments, however, when Milton conceives of churches and schools, when properly constructed, as making a positive contribution to freedom. Each of Milton's tracts addresses political and religious liberty, sometimes framing the two types of liberty similarly, other times differently. The antiprelatical and divorce tracts present episcopacy and anti-divorce laws as equally restrictive to religious and political liberty, while *Of Education* and *Areopagitica* begin to separate the role of institutions in political and religious freedom. The freedom to choose that *Areopagitica* touts will continue to be a staple of Miltonic religious liberty, while the structured curriculum upon which *Of Education* insists will lead to the political freedom of the commonwealth prose.

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<sup>9</sup> The combining of religious and political liberty was common among parliamentarians at the start of the Civil War. Parliament's grievances with the king included both religious innovations under Archbishop William Laud, such as beautifying the church and the promotion of Arminian theology, and political concerns, such as Charles' abuse of fiscal feudalism, which involved the collection of legal but rarely used revenues, such as Ship Money (Hirst *England* 161-2; (Gardiner 205-13).



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<sup>10</sup> Much of the recent scholarship on the Milton's early prose questions his faith in the English people. Paul Hammond has produced the most detailed study of Milton's view of the people, and he stresses the negative opinion Milton held throughout his career, including the early prose. See Hammond, *Milton and the People*. Christopher D'Addario likewise views Milton's early writings as expressing disappointment in the English people and a low opinion of his reader (142, 147).

<sup>11</sup> Arguments based on the difference between the Old and New Testament were common among seventeenth-century proponents of religious toleration (Coffey *Persecution and Toleration* 62). Roger Williams, for example, asserted that the creation of a national church with civil power "wakens Moses from his unknown Grave, and denies Jesus yet to have seene the Earth" (221).

<sup>12</sup> In *The Compassionate Samaritane*, Leveller William Walwyn presents a similar objection to the clergy taking the interpretation of scripture out of the hands of individual Christians. Divines, according to Walwyn, want "to persuade the people, that the Scriptures though we have them in our owne tongue, are not yet to be understood by us without their helpe and interpretation" (109).

<sup>13</sup> The Charta de Foresta of 1217 listed property rights for forests.

<sup>14</sup> Milton's reference to "confusion" minimizes the potential hardship that the freedom to divorce would have on women and children. For a discussion of how Milton's polemic opponents criticized his divorce tracts on the grounds that they neglected the interest of children, see Purkiss, "Whose Liberty? The Rhetoric of Milton's Divorce Tracts," 196-9.

<sup>15</sup> The new system of press control also prompted negative reactions from the Levellers (Walwyn 113).

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the possibilities surrounding Milton's meeting with Galileo and Galileo's subsequent influence on Milton's poetry, see Lieb, "Brotherhood of the Illuminati: Milton, Galileo, and the Poetics of Conspiracy."

<sup>17</sup> There have been a range of studies that address how various aspects of scientific developments influenced Milton. Stephen Fallon demonstrates that Milton was aware of and responded to the materialist philosophy of Descartes and Hobbes. See Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers*. John Rogers explores how the Scientific Revolution influenced the political ideas of writers in the English Revolution. In the case of Milton, Rogers argues that the vitalist movement shaped Milton's understanding of the body politic. See Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution*, ch. 4. Karen Edwards discusses the influence of advancements in natural history, particularly with regards to plants and animals, in *Paradise Lost*. She argues that although *Paradise Lost* includes both old and new forms of knowledge, Milton displays a preference for the new. See Edwards, *Milton and the Natural World*. Dennis Danielson analyzes *Paradise Lost*'s relation to the revolution in cosmology that occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, particularly with reference to Galileo. See Danielson, *Paradise Lost and the Cosmological Revolution*. Catharine Gimelli Martin detects elements of Baconian language in *Areopagitica* when Milton describes books and

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the search for truth, illustrating the influence of rational, scientific discourse on Milton. See Martin, *Milton among the Puritans*, 131-3.

<sup>18</sup> *Areopagitica*'s explicit lack of toleration of "Popery" has prompted Norbrook to question the scholarly focus on *Areopagitica*'s liberty, as the tract does not call for "universal freedom" (120). William Walker is even more skeptical about the extent of liberty in *Areopagitica*, as he interprets the vagueness in Milton's language as creating the possibility for restrictions on certain Protestant sects as well as Catholics (*Antiformalist* 135-6). In an effort to clarify Milton's anti-Catholicism, Hillary Gatti argues that when Milton attacks "Popery" in *Areopagitica*, he is targeting a specific concept of the Catholic Church, namely the Counter-Reformation Church that initiated the Inquisition (152). But while the policies of the Inquisition furthered Milton's hatred of Catholics, his contempt extended beyond the institutions in seventeenth-century Rome all the way back to the year 800 CE (*CPW* 2:501).

## Chapter 2

### The Commonwealth Prose: Separating Religious and Political Liberty

The creation of the English Commonwealth in 1649 after the execution of the king ushered in a new phase in Milton's exploration of liberty. A small group of dedicated soldiers and politicians erected the Commonwealth without popular support. Milton views a commonwealth as necessary for freedom, but he also recognizes that anything resembling a free election would return the Stuarts to power. In these circumstances, Milton separates religious from political liberty based on the role of institutions. While Miltonic religious liberty continues to limit the role of institutions to persuasion and admonition, Miltonic political liberty now empowers institutions to use coercion to free a recalcitrant population from itself. To justify the power of the Interregnum regimes, Milton defines the institutions within these regimes as both coercive and representative. The institutions of the English Commonwealth (the purged parliament, the army, and the Lord Protector) control the people's choices, while embodying the people. Institutions that ignore the will of the electorate were necessary because Milton believes that the English people could not achieve their destiny without direction. This version of liberty stands in stark contrast to Miltonic religious freedom. Although he is concerned with the broader religious community within England, Milton denies institutions the right to disregard individuals' consciences in matters of religion. Miltonic religious liberty involves institutions using discussion and persuasion to work with an individual conscience, not force to compel it.

Milton's commonwealth prose presents a unique challenge as Milton wrote these works (with the exception of *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*) while he was employed by the various governments of the Interregnum as the Secretary of Foreign Languages. As an employee of the state, Milton could not write whatever he desired, but that does not mean he was reduced

to a mere mouthpiece for the government. Many of the arguments regarding liberty that Milton employs in defence of the Commonwealth also appear in his late prose when he was no longer a civil servant (see next chapter), suggesting that he truly believed in these principles. Milton also finds ways to accommodate his own thought with the needs of his employers, especially on religion. Milton's rhetoric surrounding religious liberty expresses the aspects of his earlier prose that are compatible with his new paymasters; the principles are the same, Milton just chooses to highlight some components of religious liberty rather than others. When discussing political liberty, Milton attempts to reconcile the regimes he serves with the political philosophy he articulates in *The Tenure*. The success of these efforts is debatable, but they reveal Milton's commitment to placing his own thought within the context of his duties as a civil servant.

Since defending the new political regimes is such a prominent feature of Milton's commonwealth prose, these tracts devote less space to religious liberty. Gordon Campbell and Thomas Corns argue that since Milton remained largely silent on religious matters during the Commonwealth until 1659, it is difficult to trace his thought on religion during these years (*John Milton* 193-4). Although religious liberty is less prominent in Milton's commonwealth prose than in his early prose, he still addresses question of religious freedom in significant ways that reflect the circumstances of the English Commonwealth. Milton's commonwealth prose displays not so much a development in his thought, as an ability to place his thought in a new political and personal context. Milton also incorporates emerging institutions, like the army and Lord Protector Cromwell, into his concept of religious liberty. Many scholars connect Milton's religious views to his republicanism. Walter Lim, Elizabeth Tuttle, and Eric Nelson all highlight connections between Milton's defences of the commonwealth and biblical passages (Lim 20; Tuttle 74-8; Nelson 25, 39-41). Biblical sources influenced many English republicans, but these

influences pushed Milton in a different direction. Milton, like the radical Protestants, views the combination of temporal and ecclesiastical power as a major obstacle to religious liberty as it infringed on the conscience of individual Christians; many republicans did not share this view.<sup>19</sup>

Although Milton's commonwealth prose associates political freedom with coercive institutions, much of the scholarship on these tracts centres on Milton's relationship with early modern republicanism. The phenomenon of English republicanism has inspired a prolific amount of scholarship.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the most significant strand of republican scholarship for Milton studies is Quentin Skinner's "neo-Roman liberty," which stresses that no single individual, such as a monarch, can have domination over the liberty of the nation (Skinner *Liberty* 25-6). The greatest challenge with associating Milton with Skinner's neo-Roman liberty is Milton's defence of authoritarian regimes. Milton's commonwealth prose seeks to accomplish two objectives: defend the abolition of monarchy and promote the new governments on the grounds of liberty. When Milton discredits the institution of monarchy, he employs republican language, but when he lauds the Commonwealth and Protectorate, he moves beyond republicanism to institutional liberty. David Norbrook defends Milton's republicanism during the 1650s, arguing that Milton tolerated the oligarchic tendencies of the commonwealth in the name of enacting republican principles (202-3). Yet those oligarchic tendencies become the basis of Miltonic political liberty, as Milton transforms authoritarian institutions into the practical application of popular government.

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Religious liberty, in Milton's commonwealth prose, continues to be defined by a limited role for institutions. The most obvious shift in the commonwealth prose is the inclusion of additional institutions that limit religious liberty. Earlier, it was the bishops who brought

religious slavery to England; now it was also the king, and he did so in a manner identical to the bishops. Milton's most explicit critique of Charles I's religious policies appears in *Eikonoklastes*, published in late 1649. As a work of official propaganda, *Eikonoklastes* discredits Charles I's account of the Civil War in *Eikon Basilike*.<sup>21</sup> Milton connects his criticism of the king with his earlier position regarding the danger of applying temporal power to the church. He argues that the king ought not "to meddle with Ecclesial Government, or to defend the Church otherwise then the Church would be defended; for such defence is bondage" (CW 6:363). "Defend" carries a less malicious sense than "meddle," and, consequently, renders any involvement by the king in the church, even if he has the best intentions, detrimental to religious liberty. Charles also held the consciences of England in bondage by enforcing set forms of worship, which "imprison and confine by force, into a Pinfold of sett words, those two most unimprisonable things, our Prayers and that Divine Spirit of utterance that moves them" (CW 6:372). As in the early prose, religious liberty protects the individual Christian conscience from being forced "into a Pinfold" by any institution, be it a king or bishop.

Although religious liberty in Milton's commonwealth prose remains consistent with his early prose, the emphasis is different, reflecting Milton's new position as a civil servant. The nature and limits of religious liberty remain the same as in Milton's early prose, but Milton presents them in a manner that satisfies both himself and his new employers. The first work that Milton produced for the English Commonwealth was *Observations upon the Articles of Peace with the Irish Rebels*. This tract responds to the Articles of Peace, which the Marquis of Ormonde, the lord lieutenant of Ireland and commander of the royalist forces in Ireland, signed with the Irish rebels. The royalists hoped to use Ireland for their military operations against the English Commonwealth, and the Articles of Peace offered the Irish independence from England

in return for their assistance. Although *Observations* reiterates Milton's earlier call not to combine civil and ecclesiastical power, it is equally eager to stress that the English Commonwealth does not tolerate heresy, particularly popery. The beginning of *Observations* establishes this framework, as Milton, in some of his harshest language, attacks the Irish as not being worthy of liberty due to "their own foregoing demerits and provocations" and the fact that they are "Papists" (CW 6:232). Consequently, the Irish, Milton exclaims, are "justly made our vassalls" (CW 6:232).<sup>22</sup> From the outset, *Observations* expresses greater concern for establishing who does not deserve liberty rather than who does.

The vehemence with which Milton describes the Irish "Barbarisme" (CW 6:233) in *Observations* stands in stark contrast to the tolerationist tone of *Areopagitica*, yet Milton frames both tracts as consistent with religious liberty. Sauer argues that Milton's writings reflect the nature of early modern toleration, which stressed Protestant unity, supremacy, and the advancement of the Reformation (*Milton, Toleration, and Nationhood* 57-8). Similarly, William Walker views Milton as driven by a desire for religious unity. Consequently, Milton denies magistrates the right to use force against those who differed a little from what he considers to be the true religion, but approves of such force against those who differed a lot, such as Catholics (*Antiformalist, Unrevolutionary* 149). Milton's world view enabled him to celebrate diversity among Protestants while condemning Catholics, but he also looks for ways to utilize civil institutions against Catholics without violating the terms of religious liberty. Milton celebrates the fact that parliament had "brok'n their [Catholics] Temporall power, thrown down their public superstitions," while accepting that Catholics maintain "the bare enjoyment of that which is not in our reach, their Consciences" (CW 6:236). Since parliament's active persecution of Catholics does not reach their consciences, Milton depicts parliament's anti-Catholic bigotry as less

invasive than the Presbyterians' or bishops' use of temporal power, which sought to control the conscience of Christians. This framework satisfies Milton, but it puts pressure on his own definition of religious liberty. By not permitting Catholics to worship as they choose, Milton is requiring Catholics to follow the forms (or lack of forms) of Protestantism. To accept that parliament's attack on Catholicism is consistent with religious liberty, one must, like Milton, see Catholicism as "less a religion than a priestly despotism under the cloak of religion" (*CPW* 4.1: 321-2). Milton's position on Catholicism has not changed from *Areopagitica*, he is just choosing to express the persecutorial side of his ideas more explicitly. The focus is now on describing parliament's efforts to defeat heresy rather than the sects' contribution to religious truth.

Milton had plenty of opportunities to tout the benefits of diverse Protestant sects and the importance of not using political institutions to suppress them in his commonwealth prose, but chose instead to turn accusations of heresy back on his opponents. In royalist and Presbyterian writings, charges that the English Commonwealth promotes blasphemy and heresy were regular features. The publication of *Observations* included letters from Ormonde, one of which warns that parliamentarians "appear too bee the subverters of true religion, and to be the protectors and inviters, not only of all false ones, but of irreligion and Atheisme" (*CW* 6:224). Milton answers this claim by proclaiming that all true Protestants "know not a more immediate and killing Subverter of all true Religion then Antichrist, whom they [Protestants] generally believe to be the Pope and Church of Rome" (*CW* 6:236). By pointing to the heretical nature of Catholicism, which is practiced in Ireland and accepted among royalists, Milton turns Ormonde and the royalists into the true spreaders of heresy, but in doing so he remains silent on parliament's relationship with the Protestant sects. Milton prefers to proclaim the evils of the religion parliament does not tolerate rather than praise the goodness of the beliefs that parliament does



tolerate. The institutional role of parliament in religious liberty is now exclusively to suppress heresy, not permit and encourage free discussion among the sects. *Defensio*, written at the behest of the Commonwealth to respond to Claude Salmasius' *Defensio Regia pro Carlo Primo*, similarly shifts the accusation of sectarianism onto the Commonwealth's opponents: "Those sects among us which they attack are certainly obscure, while those they [supporters of royalists] follow are notorious and far more dangerous to the church of God" (CPW 4.1:335). As with heresy, Milton responds to the charge of sectarianism by labeling his opponents as the true sects. This is a sort of indirect defence of the Protestant sects in England, but it lacks the passion of *Areopagitica*.

In addition to not launching into an *Areopagitica*-style defence of the sects, *Observations* avoids discussing the sects, thus ensuring that no conservative Protestants would think that the English Commonwealth was tolerating the spread of radical new sects. The published version of *Observations* includes a copy of the Presbyterian pamphlet *A Necessary Representation of the present evils, and eminent dangers to Religion, Lawes, and Liberties, arising from the late, and present practices of the Sectarian party in England*. As one would expect given its title, *A Necessary Representation* stresses the danger of sectarianism, and uses the word "Sectaries" or "Sectarian" seven times, not including the title (CW 6:228-231). Although Milton responds to *A Necessary Representation*, he only uses the word "Sectaries" with reference to the Presbyterians' perception of the New Model Army and to remind Scottish Presbyterians that some of their countrymen consider them "no better then Sectarians" (CW 6:247). By not mentioning the Protestant sects and stressing that parliament does not tolerate any religion "absolutely contrary to sound Doctrin or the power of godliness" (CW 6:244), Milton creates the impression that the Commonwealth is hostile to the sects, without actually saying it. The Rump, despite the claims

of its enemies and the hopes of the radical sects, pursued a moderate religious policy. Many of the Rump's religious reforms were little more than "stop-gap measures," and clerical patronage in this period reflected moderate impulses (Worden *The Rump* 120-1). Milton's paymasters in the Rump would not have desired him to acknowledge or defend the existence of sectaries in England. Conscious of the political situation, Milton reconciles his own position in *Areopagitica* with that of his employers. In effect, he neither confirms nor denies the presence of sectaries in England. The "sound Doctrin" of *Observations* is the same as the "gracefull symmetry" (CPW 2:555) of *Areopagitica*. Since, however, *Observations* does not mention the sects or celebrate Protestant diversity, its "sound Doctrin" could satisfy conservative English Protestants.

The one moment when Milton expresses a similar sentiment to *Areopagitica* in his commonwealth prose is his comments regarding the army in *Defensio Secunda*. The army became a major actor on the English political stage in the late 1640s. At the conclusion of the first Civil War in 1646, the army's relationship with parliament deteriorated. Due to the cost of maintaining a standing army, many MPs sought to disband the army, but they did not provide sufficient guarantees that the soldiers would be paid their arrears or that they would not be prosecuted for any acts committed during the war. The second Civil War in 1648, which the king launched with the aid of the Scots after escaping parliamentary custody, further politicized the army, who viewed their victory in the first Civil War as a sign that God endorsed their side. For many soldiers, Charles was now a "man of blood" whom the army, which viewed itself as an agent of God's providence, wanted to bring to justice (Holmes 118-9). Most MPs, however, were not prepared to pursue such radical steps, and continued to negotiate with Charles. Parliament's lack of progress caused the army to become impatient. On December 6, 1648, Colonel Pride and a group of soldiers stood outside of parliament and prevented all but the most

radical MPs from taking their seats. This event, known as Pride's Purge, led to the regicide and establishment of the English Commonwealth and it brought the army directly into the realm of politics.

As the army began to assert itself politically in the late 1640s, many soldiers embraced sectarianism and raised the issue of religious liberty. The Grievances of Regiments, presented at Saffron Walden in May 1647, expresses fear that in the new religious settlement "the consciences of men shall be pressed beyond the light they have received from the Word" (Woodhouse 399). Similarly, *A Representation from His Excellencie Sr. Thomas Fairfax, and the Army under His Command*, written in June 1647, desires religious liberty for those who "may differ from established forms" (Woodhouse 409). These declarations align the army's position on religious liberty with that of Milton, as both object to institutions controlling Christians' consciences. Recognizing the army's position on religious liberty, Milton defends the army from accusations of heresy by associating it with religious truth. While the camps of other armies are filled with "drinking, indulgence in various lust, rapine, gaming, swearing, and perjuring," Milton insists that in the English camp "what leisure is available is spent in the search for truth, in careful reading of sacred scripture" (CPW 4.1:648). The English army becomes a miniature representation of the English nation as described in *Areopagitica*, as the soldiers engage in careful study of the scripture to discover religious truth. Although the country at large did not become the inquisitive, truth-seeking society that *Areopagitica* depicted, the soldiers of the New Model Army fulfilled the hope that Milton had for the English nation in *Areopagitica*.

Although *Defensio Secunda* idealizes the army's practice of free discussion, Milton, who served as licenser during the Commonwealth, approves of institutions controlling the press in matters outside of religion, particularly when it came to the memory of the dead king. The fact

that Milton, the same man who attacked pre-publication licensing so vehemently in *Areopagitica* in 1644, willingly served as a licenser may appear perplexing, but it reflects his separation of political and religious liberty.<sup>23</sup> Those critics who attempt to reconcile Milton's work as a licenser with *Areopagitica* point to Milton's supposed licensing of *The Racovian Catechism* (an antitrinitarian work by John Biddle) as evidence that Milton did not betray his earlier principles while serving as a licenser.<sup>24</sup> The licensing of *The Racovian Catechism* would reaffirm Milton's commitment to open discussion in religion, but the positive reception of *Eikon Basilike* may have convinced Milton of the need to license political works. *Eikon Basilike* was exceptionally popular and went through thirty-five English editions in 1649 alone. Additionally, numerous royalist sermons and elegies also contributed to the image of Charles I as a martyr (Wilcher 292). In *Eikonoklastes*, Milton attacks not only *Eikon Basilike*, but also the English people's willingness to embrace it, as the dead king "amongst the mad multitude" won "a sudden reputation" (CW 6:283). If Milton hoped to limit the public's exposure to writings that undermined the Commonwealth, licensing was the best option, and there was now a loyal army to enforce any printing regulations. As licenser, Milton could control the political books to which the English people were exposed, while simultaneously allowing controversial religious works, like *The Racovian Catechism*, to be printed.<sup>25</sup> The institution of licensing could have both a positive and negative role in Miltonic freedom, depending on whether it was in the political or religious sphere.

Like Milton himself, the army, in *Defensio Secunda*, expresses both the institutional coercion that Milton allowed as part of political liberty and the admonition and persuasion that Milton associated with religious liberty. The army's involvement in politics in the late 1640s had moved the revolution forward through naked military force. Milton abhorred the use of such

force in religion, but he frames the army as understanding the different roles of military power in politics and religion. No one in the army, according to Milton, “think[s] it more glorious to smite the foe than to instruct himself and others in the knowledge of heavenly things” (*CPW* 4.1:648). Even though the army was the clearest representation of coercion, it could still be an institutional agent of religious liberty because it restricted the use of coercion to politics while employing “instruct[ion]” in religion. The army, in effect, practices church discipline within its ranks, but it does so by abandoning its own military force in favour of instruction. Milton’s acclaim for the soldiers soon transforms into an appeal to all Englishmen, as he holds the army up as an example for the whole country: “What should be, not more fierce and belligerent, but more civil and humane, than these men [the soldiers] who are obliged, as the true and proper end of their labors, not to sow and reap warfare, but to cultivate peace and safety for the human race?” (*CPW* 4.1:649). By celebrating the soldier’s pursuit of religious truth after the war through non-coercive means, Milton calls on his fellow countrymen not only to admire the English army, but also to emulate it. His question both asks if it is possible to be more “civil and humane” than the soldiers, and invites his English readers (who were limited to those who could read Latin) to strive to equal the soldiers. The army’s ability to carry out the vision of *Areopagitica* renders it a model for Miltonic liberty and, Milton hopes, an inspiration for the rest of the nation.

The army also becomes a model for Oliver Cromwell at the close of *Defensio Secunda*. Cromwell had been a key military leader during the Civil War, and his star continued to rise during the Commonwealth. In 1649, he led an expedition into Ireland to finally put down the rebellion that had begun in 1641. After a brutal campaign, he returned to England and was sent to Scotland to fight the Scottish army that was being led by the future Charles II, son of the

executed king. Cromwell's success over the Scots secured the Commonwealth from its enemies, and the loyalty of his officers and soldiers rendered him the most powerful man in England.

Frustrated with parliament's lack of reform, Cromwell forcefully dissolved the Rump at musket-point on April 20, 1653. This act constitutes the most blatant example of the army shaping politics, as a general supported by armed soldiers removed an entire parliament. Immediately after the expulsion of the Rump, Cromwell and his allies drew up a list of men whom they believed to be godly. These men would govern England as the Nominated Assembly.

Nicknamed the Barebones Parliament, the Nominated Assembly proved unproductive and voted to dissolve itself on December 12, 1653. In an effort to restore order, a group of army officers installed Cromwell as Lord Protector under the Instrument of Government, England's first and only written constitution.

Cromwell's career and statements may have provided Milton with hope that he, as Lord Protector, would secure religious liberty. Addressing the Nominated Assembly on July 4, 1653, Cromwell proclaimed: "if the poorest Christian, the most mistaken Christian shall desire to live peaceably and quietly under you ... let him be protected" (Abbott 3:62). When he opened the first Protectoral Parliament on September 4, 1654, Cromwell reminded the members that beliefs "are matters of conscience and opinion, they are matters of religion; what hath the magistrate to do with these things? He is to look to the outward man, not meddle with the inward" (Abbott 3:436). Such comments are not dissimilar to Milton's own writings. Additionally, the Instrument of Government contained a vague and potentially broad definition of liberty of conscience that prompted many Protestant sects who otherwise were disappointed in the Protectorate to rejoice (Worden *Literature and Politics* 301-2). Although Cromwell had gained a reputation for tolerating a broad range of religious beliefs, his government was actively involved

in regulating religion. He viewed the church as a national organization and the definition of orthodox belief as a matter of state (Worden *Literature and Politics* 247). The Cromwellian church, consequently, was the culmination of the Erastian impulse that had been driving the religious program of the Long Parliament (Collins “The Church” 20). Two major components of the Cromwellian church were the Triers and Ejectors, which allowed the state to nominate new ministers and remove insufficient ones. This system was not fully in place when Milton wrote *Defensio Secunda*, but there was evidence that religious governance was moving in this direction. In 1652, Cromwell’s former chaplain John Owen presented to parliament a “scheme for propagation of the gospel,” which included the system that would later become the triers and ejectors (Worden *Literature and Politics* 241). With these potential restrictions on religious liberty looming, Milton addressed Cromwell directly in *Defensio Secunda* in 1654.

*Defensio Secunda* expresses concerns regarding Cromwell’s plans for the church, urging the Lord Protector to “not permit two powers, utterly diverse, the civil and the ecclesiastical, to make harlots of each other” (CPW 4.1:678). Walker argues that Milton’s impassioned language is hyperbolic in this instance. For Walker, Milton depicts Cromwell as a godly magistrate whose civil power is guided by his religious beliefs. The manner in which Cromwell governs will prove his piety (*Antiformalist, Unrevolutionary* 144-5). Walker’s dismissal of Milton’s frequent tirades against the combination of temporal and ecclesiastical power as mere hyperbole causes him to misunderstand the test of piety that Cromwell faces. His piety will be proven only if he refrains from using his position of civil power in religious matters and “leave[s] the church to the church” (CPW 4.1:678). True religion guides Cromwell as a civil leader by restraining him from meddling in the church so that the church could preach the word of God on its own terms. The army understood that military force, although necessary to move political events forward, was

detrimental in religion, and Milton hopes that Cromwell would reach a similar conclusion. The army's "search for truth" through scripture also provides Cromwell with a model for managing printing and debate. Milton encourages Cromwell to "permit those who wish to engage in free inquiry to publish their findings at their own peril without the private inspection of any petty magistrate, for so will truth especially flourish" (*CPW* 4.1:679). Such a policy would remove institutional restrictions on religious debate and allow the whole nation to participate in the type of free discussion that Milton envisions in *Areopagitica* and sees in the army's camp. Again, the practices of the army become a model for Cromwell's government.

By framing the army as the ideal interpreter of liberty, Milton directs Cromwell to emulate a group for which he had profound respect and with which he identified, thus strengthening the case for adopting Miltonic liberty. The years that Cromwell spent as a military commander leading his soldiers into battle across the British Isles caused him to develop a strong admiration for the English soldiers. Cromwell cared deeply about both the material needs of his soldiers and their personal dignity, openly weeping twice in the autumn of 1643 when his soldiers were not paid (Woolrych 97). In a letter to his cousin, he referred to his soldiers as "the faithful" (Abbott 1:264), and later, when he was Lord Protector, as "my brethren" (Abbott 3:452). As he prepared *Defensio Secunda*, Milton recognized that there was an impulse within the Protectorate to allow state institutions greater power over the church. To dissuade Cromwell from such policy, Milton points to a group that Cromwell admired, the soldiers, as an example of how to differentiate between civil and religious liberty and encourage religious truth through free discussion. Milton's arguments for religious liberty in *Defensio Secunda* are not new, but they are shaped in a way that reflects the circumstances of the Protectorate to increase the likelihood that Cromwell would establish Miltonic liberty.



Milton's interpretation of religious liberty is perhaps the most significant difference between him and other English republicans. While Milton was concerned about the impending state church under the Protectorate, his fellow republicans James Harrington and Marchamont Nedham found Cromwell's religious policies to be one of the few things about the Protectorate of which they could approve. Like Cromwell, Harrington believed that a national religion and liberty of conscience could exist simultaneously, as "a commonwealth is nothing else but the national conscience" (185). Nedham's writings, like Milton's early prose, express disgust at the clergy's power in political matters, but Nedham's solution was to place the state over the clergy (*The Excellencie* 75-8). Although Nedham did advocate for liberty of conscience, he had a much narrower view of which consciences should be tolerated and even celebrated moments of vicious persecution, such as the torture of the Quaker James Nayler (Woodford *Perceptions* 76). The promotion of a national church also, interestingly, appears in the pages of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Conscience was, for Hobbes, a private matter and he believed that faith could not actually be forced (Collins *The Allegiance* 124). Hobbes, however, also views a national religion and set forms of worship as consistent with religious liberty. Public worship, according to Hobbes, fell under the jurisdiction of the sovereign because "both State and Church are the same men" (372). Hobbes goes even further and argues that even if the sovereign orders his subjects to worship in a manner that violated their conscience, they still had to obey because "profession of the tongue is but an external thing" (338). Jeff Collins notes that although this commitment to a national church connects Hobbes with most of the republicans of the 1650s, Milton along with his close friend Sir Henry Vane were key exceptions, as both refused to accept any type of uniform worship (*The Allegiance* 185). Such sentiments, however, were unusual among English republicans, who generally endorsed an Erastian state-church.

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Politically, the execution of Charles I represents one of the most dramatic institutional changes in English history. Official declarations framed the trial, regicide, and subsequent abolition of monarchy in terms of preserving liberty. The Act Erecting a High Court of Justice for the King's Trial claimed that Charles sought "totally to subvert the ancient and fundamental laws and liberties of this nation," while stressing that the King only held power "for the preservation of their [the people's] rights and liberties" (Gardiner 357, 372). These charges portray Charles I as an enemy of liberty, and stress that his position was contractual. After the regicide, the Act Abolishing the Office of King proclaimed that kings in general tended to "incroach upon the just freedom and liberty of the people, and to promote the setting up of their own will and power above the laws, so that they might enslave the kingdom to their own lust" (Gardiner 385). The creators of the English Commonwealth framed the new government as safeguarding the people's liberty against the inevitable tyranny of kingship. Milton's first two major political prose tracts, *The Tenure* and *Eikonoklastes*, were published in 1649 and focus on justifying the execution of the king rather than any new form of government in England. *Defensio*, published in 1651, begins defending the Commonwealth as well as the regicide. To support the revolutionary change of 1649, these three works present a new basis for political liberty, cite historical precedents, correct definitions, and employ republican rhetoric. All these methods undermine the institution of monarchy, which Milton presents as a major obstacle to political liberty, but Milton adjusts his writing when he turns to the new political regime in England and outlines an institutional basis for liberty.

*The Tenure* presents a new framework for accessing political liberty, and it does so in a philosophical manner that will have an impact on all Milton's subsequent political writings. As

Milton outlines the origins of government, he anchors political freedom in the people's right to hold governments accountable. The power of governors, in Milton's framework, "is only derivative, transferred and committed to them in trust from the people ... in whom the power yet remains fundamentally" (CW 6:157). He even argues that the people could "retaine him or depose him [their ruler] though no Tyrant, merely by the liberty and right of free born Men, to be govern'd as seems to them best" (CW 6:159). Here, the people seemingly are empowered to change their governing institutions on a whim, which legitimizes the trial of Charles I and the future abolition of monarchy in England. Stephen Fallon correctly notes that Milton shifts between a pre and postlapsarian world in *The Tenure*, both acknowledging that the Fall renders government a requirement for moral behavior and remaining attached to the pre-Fallen state in which godly individuals regulate themselves and do not need a government (Fallon "The Strangest" 245-6). To balance both sides, Milton separates the people into those who already understand and are capable of freedom and those who resist freedom (Fallon "The Strangest" 249-50). Similarly, Paul Hammond effectively argues that although *The Tenure* theoretically places sovereignty in the entire population, the tract restricts the execution of sovereignty to the wisest members of the nation (Hammond 122-4). Assessing political rulers, for Milton, should be limited to the "uprighter sort" (CW 6:154), but this restriction is still a theoretical notion; how it actually functions is not mentioned in *The Tenure*. In *Areopagitica*, Milton mocks Plato for presenting an unrealistic vision of a commonwealth, which no nation ever created. *The Tenure* establishes Milton's own philosophy of political liberty and the remainder of his prose grapples with the challenges of placing this philosophical abstraction amid the realities of seventeenth-century England.

By establishing the principle of popular sovereignty, *The Tenure* provides a justification for trying the king and changing the institutional structure of England, but the novelty of these ideas did not appeal to all parties who fought for parliament in the Civil War. Charles I was the first European king to be publicly tried and executed for treason, and this revolutionary step was one that many moderate parliamentarians and Presbyterians were unwilling to take. *The Tenure* counters uneasiness about the king's trial by presenting the destruction of existing political institutions as less shocking and almost normal. Early in *The Tenure*, Milton describes the removal of a king as a standard outcome after a war in which God directed one side. The conclusion of a conflict in which "God and a good cause" brought victory "inevitably draws after it the alternation of Lawes, change of Government, downfall of Princes and thir families" (CW 6:152). Trying the king for treason and questioning traditional English political institutions may appear to be a complete re-making of the English government, but for Milton, such changes are inevitable when God leads the way to victory. The inevitability of these changes downplays the revolutionary nature of parliament's actions, rendering the regicide appropriate and reasonable given the circumstances.

Not only is altering the political institutions of England sensible, similar actions had occurred throughout history when tyrants threatened liberty. Milton recognizes that the discomfort some Englishmen felt towards trying the king caused "disputing presidents, forms, and circumstances," but he assures his reader that the exercising of "supream power" by parliament and the army is "equal to what hath been don in any age or Nation heretofore" (CW 6:153). To demonstrate parliament's consistency with historical precedent, Milton provides a lengthy list of examples of subjects holding monarchs who turned into tyrants accountable. The Greeks and Romans "held it not onely lawfull, but a glorious and Heroic deed, rewarded publicly

with Statues and Garlands, to kill an infamous Tyrant at any time without trial,” while “among the Jews this custom of tyrant-killing was not unusual” (CW 6:162).<sup>26</sup> Milton also cites Roman emperors and Christian theologians who assert that a ruler is accountable to his people (CW 6:158, 178-80). Even England itself had a history of king-killing: “our Ancestors who were not ignorant with what rights either Nature or ancient Constitution had endowd them ... thought it no way illegal to depose and put to death thir tyrannous Kings” (CW 6:165). Unlike *Of Reformation, The Tenure* calls on English traditions to defend radical change rather than the institutional status quo. In addition to these examples from centuries ago, Milton also reminds Presbyterians that they have “cited him [Charles] so oft” as tyrant and “so oft they have tearm’d [Charles I] Agag” (CW 6:152). The repetition of “so oft” renders the Presbyterians’ previous position against Charles a matter of routine. Milton’s examples present the deposing of a king as less revolutionary than it was in the seventeenth century. The recent institutional changes in England that secured liberty should not “startle” anyone and prevent them from “adhering with all thir [strength &] assistance to the present Parliament & Army” (CW 6:153). Overthrowing a monarch in the name of freedom was perfectly in line with classical, biblical, and English history as well as Protestant theology and the Presbyterians’ previous statements.

Despite all his examples, Milton is still not confident that he has provided sufficient grounds to persuade the Presbyterians and other moderates that the recent institutional changes in England were legitimate. Anticipating that his readers might question his interpretation of history, Milton pre-empts any objections by arguing that it does not matter if the English parliament breaks with historical tradition when it pursues liberty. Even if parliament and the army’s proceedings are unprecedented, their actions are still legitimate because their wisdom enables them to break new political ground: “if the Parliament and Military Council doe what

they do without precedent, if it appears their duty, it argues the more wisdom, virtue, and magnanimity, that they know themselves able to be a precedent to others” (CW 6:175). Milton abandons his argument of historical commonplace and instead presents parliament and the army as setting a new precedent. *The Tenure* finally acknowledges the revolutionary nature of the king’s trial, but in doing so it celebrates that revolution because it secures liberty in a more impressive manner than ever before. Shortly before this shift in his argument, Milton admits that an unaccountable monarchy is “not illegal, or intolerable,” it just rules “not as a free government” (CW 6:174). The legality of an unaccountable monarchy throws doubt over the legitimacy of Charles’ trial, but Milton now ignores previous practice in favour of pursuing freedom without concern for legal precedent. The violent overthrow of a legal government is, for Milton, justified if that legal government was not establishing freedom. The trial of the king becomes both part of a historical tradition, and a new precedent that will inspire future generations. Milton is looking both backward and forward to justify challenging the key English political institution. By invoking both the past and future, Milton invites his fellow Englishmen to simultaneously continue and create a tradition of freedom in England through the removal of the dominant political institution.

Milton repeats this strategy of providing extensive commentary on historical examples and then arguing that they do not apply to England in *Defensio*. Early in the tract, Milton analyzes passages in the Book of Samuel regarding the ancient Israelites asking God for a king, to which Salmasius points to defend absolute monarchy. Milton, as Elizabeth Tuttle notes, counters Salmasius’ biblical arguments and, in doing so, turns the examples from the Old Testament into proofs that a commonwealth is the best form of government (78). Yet, after providing this biblical exegesis, Milton shrugs off its relevance to seventeenth-century England:

“what has all this to do with our rights or those of our kings? We never opposed God’s will in seeking a king nor did we receive one by his grant, but rather followed the rights of peoples and established our own government” (CPW 4.1:354). Milton also expresses skepticism of Salmasius’ depiction of early Christians being obedient to monarchs, before again questioning the relevance of this example. First, Milton demonstrates that “Christians warred on tyrants, used arms in their own defence, and frequently punished the crimes of tyrants” (CPW 4.1:414). Just a few paragraphs later, Milton asserts that the first Christians “were not men on whose authority we should rely,” as they had “lost much of their early holiness and purity of faith and morals” (CPW 4.1:417). If primitive Christians were not a useful example, Milton could have simply pointed this out, but he elects first to spend pages describing early Christian resistance to unaccountable monarchs. This method enables Milton to inflict the maximum damage on Salmasius, as he both challenges Salmasius’ interpretation of scripture and history, and asserts that such past examples do not delegitimize the regicide and English Commonwealth. As in *The Tenure*, the English revolutionaries in *Defensio* follow tradition while not being bound by the precedents of other nations as they destroy institutions that obstruct political liberty.

In addition to calling on old and new precedents, *The Tenure* and *Defensio* offer new definitions of the Civil War and monarchy to defend the regicide. In the seventeenth century, the idea of rebellion provoked anxiety among both royalists and parliamentarians, including Milton, who feared the horrors of antichristian rebellion (Loewenstein *Representing Revolution* 176-8). The terms rebellion and rebel, as David Lowenstein points out, were malleable as all sides tried to use them to their advantage (*Representing Revolution* 179). Loewenstein’s focus is on how Milton presents parliament as heroic and the Presbyterians as seditious, but Milton also engages with the definition of rebellion in relation to the Civil War. In *The Tenure*, Milton expresses his

disappointment that the Presbyterians have “turn’d thir own warrantable actions into Rebellion” (CW 6:169). In response, Milton redefines the meaning of the conflict with the king: “I doe not say it is rebellion, if the thing commanded [by the king] though establish’d be unlawful ... but I say it is an absolute renouncing both of Supremacy and Allegiance, which in one word is an actual total deposing of the King” (CW 6:169). The conflict against the king, in Milton’s account, becomes elevated above the disorder and illegitimacy of a rebellion to a straightforward, valid alternation of the institutions of government. By no longer calling resistance to the king rebellion, Milton removes any negative stigma associated with such action. To further solidify his point, he points to a conflict in the Old Testament between King Rehoboam and the Israelites when the prophet Shemiah “calls them [those Israelites who were against Rehoboam] thir Brethren, not rebels” (CW 6:159). Milton does not want the Presbyterians to define themselves as rebels and their actions as rebellious, as such a self-image will cause them to have second thoughts about deposing the king.

Milton also invokes definitions to undermine the legitimacy of any supporters of monarchy, further delegitimizing monarchy as a political institution. Some Presbyterians express pity for Charles, but Milton doubts their sincerity: “thir pity can be no true, and Christian commiseration, but either levitie and shallowness of minde, or else a carnal admiring of that worldly pomp and greatness, from whence they see him fall’n” (CW 6:152). Additionally, Milton describes the Presbyterians’ “deposing” Charles with their actions while “upholding” him with their words as “evidence of thir feare, not of thir fidelity” (CW 6:172). Support for the king is defined as “carnal” and fearful rather than pitiful and faithful; loyalty to the king, therefore, cannot be sincere. While *The Tenure* corrects the Presbyterians’ definitions of themselves, *Defensio* presents Salmasius as obsessing over definitions to the point of causing his entire



argument to collapse. Milton frames Salmasius as being so protective of his definition of monarchy (that is, royal power “is highest and unique in the state, over which no other is recognized” [CPW 4.1:454]) that he prefers to restrict liberty rather than admit a flaw in his definition: “your faintheartedness should not be so fearful for your assemblage of grammatical details or words as to prefer the betrayal of all men’s freedom and government to the slightest disturbance or injury of your glossary” (CPW 4.1:456). Beyond mocking Salmasius’ attachment to false definitions, Milton points to examples in Salmasius’ home country of France to demonstrate the inaccuracy of his definitions. The status of the nobility of France, according to Milton, proves that French kings, despite what Salmasius claims, have peers, which challenges Salmasius’ understanding of the kingship: “you must have a care that your glossary, which is your sole concern, be not more derided in the kingdom of France than in our commonwealth” (CPW 4.1:463). In *Defensio*, correct definitions are a means of ridicule rather than education, but the tract still highlights Milton’s use of redefinition to justify the regicide. The new definitions in *The Tenure* and *Defensio* undermine both the monarchy and those who champion it, as Milton pushes his readers to re-think the place of monarchy in England and the types of institutions necessary for political freedom.

Milton’s critique of monarchy also includes republican rhetoric, particularly in *Eikonoklastes*. As Thomas Corns correctly points out, *Eikonoklastes* defends regicide, not republicanism. Milton never advocates for a republican government along classical lines, but he expresses republican values as he demystifies kingship (Corns “Milton and the Characteristics” 26-7).<sup>27</sup> To undermine the king’s position, Milton frames the Civil War as between one man and the entire nation, repeatedly stressing the absurdity of subordinating the entire nation to a single person. If a commonwealth depends on “the gift and favour of a single person,” Milton believes

that “it cannot be thought sufficient of it self, and by consequence no Common-wealth, nor free” (CW 6:345). In the context of seventeenth-century England, reducing the entire nation to the will of one man referred to the king’s negative voice, which enabled the king to block any legislation passed by parliament. Milton refers to the “Law-giving power” of parliament as the “Foundation of our freedom” (CW 6:411). Since the whole nation is, for Milton, “virtually” in parliament (CW 6:409), if the king uses his negative voice to prevent parliament from passing laws, he restricts the freedom of the entire country. *Eikonoklastes*, which justifies the regicide but says little about the regime that replaced the Stuart monarchy, contains the clearest republican rhetoric of all of Milton’s prose, as it seeks to render the king’s position absurd and tyrannical.

Once Milton starts defending not only the regicide, but also the new governments in England, he cannot rely solely on republican arguments, as it is difficult to label any of these regimes as representative. *The Tenure*, *Eikonoklastes*, and *Defensio* all appeal to the people’s natural right of changing government as the basis of political liberty. Had there been an election in 1649, the traditional English electorate would have returned a parliament with a very different composition than the Rump, and such a parliament would have likely continued to negotiate with the king. This fact troubled Milton, as his principles of liberty (accountability through popular sovereignty) would have prevented the outcome of liberty (a free commonwealth). Scholars are divided over the extent of Milton’s frustration with the English people in this period. Norbrook insists that we should not take Milton’s negative comments about the English people at face value, as these comments serve the rhetorical purpose of shocking Milton’s readers so that they abandon the royalist cause (205). Hammond, comparatively, detects a “doubleness” in Milton’s depiction of the people, as the people both rallied against idols, and ultimately preferred slavery to liberty (135-7). Milton unquestionably wants to believe in the English people’s ability to

create and maintain his version of a free commonwealth, but the political realities rendered such a belief impossible. By the time the English Commonwealth was created, many institutional obstacles to liberty had been removed. Episcopacy, the former system of pre-publication licensing, and monarchy had all been abolished by 1649.<sup>28</sup> Despite these reforms, Milton saw many Englishmen remaining attached to their former servile state. For Milton, the sympathetic response to the dead king epitomized this servility. This reaction forced Milton, in *Eikonoklastes*, to accept that there were few people “who yet retain in them the old English fortitude and love of Freedom”; the rest “give adoration to the Image and Memory of this Man [Charles I], who hath offer’d at more cunning fetches to undermine our Liberties, and putt Tyranny into an Art, than any British King before him” (*CW* 6:282). *Eikonoklastes* presents the English people as failing to accept the liberty of the regicide, but this tract only expresses frustration, it does not yet propose solutions.

In *Defensio*, Milton continues to express disappointment with the English people, but he softens his position to suit his European audience. *Defensio* both celebrates the achievements of the English people in the Civil War and ignores their opinion in drawing up a peace settlement. By defeating the king, “each [Englishman] won for himself for the future the name of liberator in every land” (*CPW* 4.1:336). The people’s victory becomes a triumph so great, that it elevates them: “the people dared to perform in common such an act as in other lands is thought possible only for great-hearted men of old” (*CPW* 4.1:336). As in much of his commonwealth prose, Milton looks both to the future in commenting on how the current generation of Englishmen will be remembered, and to the past in equating the English with ancient heroes. Despite these great acts, the war did not lead to the people embracing freedom. Milton could not deny the lack of enthusiasm for the Commonwealth, but since *Defensio* is addressed to a European audience, he

goes further than he does in *Eikonoklastes* in excusing the English: “their [Englishmen’s] sins were taught them under the monarchy, like the Israelites in Egypt, and have not been immediately unlearned in the desert, even under the guidance of God” (*CPW* 4.1:386-7). The switch from slavery to freedom is a difficult process, as unlearning servitude cannot be done all at once. The phrase “immediately unlearned” suggests that given time, the English people will eventually embrace the freedom of the Commonwealth, and Milton insists “there is much hope for most of them [the English people]” (*CPW* 4.1:387). Such wording reassures European readers that the English Commonwealth does not marginalize the people in a tyrannical manner like the monarchy.

Milton uses his assertion that most Englishmen have been conditioned to reject freedom to articulate an active role for institutions in political liberty. Many scholars have noted Milton’s preference for placing liberty in the hands of a small elite group. Hammond views Milton as redefining the people as “those who act to preserve liberty; which in turn is defined as Milton chooses” (164-5). In exploring how Milton understands the English nation, Sauer argues that Milton sees England as comprising two nations, and he looks to the better part to lead the way in “national self-fashioning” (*Milton, Toleration* 92). Milton does frequently appeal to the better part of the nation, but in terms of practical policy, government by the better sort does not mean empowering a segment of the population to vote regularly and become actively engaged with politics. Rather, it means turning to specific institutions to bring liberty, whether the population desires it or not. Milton is not interested in sifting through the entire English population to locate the better sort. For him, rule by the better sort means achieving the nation’s maximum potential. By the 1650s, Milton sees that potential in various institutions, not in any portion of the actual English people. These institutions represent, and eventually become, the interests of the better

sort in Milton's commonwealth prose. Walter Lim frames Miltonic liberty as requiring both the people to learn from history and scripture and "a political institution [that is] responsible for making and preserving the law and also for ensuring the well-being of the commonwealth" (99). These two conditions represent the ideal for Milton. If the people refused to learn from history and scripture, Milton believed that liberty was still possible, but institutions had to play an even greater role.

The political institutions that Milton praises, namely parliament, the army, and the Lord Protector, were composed of some the better sort of the people, but the entire better sort does not occupy these institutions. Milton is not restricting the better sort to only those men who sat in parliament or served in the army, as such a restriction would place himself outside the better sort, and Milton unquestionably considered himself a wise man. Those members of the better sort who are not part of these institutions, such as Milton, recognize that their interests are being represented in the current institutions and submit to their rule. This transference of the spirit of the best elements of the nation to certain institutions becomes the practical expression of the political philosophy of *The Tenure*. Walker views Milton's endorsement of Interregnum regimes that violated the liberties of *The Tenure* (such as the right of the people to hold their governors accountable and their right to decide their form of government) as evidence that Milton was in no way a precursor to modern liberals (*Antiformalist, Unrevolutionary* 121-2). Milton may not have been a liberal, but his defences of the Interregnum governments re-imagine rather than marginalize political liberty. Although this empowerment of institutions has an authoritarian tone, it secures Milton's desired result while maintaining the semblance (or perhaps illusion) of popular sovereignty. Milton's institutional liberty strains the theory of *The Tenure*, but as long

as there is an institution that can enact Milton's vision of political freedom, he tries to reconcile his theory with the realities of seventeenth-century England.

The chief institution to which Milton looked was parliament. In tracing the history of parliament, Milton claims that the Commons predates the king: "before any king was created, they [the House of Commons] used to hold councils and Parliaments in the name of the whole people, make judgements, pass laws, and create kings" (*CPW* 4.1:494). The supremacy of parliament in ancient England prompts Milton to praise his English ancestors "who, in establishing this state, displayed a wisdom and a sense of freedom equal to that of the ancient Romans or the most illustrious Greeks" (*CPW* 4.1:495). Historical arguments, however, were not applicable to the parliament that voted to try Charles I for treason and abolish the monarchy. The changes to the membership of parliament that occurred between 1640 and 1649 were without historical precedent. Milton, therefore, could not point to English history to defend the actions of a purged parliament. Instead, he reminds his readers that "the first and peculiar duty of parliament" is "to maintain above all else the freedom of the people in peace and war" (*CPW* 4.1:458). Milton elevates the purpose of parliament above the process of electing MPs. The result of freedom becomes more important than the actual electorate's involvement. Despite his praise for the historic foundation of parliament, Milton denies those MPs who were sympathetic to the king the powers and privileges of being an MP because they put the king's interest before the nation's liberty: "Thus their [the purged MPs] religion, their freedom, that covenant they boasted of so often were all made of less importance than the king" (*CPW* 4.1:510). These MPs (not to mention those who left parliament in 1642 to fight with the king in the Civil War) were not, in Milton's account, fulfilling the obligations of parliament, and, consequently, they lost the

institutional status of being part of parliament. Once again, Milton abandons historic precedent when it obstructs his vision of liberty.

If the MPs who sympathized with the king lost their privileges, the people who elected them (who were part of the traditional, property-owning electorate) also lost their privileges as active members of the political community. Their votes for MPs who sought to continue negotiations with the king become neutralized in the name of freedom. For Milton, the legitimacy of an action was based on whether it promoted freedom, not whether it was popular. The majority of MPs in parliament had no right to enslave the nation, even though their numbers were greater than the MPs who pursued freedom: “If a majority in Parliament prefer enslavement and putting the commonwealth up for sale, is it not right for a minority to prevent it if they can and preserve freedom?” (*CPW* 4.1:457). A wise minority who understands and values freedom is, in Milton’s account, able to circumvent the wishes of both the majority of elected representative and the population as a whole; by doing so, this minority frees the nation. In 1649, the spirit of the wise minority lay in the purged House of Commons. A parliament that had been gutted by soldiers in an unprecedented way becomes the embodiment of the original principles of parliament. Milton presents the Rump as simultaneously fulfilling the historic purpose of parliament and suppressing the historic means of electing parliaments. Milton’s commitment to achieving freedom at all costs causes *Defensio* to present political freedom in contrasting terms to *The Tenure*. While *The Tenure* stresses the people’s right to decide their form of government, *Defensio* strips those who traditionally did have a voice in politics of their rights.

Milton is aware that the version of political liberty that he now defends has reduced the number of people who actually participate in the political process. Such a system seems to

violate the terms of *The Tenure*, but Milton insists that the spirit of popular sovereignty remains, just in a more practical form. With the purged MPs stripped of their institutional status, Milton frames the Rump parliament as the true institutional representation of the people: “for why should I not say that the act of the better, the sound part of the Parliament, in which resides the real power of the people, was the act of the people?” (*CWP* 4.1:457). Milton attempts to transform what is in effect an oligarchic regime into a popular government to link political realities to the philosophy of *The Tenure*. The actual English people, according to Milton, could not participate in politics because they resisted their destiny: “for you [English people] to wish to resist your destiny and return to slavery after your freedom has been won by God’s assistance and your own valour . . . would be not simply a shameful act, but an ungodly criminal act!” (*CPW* 4.1:532). By associating freedom with England’s “destiny,” Milton empowers institutions to do whatever is necessary to achieve freedom, even if the people resist. Milton’s shifting position towards the English people and their role in government has prompted David Loewenstein to label him an “anguished nationalist” who “alternatively identified with and felt repelled by” the English nation (“Milton’s Nationalism” 43). Similarly, Paul Stevens, in charting Milton’s fluctuating attitude towards the English people, argues that, for Milton, the English people were only truly the English nation when they lived up to their potential (“How Milton’s” 287). When the English people did not meet their potential, Milton did not give up on that potential, but rather sought it through institutions. The actions of the people, in *Defensio*, no longer need to be performed by the actual English people to maintain political liberty. Institutions that held “the real power of the people” were sufficient.

Milton’s parliamentary institutional liberty reaches its full expression in *Defensio Secunda*, when Milton claims: “with this power [from the electorate] they [the MPs] are



themselves now the people” (CPW 4.1:635). Milton acknowledges that the MPs derive their power from the people, but after that initial investment of power, parliament transforms into the people, not simply a representation of the people. The tracts *Eikonoklastes*, *Defensio*, and *Defensio Secunda* reveal the evolution in Milton’s presentation of the relationship between parliament and the people. Parliament first “virtually” contains the entire nation, then it holds the “real power of the people,” then finally it *is* the people. The shift in the way Milton describes the relationship between parliament and the people gradually places more emphasis on parliament’s power than their role as representatives of the people who choose MPs through elections. In *The Tenure*, political liberty was about a process of changing governments, which Milton assumes would lead to a free commonwealth. In the 1650s, political liberty requires a specific end result, namely the creation of a free commonwealth, a result that no election was likely to bring. With the English people (even when defined narrowly) disappointing his hopes, Milton transforms institutions into the people so that he can connect the creation of a commonwealth to the theory of *The Tenure*. The result is the presentation of an authoritarian regime in popular clothes, which adapts Milton’s own definition of political liberty to the realities of the 1650s while simultaneously satisfying his new employers. As a paid civil servant, Milton is required to defend the Commonwealth. His defence of the Commonwealth is propaganda, but it also continues his approach from his early prose of presenting liberty in real rather than theoretical terms. By reconciling the abstract philosophy of *The Tenure* with the practical politics of the 1650s, Milton expresses what political freedom actually looks like without abandoning his earlier position. In presenting institutional liberty, Milton strives for consistency across his prose, and although his success is questionable, the effort is always there.

The forced consistency of Milton's Commonwealth prose becomes the most strained when he discusses the army. Although Milton's early prose has elements of institutional liberty, those tracts also oppose coercive institutions. By the 1650s, Milton could not deny that violence had played a prominent role in the creation of the English Commonwealth. To legitimize the English Commonwealth, Milton had to connect military action with liberty. As the army began asserting itself politically in the late 1640s, it published declarations that framed it as a noble group that sought to secure the nation's liberties. *A Representation from His Excellencie Sr. Thomas Fairfax, and the Army under His Command* proclaimed: "we [the soldiers] were not a mere mercenary army, hired to serve any arbitrary power of a state, but called forth and conjured by the several declarations of Parliament to the defence of our own and the people's just rights and liberties" (Woodhouse 404). The army's stated goal was to see all "free-born people" be "in full possession of those fundamental rights and liberties without which we can have little hope, as human considerations to enjoy either any comfort of life or so much as life itself" (Woodhouse 403). In 1647, the Long Parliament was pressuring the army to disband, but the army's declarations made it clear that this would not happen until it received assurances regarding both its pay and liberty. The army, like the Levellers, desired legal freedoms, such as the freedom to petition parliament and freedom from arbitrary arrest (Woodhouse 408). Far from simply obeying orders, the army was actively involved in the struggle for liberty through both its declarations and its political actions.

In addition to presenting itself as a defender of liberty, the army also outlined a specific justification for being worthy of liberty. Soldiers, according to army declarations, had earned their liberty because they had fought against the king in the Civil War. In *A Representation from His Excellencie Sr. Thomas Fairfax, and the Army under His Command*, the army claimed for

itself rights and liberties that had been won by “the later blood of our dear friends and fellow soldiers” (Woodhouse 405). The *Grievances of Regiments*, presented at Saffron Walden, was even more explicit. It reminded the nation’s political leaders: “we have engaged our lives for you, ourselves, [and] posterity, that we might be free from the yoke of episcopal tyranny, yet we fear that the consciences of men shall be pressed beyond the light they have received from the Word” (Woodhouse 399). The *Grievances* went on to question the justness of denying the freedom to petition parliament to soldiers who had fought for liberty in the Civil War (Woodhouse 399). The army described itself as being essential in securing the nation’s liberties, which rendered the denial of liberties to soldiers all the more tyrannical. This line of argument was later picked up by Oliver Cromwell in the 1650s. When Cromwell opened the first Protectoral Parliament on September 4, 1654, he objected to “denying liberty to those who have earned it with their blood, who have gained civil liberty, and religious also, for those who would thus impose upon them” (Abbott 3:437). Neither the army officers nor Cromwell suggested that the soldiers’ achievements in the war rendered those who did not fight in the war unworthy of liberty. They simply argued that because the soldiers had fought for liberty, it was unjust to deny it to them.

Although Milton never stated that the soldiers’ military record earned them liberty, he repeatedly praised the army’s efforts to secure freedom. Milton could, and does, cite English precedents for using force against the king to preserve liberty (*CPW* 4.1:497). In the mid-seventeenth century, however, the army acted not only against the king, but against parliament as well. Rather than view the army as violating parliamentary privilege, he praised it as the source of liberty: “our troops were wiser than our legislators, and saved the commonwealth by arms when others had nearly destroyed it by their votes” (*CPW* 4.1:332-3). “Arms” become a more

effective means of securing liberty than legislation. Milton goes so far as to equate the army with the people. In response to Salmasius' question "who 'drove out the nobles from Parliament? The People?'" Milton insists, "yes, the people" because the soldiers were "not foreigners but citizens, forming a great part of the people, and they act by the consent and by the will of most of the rest" (*CPW* 4.1:457). Not only parliament, but also the army, which could not claim to have ever been elected, could act as the people. The representation of the people in parliament was an English tradition, but there was no such tradition for the army. Milton's willingness to extend institutional liberty beyond parliament and into the army reflects the new institutional power in England. Prior to the Civil War, monarchs only raised armies for the duration of a war. Now, there was a standing army in England. With a standing army that associated itself with the cause of liberty came the potential to create and maintain the conditions of liberty aggressively without (or even against) popular support. Milton acknowledges the army's capabilities and accommodates military force to his version of political liberty.

To justify the institutional power that he grants to the army, Milton constructs a specific image of the soldiers to render them worthy of defending liberty. When Milton praises the "troops" over the "legislators," he uses the Latin word *legiones* (*WJM* 7:54), which refers to Roman legions and places the emphasis on the soldiers rather than the commanding officers. The years 1647 to 1650 witnessed difficult economic conditions in England, with many men joining the army out of desperation. Printed attacks on the army commanders claimed that army regiments were being filled with the ignorant and the needy (Reece 26). The army was comprised of precisely the type of men whom Milton seeks to deprive of political power. Instead of using the low social status of the soldiers to equate the Commonwealth with popular sovereignty, Milton justifies their power by situating them in the historical tradition of the

Roman legions. Although Roman legions served both the Roman Republic and Empire (as well as dictators like Sulla), Milton's reference to the *legiones* using "arms" while "legislators" wasted their time with "votes" links the English army to the more authoritarian moments in Roman history. Milton's description of soldiers reflects his elitism, as he is more comfortable appealing to coercive institutions than to true populism. Additionally, Milton's claim that the soldiers formed a "great part of the people" is an obvious exaggeration. Although the Civil War was the bloodiest per capita conflict in England's history, a relatively small part of the population directly engaged in the war, a fact noted by many contemporaries (Carlton 289-90). Milton's depiction of the army overstates both the status and number of the soldiers. Such a description attempts to equate the army with the people, but it only further institutionalizes political liberty.

Despite his celebration of the army's role in politics, Milton also notes that tyrants rely on the force of arms to suppress liberty. In effect, he establishes a double standard when it comes to military force. As part of his critique of Salmasius' examples, Milton objects to his selectively quoting from Tacitus to defend the absolute power of the emperors: "What you call the rights of the [Roman] emperors was no right but sheer force; the empire was set up with no right save that of arms" (*CPW* 4.1:443). Milton points specifically to Octavius, who employed violence and fraud to set himself and all future emperors above the law, and Julius Caesar, "who had then gained supreme power through his criminal raising of forces against the republic" (*CPW* 4.1:444). Milton contrasts the Roman emperors' use of force to destroy the commonwealth with that of the English army to save liberty, lest his readers think he condoned all militaristic regimes. This contrast, however, privileges Milton as the adjudicator of all governments. Milton does not, as some defenders of the commonwealth do (Nedham *The Case* 14), argue that military

might leads to political legitimacy. Rather, he authorizes all governments of which he approves to utilize the power of the army in the name of freedom, even if that involves removing elected officials by force. By contrast, he accuses any regime of which he disapproves of tyranny if it relies on the force of arms. Milton insists that there is a difference between a commonwealth and a tyrant's use of force, but in the case of the New Model Army, that difference is sometimes hard to see.

Milton's defence of Cromwell's expulsion of the Rump in *Defensio Secunda* further connects Miltonic political liberty with authoritarian institutions rather than the electorate.<sup>29</sup> In Milton's account, the members of the Rump, like Charles I, had begun to pursue their "private interest," and "the people [were] complaining that they had been deluded of their hopes"; therefore, Cromwell had to "put and end to the domination of these few men" to preserve liberty (CPW 4.1:671). Milton's description is similar to that of both contemporary propaganda and Cromwell himself. Just two days after the expulsion of the Rump, *A Declaration of the Lord General and his Council of Officers* appeared in print and proclaimed: "this Parliament [the Rump], through corruption of some, the jealousy of others, the non-attendance and negligence of many, would never answer those ends which God, his People, and the whole Nation expected from them" (5-6). Cromwell was more specific regarding the shortcomings of the Rump in a speech he made to the Nominated Assembly on July 4, 1653: "plainly the intention [of a bill proposed by the Rump] was, not to give the people right of choice ... [and] was intended only to recruit the House, the better to perpetuate themselves" (Abbott 3:56). Cromwell's speech presents the members of the Rump as seeking only to fill the vacant seats in parliament so that they could perpetuate themselves and deny England a new election. Historians, however, have shown that the Rump in fact sought a new election that would have produced a new

representative assembly (Worden *The Rump* 345-63). Such an election would have resulted in a conservative, Presbyterian parliament that had no interest in the reforms that Cromwell and Milton desired. By parroting the official defences of the expulsion of the Rump, Milton implicitly opposes giving the English electorate the power to choose its own government.<sup>30</sup> The fresh election proposed by the Rump was the best opportunity to restore a degree of popular sovereignty to England, and Milton ignored this plan while embracing military institutions. The ability of institutions to achieve his goals was more important to Milton than preserving the traditional popular component of the English constitution.

Milton's willingness to allow the army to intervene in politics differentiates him from his fellow republicans, who were wary of the army's involvement in politics and questioned the legitimacy of the Protectorate. Nedham was not opposed to using force to preserve liberty, but he thought the circumstances that merited such action were rare. In *The Excellencie of a Free State*, which was published in 1656 and based on a series of newspaper editorials that Nedham wrote for his newspaper *Mercurius Politicus* in the early 1650s, he warned: "for a man to think Civil War, or the Sword, is a way to be ordinarily used for the recovery of a sick-State, it were as great a madness, as to give strong Waters in a high Feaver" (*The Excellencie* 96). Nedham did, initially, produce propaganda for the Protectorate, which defended the army's expulsion of the Rump, describing it as "irregular and extraordinary" (*A True State* 11). By 1656, however, Nedham realized that the Protectorate was not the balanced republic for which he had hoped, and he repeated his calls from the early 1650s to place power in the people rather than military leaders. Sir Henry Vane praised the army's actions in the Civil War, but he was opposed to the militarized regime of the Protectorate. In *A Healing Question*, Vane attempts to re-unite the broad parliamentary coalition, which he views as being split by the Protectorate. The

Protectorate's power, in Vane's eyes, rested solely on force and not broader consent, an issue that no longer concerned Milton. Such a government was not ideal, as "the sword never can, nor is to be expected ever do this [create harmony], while the sovereignty is admitted and placed anywhere else than in the whole body of the people that have adhered to the cause" (Vane 129). As a loyal member of the Rump, Vane saw its dissolution as an arbitrary act that removed a legitimate government and replaced it with the sword. He could not follow Milton in accepting the actions of armed soldiers against parliament. On the issue of using force for freedom, Milton's position was closer to that of radical elements in the army than that of the English republicans.

Milton's strongest endorsement of an arbitrary political institution is his praise for Oliver Cromwell in *Defensio Secunda*. Since Cromwell's title of Lord Protector was not enshrined in English law the same way that the title king was, some conservative political figures urged him to become king as a means of defining and limiting his power. Bulstrode Whitelocke, Keeper of the Great Seal, argued in favour of kingship because it "is known by the Law of England for many ages, many hundreds of years together received, and the Law fitted to it" (*Monarchy Asserted* 10). Despite the unique nature of his title, Cromwell's power was not unbounded. The Instrument of Government included provisions for a Protectoral Council and it required Cromwell, when parliament was not sitting, to act only "with the majority part of the council" in matters pertaining to the militia and war and peace. When parliament was in session, it also had a role in controlling the militia. In other matters, the Protector had to govern "by the advice of the council" (Gardiner 406). Historians, however, question the degree to which Cromwell's power was, in practice, limited by the Instrument. Many members of the Protectoral Council had long-standing connections to Cromwell, which may have prevented them from acting as a check



on Protectoral power (Hirst “The Lord Protector” 139-40). After analyzing how the Council functioned and the extent to which Cromwell controlled English political matters, Peter Gaunt concludes: “the overwhelming consensus of contemporary opinion, that Cromwell towered over the Protectorate and effectively controlled most aspects of central government, is almost certainly correct in essence” (Gaunt 168).

Although the creation of the Protectorate changed the structure of the English government, Milton continued to serve as Secretary of Foreign Languages and defended the new regime to a European audience in *Defensio Secunda*. Milton’s reason for defending Cromwell has divided scholars, and some question the sincerity of his praise. Worden believes that Milton could support the Protectorate because he was not committed to republican government, but Worden also perceives feelings of doubt and anxiety regarding Cromwell’s character in Milton’s writings (*Literature and Politics* 290, 258). Norbrook, by contrast, detects republican elements in *Defensio Secunda*, as Milton employs “an anti-courtly sublime” in his celebration of Cromwell’s position of power (335). Joad Raymond and Warren Chernaik reject the notion that *Defensio Secunda* contains a coded critique of the Lord Protector and view the tract’s rhetorical mode as simultaneously praising and admonishing Cromwell. They note that Renaissance rhetoric and the panegyric tradition could combine praise, advice, guidance and criticism (Raymond “John Milton, European” 283; Chernaik 118). In an effort to move beyond the question of Milton’s attitude towards Cromwell, Go Togashi argues that it is a mistake to look for consistency in Milton’s writings, and instead contextualizes *Defensio Secunda* with other tracts that engaged with similar issues (217-9). He concludes that Milton positions himself above party politics and occupies the political centre of the mid-1650s (236). This scholarship has done much to draw out the complexities in Milton’s discussion of Cromwell, but to

understand how Milton connects Cromwell to freedom, we must look at *Defensio Secunda* through the lens of Milton's exploration of institutions.

The endorsement of Cromwell in *Defensio Secunda* is consistent with Milton's other commonwealth prose in that it is part of Milton's continuous effort to re-construct the principles of liberty so that they are applicable to a specific moment. Each change in the Interregnum governments forces Milton to reconsider the type of institution he can reconcile with political liberty. This process is one of adaptation rather than radical change, although the adaptation sometimes undermined the very principles of liberty. In the case of the Protectorate, Cromwell's dominance restricts the ability of others to engage politically, but it prompts Milton's praise because the Lord Protector has the potential to reshape a nation that, in Milton's view, was badly in need of being reshaped. Tobias Gregory notes that Milton was not attached to the Rump Parliament in the way that other republicans were and he would have had no scruples about serving a man who frequently dissolved parliaments. Pointing to Milton's various sources of income, Gregory reveals the insufficiency of claiming that Milton served Cromwell only because he was paid; Milton and Cromwell had enough in common that Milton could defend Cromwell with a clean conscience (Gregory "Milton and Cromwell" 58). Gregory focuses on Milton's approval of the limited toleration that Cromwell offered and the Protestant foreign policy of the Protectorate, but the political power that Cromwell wielded also rendered his regime attractive to Milton. Miltonic institutional liberty is tied to practicality, and in the mid-1650s, Cromwell was the most likely person to lead the nation to freedom. In *Defensio Secunda*, Milton transfers all the institutional power with which had previously endowed parliament to Cromwell: "That [liberty] which she [England] once sought from the most distinguished men of the entire nation, she now seeks from you alone and through you alone hopes to achieve" (*CPW* 4.1:673). A

single person can, if it is convenient for Milton's desired result, hold the same institutional power as an assembly.

Since the strongest institution in England in 1654 was a single person rather than an assembly, Milton, in *Defensio Secunda*, abandons his earlier republican rhetoric. While *Eikonoklastes* was clear that the nation could not depend on Charles I and still be considered free, *Defensio Secunda* suggests that England does indeed depend on Cromwell: "Cromwell, we are deserted! You alone remain. On you has fallen the whole burden of our affairs. On you alone they depend" (CPW 4.1:671). Chernaik argues that these lines reflect what Milton perceives as the heavy responsibility on Cromwell and are not an endorsement of single-person rule (118). Milton may not be promoting a specific form of government, but the crucial component of liberty is not the people, but the Lord Protector. The repetition of the word "alone" stresses that Cromwell, and only Cromwell acting by himself, is able to save the nation. Such language renders republicanism incompatible with *Defensio Secunda*. There were republican reasons for supporting the Protectorate, but Milton did not mention them. Unlike Nedham, who defends the Protectorate by pointing to the balance of power established by the Instrument of Government (*A True State* 33), Milton makes no reference to the Instrument and the limits it placed on the Lord Protector. Instead, Milton celebrates the personal greatness of Cromwell, elevating him above not only "our kings, but even the legends of our heroes" (CPW 4.1:672). Milton's willingness to turn to an individual to restore the nation's liberty reveals his lack of commitment to republicanism. The republican rhetoric of *Eikonoklastes* was, for Milton, simply a tool to undermine Charles I. After Cromwell's rise, Milton had no problem returning such rhetoric to the toolbox.

Although he praises Cromwell's greatness, Milton also differentiates him from a monarch. In doing so, however, he still frames Cromwell as an authoritarian figure and reveals his own growing sympathies with strong institutions. Cromwell did not have the same upbringing as monarchs, who were "accustom'd from the Cradle to use thir will onely as thir right hand, thir reason alwayes as thir left" (CW 6:279). Cromwell's early years, by contrast, were defined not by the indulgence of his will, but by "his devotion to the Puritan religion and his upright life" (CPW 4.1:667). Monarchs had "unbridled passion" while Cromwell was "Commander first over himself" (CPW 4.1:387, 668). Milton also repeatedly stresses that Cromwell's title was not king, as Cromwell "rightly" "spurned" "the name of king" and instead "assumed a certain title very like that of father of your country," which in Latin is *pater patriae* (CPW 4.1:672). This title, according to Milton, "forced" Cromwell "into a definite rank, so to speak, for the public good" (CPW 4.1:672), further separating Cromwell from that of the Stuart monarchs who only ruled for their private good. Joad Raymond argues that Milton's reference to Cromwell's title forcing him "into a definite rank" is connected to the Instrument of Government and the limits it imposed on Cromwell ("John Milton, European" 284-5). Milton, however, does not use Cromwell's actual title as it appears in the Instrument, but rather creates a new title for Cromwell. By giving Cromwell a title different from the one outlined in the Instrument, Milton establishes Cromwell's position in terms of the public good and Cromwell's own unique nature rather than the particular details of the Instrument.

The title *pater patriae* suggests that Cromwell is pursuing the "public good" as an authoritarian figure who does not consult with or listen to the people. In the Yale edition of Milton's prose, Don Wolfe states that Milton uses the title *pater patriae* to equate Cromwell with Cicero, who received that title after he thwarted the Catiline conspiracy, while David

Loewenstein connects *pater patriae* to the Roman general Marcus Furius Camillus, the first Roman to receive the title (CPW 4.1:672n.508; Loewenstein “Milton and the Poetics” 187). Cicero and Camillus, however, were not the only Romans to be honoured with the title *pater patriae*. The emperor Augustus also received the title *pater patriae* from the senate in the year 2 BCE. In *Defensio*, Milton criticizes Augustus, who “promised before an assembly that he would give up the principate and obey the laws and commands of others, pretending to refuse the empire, he gradually seized it” (CPW 4.1:444). Milton’s description of Augustus in *Defensio* renders him a tyrant who ensured that “the emperors were not limited by law” (CPW 4.1:444). Interestingly, *Defensio* refers to Augustus as Octavius, his name before becoming emperor. The language in *Defensio Secunda* is less hostile towards Augustus, creating a separation between the scheming, ambitious Octavius, and the wise, prudent Augustus. When he praises Queen Christina of Sweden, Milton refers to her as “Augusta” and proclaims: “your actions declare sufficiently that you are no tyrant” (CPW 4.1:604). Here, Milton connects Augustus to Christina, a virtuous monarch who resists the temptations of tyranny. With regards to Cromwell, Milton, within a few sentences, calls Cromwell “the author of liberty” and asserts that Cromwell “can undertake no more distinguished role and none more august” (CPW 4.1:672). The Latin word that Milton uses is *augustiore* (WJM 8:224), which is the superlative of *augustus*. In describing Cromwell’s importance to liberty, Milton uses an adjective directly related to the name of the Roman emperor. Cromwell is both “the author of liberty” and the most *augustus*, which suggests that he can simultaneously hold unchecked, emperor-like power, and bring liberty to the nation.

Comparisons between Cromwell and Augustus were not uncommon in the 1650s. The poet and civil servant Edmund Waller frames both Augustus and Cromwell as bringing order to an unstable world:

As the vext world to find repose at last  
It self into Augustus Arms did cast:  
So England now, doth with like toyle opprest,  
Her weary head upon your [Cromwell's] bosome rest (Waller 10).

Waller's *Panegyric to My Lord Protector* contains the strongest literary representation of Cromwell as a monarch, but it mixes English monarchical traditions with Roman imperial comparisons to enhance its praise of Cromwell (Woodford *Perceptions* 90-3). In addition to Waller's poem, the University of Oxford published a collection of poems that explore the place of the university within the Cromwellian Protectorate (Cromwell was also the Chancellor at Oxford). The collection includes a Latin poem by John Owen, the university's vice-chancellor, which addresses Cromwell as Augustus.<sup>31</sup> Cromwell's unique position inspired much speculation about the nature of his power and the comparison with Augustus provided supporters of the Lord Protector with a familiar historical figure with whom to associate Cromwell.<sup>32</sup> The title *pater patriae* and the description of Cromwell as *augustiozem* in *Defensio Secunda* contribute to the Augustus comparison. While Milton presents Octavius as a tyrant in *Defensio*, the post-Rump environment prompts him to reassess the value of a strong individual to the cause of liberty.

Although Milton never says that Cromwell is the people, he describes Cromwell's relationship with the English people as being similar to parliament's, further highlighting how Cromwell holds the institutional power of parliament. Milton's verb choices in *Defensio Secunda* suggest that Cromwell's power incorporates the English people: "In unison we acknowledge your [Cromwell's] unexcelled virtue" (*CPW* 4.1:671). The Latin of this phrase is

*insuperabili tuae virtuti credimus concti* (WJM 8:222), and the verb *credere* can also mean to trust in. Walker notes the prominence of the rhetoric of trust in Milton's prose, particularly with regards to the people trusting institutions. As with parliament, the English people put their trust in Cromwell (Walker "Milton's Trust" 250-253). In describing the process of entrusting parliament in *Defensio*, Milton uses a nearly identical verb, *concredere*, when he refers to parliament being entrusted with the safety of the nation (WJM 8:524). Later in *Defensio Secunda*, Milton urges Cromwell to consider "how precious a thing is this liberty," which is "entrusted [*concreditam*] and commended to you by how dear a mother, your native land" (CPW 4.1:673; WJM 8:224). All of these Latin verbs are part of the English discourse of trust (Walker "Milton's Trust" 250-1). If the people put their trust in Cromwell's personal virtue in the same manner that they entrust parliament with their safety, then Milton's depiction endows the Lord Protector, a single person, with "the real power of the people." Such a formulation seeks to have it both ways. It simultaneously elevates a single person above the people while insisting that the people somehow consented to his position and are represented by it. This depiction of Cromwell as a representative institution is divorced from reality, but it is the best Milton can do to accommodate the theory of *The Tenure* with the reality of the Protectorate.

Despite his tribute to the Lord Protector, Milton also suggests that there are limits to Cromwell's institutional liberty. Much of Milton's praise for Cromwell stresses his military achievements, which include "the capture of many cities" and many battles "in which he was never conquered or put to flight" (CPW 4.1:668). In addition to his victories on the battlefield, Cromwell's internal self-control is also militaristic: "Commander first over himself, victor over himself, he had learned to achieve over himself the most effective triumph" (CPW 4.1:668). Cromwell's ability to keep his soldiers "at their duty" and his conquest of himself contribute to

his position of power (*CPW* 4.1:668), but Milton also expresses a scepticism of liberty built solely on military strength. Such liberty is not a long-term solution; it is only a temporary fix. Consequently, Milton appeals to the English nation to seek liberty beyond the force of arms: “Unless your liberty is such as can neither be won nor lost by arms . . . there will not be lacking one who will shortly wrench from you, even without weapons, that liberty which you boast having sought by force of arms” (*CPW* 4.1:680). If Cromwell’s virtue is anchored in his military success and if the force of arms can secure but not maintain liberty, the implication is that Cromwell, by himself, could not provide a lasting liberty. The English people needed to develop the appropriate level of virtue or “no one, not even Cromwell himself, nor a whole tribe of liberating Brutuses, if Brutus were to come to life again, either if they would, or would if they could, free you a second time” (*CPW* 4.1:682). Cromwell and the army had created the conditions to be free, but these conditions would not be permanent unless the English people also took some responsibility for their freedom.

Why does Milton acknowledge the limits of liberty brought about by the force of arms in *Defensio Secunda*, but not in *Defensio*? Why after putting the responsibility on Cromwell “alone” to establish liberty does Milton turn to a segment of the English people at the end of *Defensio Secunda*? Throughout his Commonwealth prose, Milton continually tries to reconcile the process (political participation) and the end (a free commonwealth) of political liberty. Although Milton’s verb choices imply that Cromwell is entrusted in a similar manner to parliament, Milton seems unsure if his reference to Cromwell being entrusted by the nation contains a sufficient amount of popular sovereignty to render it consistent with the principles of *The Tenure*. Consequently, he appeals to his fellow countrymen at the end of *Defensio Secunda* to incorporate an additional popular element into the Protectorate. In the context of the



Protectorate, Milton's compromise between the theory and reality of freedom is to have an institution, even if it is just one man, lead the way in the hope that the people will follow; true popular sovereignty is put on hold until there is sufficient virtue, but it still has a place in the new regime. Milton's lack of faith in the English people renders his attempt to carve out a future role for them unconvincing. Loewenstein reads Milton's address to his fellow countrymen in *Defensio Secunda* as a recognition of the fragility of the new order, as Milton both exhorts the English and anticipates being disappointed by them ("Milton and Poetics" 188). Although Milton assumes that the English people will not live up to his standards, he still feels the need to include them. *Defensio Secunda* presents the most awkward combination of institutional liberty and popular sovereignty in Milton's commonwealth prose, but it also reveals his commitment to continue to articulate to the theory of *The Tenure* despite the authoritarian nature of the Protectorate.

Milton's insistence that few Englishmen were capable of freedom and his willingness to accept the Protectorate put him at odds with many republicans during this period. Nedham recognized that in certain situations, such as the aftermath of a civil war, it was prudent that some members of society should be denied the right to participate in politics. After a Commonwealth had been properly settled, however, Nedham was willing to open up political liberties, so that "the people (without distinction) in as great a latitude" could vote in elections (*The Excellencie* 53). James Harrington went even further and suggested that even royalists needed to participate in government or a commonwealth would become a tyranny. The royalists, according to Harrington, "can neither be justly for that cause [opposing the commonwealth in the past] excluded from his full and equal share in the government" (203). Nedham's populism and

Harrington's reconciliation with royalists stand in stark contrast to Milton's political liberty, which explicitly marginalized the English people.

Additionally, Nedham and Sir Henry Vane were more skeptical about the structure of the Protectorate than Milton. Although he initially applauded the constitution of the Protectorate, Nedham became more critical by 1656 after witnessing the extent to which Cromwell dominated politics. For Nedham, it was essential that the people were the guardians of their own liberty, "because they are most concerned in it" (*The Excellencie* 30), while Milton was willing to depend on the single person Cromwell to defend the nation's liberties. Individuals with great power concerned Nedham, because historically they tended to restrict liberty. In free states, Nedham notes, "it hath bin usual not to suffer particular persons to Grandise, or greater themselves more than ordinary" (*The Excellencie* 84). Even if a man "deserved never so well by good success or service," the state should prevent him "from being too great or popular" (*The Excellencie* 44). Nedham had much more faith in the collective abilities of the whole population than of a single powerful man. Similarly, Vane warns that if a small group was "to assume and engross the office of sovereign rule and power, and to impose themselves as the competent public judge of the safety and good of the whole ... this is the anarchy that is the first rise and step to tyranny ... [and] introduces the highest imposition and bondage upon the whole body" (130). Milton's political liberty permitted a wise and virtuous small group or even a single individual to pursue liberty, even if the bulk of the nation objected. Republicans such as Nedham and Vane were suspicious of such claims, and viewed governments built on these principles as a form of bondage.

Milton's commonwealth prose marks the first clear separation of political and religious liberty in his writings. Religious liberty continues to reflect the skepticism regarding institutions

in Milton's early prose, but with greater emphasis on those religions that are not tolerated. Additionally, Milton's enthusiasm for touting parliament's efforts to suppress heresy leads to arguments that justify coercive institutional control over certain religious groups. While modern readers may shudder at the accommodation of anti-Catholic bigotry with religious liberty, Milton presents these concepts as consistent. Milton's celebration of the persecution of Catholics undermines his definition of religious liberty, and his preference for military institutions over elections causes similar complications for his political liberty. After he establishes the theoretical basis for political liberty in *The Tenure*, all of Milton's subsequent prose tracts are bound to this theory. The political realities, however, render it difficult to label any of the regimes that employed Milton as expressions of popular sovereignty. This difficulty, however, did not stop Milton from finding popular elements in the Commonwealth and Protectorate. The commonwealth prose strains Miltonic freedom as these tracts promote religious and political liberty as well as bigotry and authoritarian dictatorships. Milton's writings attempt to unify all these ideas, but the further the English Revolution progressed, the more difficult this becomes, particularly with political liberty. As the Restoration approached, Milton continued to struggle with the contradictions in freedom and drew an even stronger separation between religious and political liberty.

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<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of how other English republicans apply Skinner's neo-Roman liberty to religion, see Justin Champion, "Some Forms of Religious Liberty: Political Thinking, Ecclesiology and Religious Freedom in Early Modern England," 56-7.

<sup>20</sup> For different perspectives on English republicanism, see J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, Blair Worden, "Republicanism, Regicide and Republic: The English Experience," and Jonathan Scott, *Commonwealth Principles: Republican Writing and the English Revolution*.

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the writing of *Eikon Basilike*, see Wilcher, *The Writing of Royalism, 1628-1660*, 279-281.

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<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of Milton's attitude toward Ireland and its place within the British Isles, see Walter Lim, *John Milton, Radical Politics, and Biblical Republicanism*, 53-63, and Elizabeth Sauer, *Milton, Toleration, and Nationhood*, 53-63.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Dobranski responds to attempts to minimize Milton's work as licenser by arguing that both *Areopagitica* and Milton's work as a licenser reflect historical circumstances. *Areopagitica* attacked Presbyterian licensers because their efforts to control the press would limit the radical sects, with whom Milton sympathized. The year 1649, conversely, presented Milton with an opportunity to serve the Commonwealth and use his position as licenser to ensure the government's success (Dobranski 136-7).

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of this evidence, see Dobranski, *Milton, Authorship, and the Book Trade*, 131-2.

<sup>25</sup> The surviving records do not indicate that Milton ever refused a license, but his responsibilities suggest that he was complicit in the government's attempts to silence its opponents (Dobranski 126-7).

<sup>26</sup> Many of these examples reappear in Milton's other commonwealth prose tracts, but Milton sometimes expands on them to accommodate his changing audience. For example, both *The Tenure* and *Defensio* refer to Ehud killing Eglon in the Old Testament, but *Defensio*, which targets a European audience, explicitly links these events to England: "The children of Israel cried unto the Lord"; and we too have cried. The Lord raised them up a deliverer for them, and for us too" (CPW 4.1:401). Many English readers would have reflexively seen parallels between ancient Israel and England, but Milton makes the connection clear for European readers in *Defensio*.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion on the ideological difference between regicide and republicanism, see Sarah Barber, *Regicide and Republicanism*.

<sup>28</sup> The English Commonwealth did create its own system of press control, but, as mentioned above, Milton himself was the official licenser.

<sup>29</sup> For contemporary accounts of Cromwell's expulsion of the Rump, see Edmund Ludlow, *Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow, Esq*, 174 and "Venice: May 1653." *Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, Volume 29, 1653-1654*.

<sup>30</sup> Blair Worden argues that Milton's concerns regarding elections at the end of *Defensio Secunda* refer to the end of the Rump rather than the beginning of the Protectorate, and were likely written shortly before the dissolution of the Rump. See Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England*, 278-81.

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of how Owen's poem engages with the complexities and ambiguities of the Protectorate, see Holberton, *Poetry and the Cromwellian Protectorate*, 84-5.

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<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of the range of reactions to Cromwell's power, see Benjamin Woodford, *Perceptions of a Monarchy without a King: Reactions to Oliver Cromwell's Power*.

### Chapter 3

## The Late Prose: Institutional Freedom and Freedom from Institutions

Milton's late prose reflects the same principles as his commonwealth tracts, but the difference between religious and political freedom is even clearer. Religious freedom still involves a lack of institutional control, with the church only using persuasion that works with rather than against the individual conscience. There is, however, a greater emphasis on the individual Christian following his conscience, particularly in *De Doctrina Christiana*, which places the individual above all institutions, including the church. No longer employed by a government that was unsure how much religious liberty it desired, Milton allows his late prose to embrace the full implications of freedom from coercive institutions. In terms of political freedom, Milton continues to advocate for strong institutions, but he provides more details about the structure of the ideal commonwealth. Milton's commonwealth involves a perpetual parliament that cannot be removed and requires citizens to undergo an extensive education (which borders on indoctrination) before they can participate in politics. Although this commonwealth restricts voting and renders the government unaccountable to the people, Milton still considers it free. As in his commonwealth prose, Milton struggles to combine the theory of popular sovereignty with the reality of authoritarian institutions. This process becomes more strained in Milton's late prose, and ultimately collapses in April 1660 when there are no longer any institutions that can create the conditions for Miltonic political liberty. In this situation, Miltonic political liberty becomes impossible, as the theory no longer has a practical application.

Much of the scholarly work around Milton's late prose centres on the extent to which he maintained his earlier commitment to liberty as the chaos prompted him to consider authoritarian solutions. Norbrook admits that the limits that Milton places on who can participate in politics

make for “grim reading,” but he still insists that Milton, through his attacks on the rule of a single person, maintains republican language (412-3). Paul Stevens better captures the complexities of Milton’s late prose when he notes that Milton both desires not to be mastered and idealizes power that protects one from being mastered (“Lament” 606). Milton, in Stevens’ account, espouses republican ideals while also advocating for forms of government that are contrary to those ideals. William Walker, who questions whether Milton should be labeled a republican, is even more pessimistic about the extent of civil liberty in Milton’s late writings. He views *The Readie and Easie Way* as expressing distrust for the English people and, consequently, denying them civil freedoms (“Milton’s Trust” 255). Blair Hoxby rejects these bleak perspectives and argues that freedom of choice, which was so prominent in Milton’s early works, is still present in his late prose, but in a different context. Hoxby’s analysis focuses on the federal system for which Milton advocated, as it allows people to move about the country and choose which type of local government they prefer (83-4). A few scholars note the difference in how Milton approaches religion and politics in his late prose. For Feisal Mohamed, Milton’s focus in 1659-60 is on securing liberty for a religiously enlightened minority; he was no longer concerned with civil society or institutions that limited active political citizens. Consequently, Milton accepted governments that restricted political liberty to preserve religious liberty (Mohamed *Milton and the Post-Secular* 77-9).<sup>33</sup> Although Mohamed is correct to point to the difference between religious and political liberty, Milton turns to strong institutions because he still cares about political liberty, not because he has abandoned political liberty to focus on religious liberty. In Milton’s view, the authoritarian institutions that he endorses in his late prose do not restrict political liberty, as Mohamed claims; they create it through coercive means. These institutions, however, have no place in Miltonic religious liberty.

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In 1659 Milton directed his tract *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes*, which centres on religious liberty, to Richard Cromwell's parliament. The fact that Milton turned to parliament to defend religious liberty rather than the Lord Protector (as he had done with Oliver Cromwell in 1654) has prompted some scholars to speculate on whether or not Milton's opinion of Oliver Cromwell and the Protectorate changed during this period.<sup>34</sup> There were aspects of Richard's Protectorate that would have troubled Milton and potentially convinced him that Richard was not the man to lead England to religious freedom. Richard tended to associate with conservative Cromwellians who were hostile to the radical religious sects. In the months before he called parliament, Richard and his privy council pursued a conservative religious policy, maintaining the components of the Cromwellian state church (Hutton 25). The succession of Richard also marked a shift toward hereditary monarchy. After the kingship crisis of 1657, the Instrument of Government was replaced with the Humble Petition and Advice, which provided Cromwell with the power to select his own successor (Gardiner 449). This power did not guarantee that Cromwell would be succeeded by his eldest son, but it did remove the elective nature of the Lord Protector's successor. Milton's praise for Cromwell in 1654 included Cromwell's decision not to rule as king, while Milton's late prose repeatedly criticizes monarchy on the grounds that it is hereditary. In 1659, the Protectorate had all the trappings of a hereditary monarchy, the primary institutional obstacle to Miltonic religious and political liberty.

The composition of Richard Cromwell's parliament might also have convinced Milton that these particular MPs were willing to consider his version of religious liberty. Thomas Corns suggests that Milton saw in Richard's parliament an assembly that was engaged in rational



debate and whose position was close to his own (*Uncloistered* 270). More importantly for Milton, many MPs in Richard's parliament lacked both experience and political affiliation. In the election for Richard's parliament, the electoral reforms of the Protectorate were abolished, and the country returned to what Ronald Hutton calls the "traditional higgledly-piggledy form" of elections (27). There were now more borough seats than in Oliver Cromwell's two parliaments, which both the government and its opponents believed were easy to control. Although government and republican opposition candidates won seats in Richard Cromwell's parliament, the bulk of the MPs were gentry and urban leaders with no obvious political affiliation (Hutton 28). The fact that so many MPs were inexperienced and unaffiliated presented Milton with an opportunity. Without any clear allegiances, these MPs might be open to Milton's arguments regarding religious liberty. Hence, he chose to address them in *A Treatise of Civil Power* before their opinions hardened.

As he appeals to parliament in *A Treatise of Civil Power*, Milton, more explicitly than in any of his other prose tracts, describes religious liberty as freedom from institutional coercion. Susanne Woods views Milton as employing the simple techniques of definition and repetition to educate his readers so that they can make choices ("Elective Poetics" 200). Repetition also pushes institutions out of the search for religious truth. First, Milton stresses that Protestants have "no other divine rule or authoritie from without ... but the holy scripture," and "no other within us but the illumination of the Holy Spirit" (*CPW* 7:242). Both "without" and "within" Christians there is only one source of "authoritie," "no" others are permitted. With authority lying solely in an individual's interpretation of the scripture as guided by the holy spirit, "no man, no synod, no session of men, though called the church, can judge definitively the sense of scripture to another mans conscience" (*CPW* 7:247-8). The word "no" strips all institutions of

any power and authority in religion, sealing off the individual Christian conscience and the scriptures from all external power. Milton's inclusion of "man," "synod," and "session of men, though called the church" prevents institutions from restructuring or re-naming themselves to gain power over Christians' conscience. Milton removes any loopholes by which an institution can assume authority beyond its jurisdiction. Religion becomes about restricting what and who is involved.

In addition to the series of negatives in *A Treatise of Civil Power*, the repetition of the word "infallible" highlights the limited ability of institutions and draws unfavourable connections to the papacy. Milton labels the Pope the antichrist because "he assumes to himself this infallibilitie over both the conscience and the scripture" (*CPW* 7:244). Milton's target is the papacy, but he is equally critical of Protestant churches that make claims to infallibility. Church governors "cannot infallibly determin to the conscience without convincement, much less have civil magistrates authoritie to use force where they can much less judge" (*CPW* 7:246). Far from desiring magistrates to be involved in religion, as Walker contends (*Antiformalist, Unrevolutionary* 146), Milton underscores magistrates' inability to see into someone else's conscience and know if they are being truthful: "no men or body of men in these times can be the infallible judges or determiners in matters of religion to any other mens conscience but thir own" (*CPW* 7:243). Even those who were the "most intelligent and authentic" in religious matters were not "unerring always or infallible" (*CPW* 7:247). The repetition of "infallible" mocks papal authority while transforming Protestant institutions that seek to control the consciences of Christians into papal knock-offs. Since no institution is "infallible," no institution can compel a Christian's conscience.

As with his early prose, church discipline is part of reaching the appropriate end of a Christian. Graham notes that although *A Treatise of Civil Power* shifts the focus of church discipline from admonition to the search for truth, the tract continues to promote a form of discipline that allows the church to make disciplinary judgements while simultaneously protecting the individual Christian's right to hold his own beliefs (146-7). Throughout *A Treatise of Civil Power*, Milton incorporates the individual and church into his religious freedom. At some moments, the individual appears to stand above the entire congregation: "He then who to his best apprehension follows the scripture, though against any point in doctrine by the whole church receivd, is not the heretic" (*CPW* 7:248). The church cannot compel any member to change his conscience, but it can excommunicate him. While a member is excommunicated, the church can reach out continuously to him, but an excommunicated member who is "intractable, incurable, and will not hear the church," will face "the final sentence of that judge, whose coming shall be in flames and fire" (*CPW* 7:269-70). *A Treatise of Civil Power* simultaneously celebrates the dissenting individual who follows his conscience rather than congregational pressure and requires individuals to be part of a church if they hope to reach the final goal of all Christians. Milton gives individual Christians the freedom to form their beliefs and practice their faith without institutional coercion, but in cases of excommunication, he seems to question the validity of the individual member's position. An excommunicated member is not lost because the church has the ability to correct the errors that prevent salvation, but this rehabilitation involves both the church and the individual. By placing more emphasis on the individual Christians than Milton did in his earlier tracts, *A Treatise of Civil Power* presents religious freedom as a partnership of the individual and institution in which the power of both is respected.

Even within the framework of church discipline, Milton trusts that each individual Christian conscience is doing its best to understand and follow God's will. Victoria Silver analyzes Milton's arguments for toleration in *A Treatise of Civil Power* in terms of the legal language of equity. An equitable understanding of a person's conscience would take into account circumstance and intent, not strict categories of orthodoxy. According to Silver, Milton protects conscience on the grounds of probability, meaning what usually happens under certain circumstances. Since all Protestants view the scriptures as interpreted by one's conscience as the highest authority, and since no one can know another person's conscience with certainty, one can assume that someone is following their conscience under certain circumstances (Silver 163-6). Silver's framework of equity is a useful lens to view Milton's religious liberty, as he consistently gives the benefit of the doubt to the individual Christian rather than institutions, with excommunication being the one exception. Even if a belief appeared to be an error in the eyes of civil or ecclesiastical authorities, they had no right to compel an individual to change his mind: "though to others he seems erroneous, [he] can no more be justly censur'd for a heretic than his censurers" (*CPW* 7:248). With liberty that privileges the individual over an institution, there is always the possibility of poor choices and errors, but Milton asserts that God accepts all the consequences that accompanied such liberty. God, being all-knowing, is aware of the potential for abuses and mistakes, "yet knowing all their worst, he gave us this liberty as by him judged best" (*CPW* 7:270). Humanity would inevitably err, but God still believes that the liberty to follow one's own conscience was preferable to institutional compulsion. Since God trusts humanity with such liberty, Milton believes that institutions should do so as well.

Despite his acceptance of some errors, Miltonic religious liberty continues to have limits. As with Milton's other tracts, Catholicism is not tolerated in *A Treatise of Civil Power* on the

grounds the conscience of Catholics “becoms implicit; and so by voluntarie servitude to mans law, forfeits her Christian libertie” (*CPW* 7:254). Milton continually frames his refusal to tolerate Catholics as consistent with religious liberty, citing Catholics’ acceptance of the “servitude” of the Pope rather than the freedom of the gospel. Woods argues that although Milton’s framework allows one to reject God’s call to liberty, to do so, one must engage in the conscious choosing that enacts Miltonic liberty (“Elective Poetics” 202). Woods’ formulation suggests that when Catholics choose to submit to papal authority, they are participating in Miltonic freedom in the moment of choosing. Yet free choice in Miltonic religious liberty can only apply to mistaken Protestants, not Catholics. Miltonic religious freedom protects the individual conscience from institutional coercion under the assumption that when they are free, Christians will listen to their conscience rather than any human authority. Unlike Protestants, Catholics do not, in Milton’s eyes, deserve the benefit of the doubt because they clearly are not following their consciences. With Catholics, Milton questions: “Who can plead for such a conscience, as being implicitly enthrald to man instead of God, almost becomes no conscience, as the will not free, becomes no will” (*CPW* 7:254). Choosing to follow the Pope, in Milton’s framework, is not a free act because it follows a man rather than one’s conscience and results in the loss of one’s conscience. Miltonic religious freedom consists of both the ability to follow one’s conscience without institutional coercion and subsequently choosing to obey God through one’s conscience. Woods views Miltonic freedom exclusively in terms of choice, but Milton also ties freedom to a specific end, namely following one’s conscience as informed by the holy spirit. Miltonic freedom involves both a means and an end; in the case of religion, the means is a lack of institutional control, but one still must reach the appropriate end to be free.

Although Miltonic religious freedom is more than just choice, *A Treatise of Civil Power* expands on the role of choice in relation to God. As in Milton's early prose, *A Treatise of Civil Power* points to differences between the Old and New Testament and connects bondage to childhood, but the later tract also revises the filial metaphor. Referring to the era of the Mosaic Law, Milton in *A Treatise of Civil Power* notes: "then was the state of rigor, childhood, bondage and works" (CPW 7:259). The Gospel, comparatively, "is the state of grace, manhood, freedom, and faith" (CPW 7:259). Milton differentiates the state of "childhood" under the law from the "manhood" of the Gospel, but he still presents the Gospel as expressing a filial relationship. Milton draws on a passage from Galatians, in which Paul refers to the Israelites being "children" and "in bondage," but the arrival of Christ rendered it possible to "receive the adoption of sons" (CPW 7:264-5). The status of an adopted son becomes essential for freedom: "if we be not free we are not sons, but still servants unadopted" (CPW 7:265). A few sentences later, Milton refers to "the spirit of adoption to freedom" (CPW 7:265). As adopted sons, Christians have freedom, while the "children" under the Mosaic Law were in bondage. The process of adoption involves choice. A parent chooses to adopt a child. In the case of *A Treatise of Civil Power*, God freely chooses to offer grace to people so that they can become his sons, but the choice does not stop there. People must also freely choose to accept God's grace. After quoting Galatians, Milton's text is full of conditionals that express humanity's choice in accepting God's adoption: "if we turn again to those beggarly rudiments;" "if for the spirit of adoption to freedom, promised us, we receive again the spirit of bondage of fear;" "if our fear which was then servile towards God only, must now be servile in religion towards men" (CPW 7:265). The process of adoption that Milton presents is unique in that both the parent and child must freely choose to accept the new

relationship. With the Gospel, the free love and grace of the adoptive parent replaces the strict rules and punishments of the biological parent.

While *A Treatise of Civil Power* addresses the relationship between civil institutions and religious freedom, *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means* explores the institution of the church itself. As with political institutions in his commonwealth prose, Milton was concerned with the personnel of religious institutions. In the religious sphere, however, the solution to this problem lay in the broader congregation rather than powerful institutions (like the army). Religious freedom involves not only choosing to join a church, but also choosing the officers of the church as well: “to barr them [the congregation] thir choise [of minister] is to violate Christian liberty” (*CPW* 7:301). At first glance, Milton’s belief that religious liberty involves choosing ministers appears similar to his commitment to popular sovereignty in political liberty. The difference is that in the religious realm Milton makes no efforts to transfer this popular element to an institution or direct Christians how to select their ministers; he seems to trust the individual Christians to make a wise choice. Part of the reason that Milton did not offer guidance on the selection of ministers was the simplicity of Christianity when compared with politics. Milton insisted that “the Christian religion may be so easily attained, and by the meanest capacities,” and he described “Logic, natural Philosophie, Ethics or Mathematics” as being “more difficult” to obtain than “Christian knowledge” (*CPW* 7:303, 302). A complex education was not required to understand Christianity, therefore even “the meanest” could attain knowledge of religion and participate in choosing a minister. Milton envisions a much broader group engaging in religion than politics, as all decisions regarding the staffing of the church lay with the congregation.

As the Restoration approached, Milton continued to present his vision of religious liberty in *The Readie and Easie Way*. Norbrook stresses that *The Readie and Easie Way* links religious liberty to republican government, as only a republic can protect liberty of conscience (414). Norbrook is correct that *The Readie and Easie Way* is unambiguous in associating monarchy with religious oppression, but this may reflect Milton's desire to terrify his readers with the horrors of a Stuart restoration. Some of Milton's other late prose in fact suggest that monarchs could protect religious freedom (see below). According to *The Readie and Easie Way*, however, Monarchs were "full of fears, full of jealousies, startl'd at every ombrage," and "have most in doubt and suspicion them who are most reputed religious" (CW 6:515). Milton then proceeds to provide an example from England's history of a monarch who limited religious freedom. In choosing an example, Milton had many options. He could have easily returned to Charles I's religious policies, as he had done in *Eikonoklastes*, but instead he selected a much more beloved monarch, Elizabeth I. Milton notes that "Queen Elizabeth though her self accounted so good a Protestant," still "imprisond and persecuted the very proposers [of reformation]" (CW 6:515). Milton's decision to point to a popular queen as an example of a monarch suppressing religious liberty enhances his argument. If a monarch who was "a good Protestant" "persecuted" reformers, "what liberty of conscience can we then expect of others, far worse principl'd from the cradle, traird up and governd by Popish and Spanish counsels" (CW 6:515)? Milton's point is not that there are some evil Catholic monarchs who threaten religious liberty, it is that even the best and most Protestant monarchs will restrict religious liberty. His attack is not on specific monarchs, but on the institution of monarchy, which causes whoever wears the crown to be suspicious of true religious reformers.



Milton's lengthiest exploration of Christianity lies in *De Doctrina Christiana*. Since it was never published, dating *De Doctrina* is difficult. Milton likely began it in 1658, but the extent to which he continued to work on it in the Restoration is unknown. Gordon Campbell and Thomas Corns argue that Milton abandoned *De Doctrina* around the time of the Restoration, as many supporters of Interregnum governments began hiding their papers in the early 1660s. Once the king was restored, state officials seized the manuscripts of the republican writers James Harrington and Algernon Sidney. Milton may have feared a similar fate, knowing that the heterodox views in *De Doctrina* would be used against him in a trial (Corns and Campbell "*De Doctrina*" 426-7). Situating *De Doctrina* in the final years of the English Commonwealth, Campbell and Corns assert that the manuscript "memorializes an England that might have been," as it presents a vision of Christianity that includes broad toleration, the exploration of all theological views, and no interference from civil magistrates ("*De Doctrina*" 435). The connection between *De Doctrina* and Milton's vision for England is tenuous, as Milton likely intended the Latin manuscript to be read by continental theologians rather than submitted to an English government for consideration in public policy; nevertheless, Campbell and Corns present a convincing argument as to why Milton would be reluctant to work on *De Doctrina* during the early years of the Restoration. Given the length of *De Doctrina*, however, Milton may have returned to it after the initial political tensions surrounding the Restoration had died down.

Of all of Milton's prose works, *De Doctrina* represents a unique case. It is not a polemical tract that engages with the current political or religious context, but rather Milton's own exploration of Christianity. The title *De Doctrina Christiana* quotes the title of a work by St. Augustine, connecting Milton's work to a long tradition of Christian theology. In *De Doctrina*, Milton is eager to pursue religious truth, but he is specific regarding how religious

truth is to be sought. The guiding force must be “each person’s firm belief,” that is, the individual Christian conscience (*CW* 8.1:9). Schools, by contrast, were useless in religious matters: “One must seek this doctrine, therefore, not from the schools of those who philosophize, nor from human laws, but solely from the sacred writings, with the holy spirit as his guide” (*CW* 8.1:19). Michael Lieb interprets Milton’s criticism of schools as a means of separating the approach of *De Doctrina*, which centres on the scriptures, from that of seventeenth-century universities, which was based on philosophical reasoning (*Theological* 46). Milton’s attitude towards educational institutions illustrates the difference in religious and political liberty that had emerged by the end of his career. Effective political elections hinged on a proper education. The only way, according to *The Readie and Easie Way*, “To make the people fittest to chuse [MPs], and the chosen fittest to govern, will be to amend our corrupt and faulty education” (*CW* 6:501). Schools and formal education lay at the centre of political freedom, but they hindered religious freedom by preventing the “holy spirit” from guiding each Christian. Since the “holy spirit” dwelled in each Christian and provided him with sufficient guidance, Milton insists: “every single one of the faithful has the right of interpreting the scriptures, of interpreting them for himself, I mean” (*CW* 8.1:805). As in the *Likeliest Means*, Milton in *De Doctrina* stresses the ability of all Christians to acquire religious knowledge without the formal education that lay at the heart of political freedom.

The presence of the holy spirit in each Christian, however, did not mean that Christians could not derive any benefit from the proper institutions. Milton’s ideal church uses discipline to exercise some direction over the congregation, but it does so in a manner that enhanced the spiritual lives of all its members. Disciplinary activities included “supporting and treating gently the weak or even lapsed” members, “resolving disagreements among the brethren,” and “warning

or publicly reproofing those who offended more seriously” (CW 8.2:859, 861). All of these aspects of discipline prevent troublesome members and disagreements between members from disrupting the spiritual life of the congregation. Such discipline is necessary for managing large groups of Christians to ensure that “everything at its [the church’s] meetings [is performed] decently and in order” (CW 8.2:855). An individual Christian who was not part of a church did not require discipline because he could worship “decently and in order” alone, as he would never fall into disagreement with himself. In a large congregation, however, administrative mechanisms were necessary to maintain order so that members of the congregation are free to follow their conscience without disruption. Sizable congregations could not experience religious freedom without some level of discipline. Since, however, all particular churches were entered into voluntarily, one could leave a church and its system of discipline at any time. Consequently, religious freedom did not require institutional involvement from the church, nor did such action in particular churches limit the religious freedom of its members.

The one form of discipline which neither the church nor civil magistrates could practice was physical coercion. No institution, in Miltonic freedom, could ever compel the conscience of the individual Christian. There was no jurisdiction for “the execution of magistrates’ edicts such that by them the faithful may be coerced, or else stripped of any part of their freedom ... If a magistrate removes this freedom, he removes the Gospel itself” (CW 8.2:723). Milton viewed the church in similar terms: “all external coercion must be absent from the kingdom of Christ, which is the church” (CW 8.1:505). These two statements regarding “coercion” use different Latin words, but the sentiment is identical. In the case of the magistrates, Milton employs the verb *cogere*, which means to compel to do something, sometimes with reference to military force. When discussing the church, Milton seeks to prevent the church from using *vis*, which

means force or power, again often in a military context. Milton denies both the magistrates and the church the type of forceful power associated with the army. While Milton's proposals for political freedom include using the army to erect forcibly a commonwealth, religious liberty is defined by the absence of such force.

Although the church is involved in religious freedom through the use of discipline, *De Doctrina*, more so than any of Milton's other prose, elevates the individual above the church. Milton defines the universal church as all those who worship either in groups or individually (CW 8.2:781). One can be disassociated with all religious institutions, yet still belong to the universal church: "Although it is the duty of each of the faithful to join a correctly instituted church if that can be done ... yet those who cannot do that conveniently or with a fully informed conscience are not for that reason excluded from or destitute of the blessing imparted to the churches" (CW 8.2:781). By placing individuals who are not part of a particular church within the universal church, *De Doctrina* goes further than *A Treatise of Civil Power* in valuing the individual. Milton might have been more comfortable articulating a position that elevated the individual Christian above the church in a Latin text that targeted an educated audience. The content of *De Doctrina* may also have motivated Milton to allow individuals to refrain from joining a particular church while remaining a part of the universal church. *De Doctrina* expresses numerous heterodox positions, including antitrinitarianism.<sup>35</sup> It would have been difficult for a Christian who held all the heterodox beliefs in *De Doctrina* to become a member of a particular church in England "with a fully informed conscience." *De Doctrina* recognizes that some beliefs, although reflective of a person's conscience, prevent membership in particular churches. This recognition frees Christians from any type of religious institutional oversight, thus enabling them to seek salvation without institutional membership.

*De Doctrina* perhaps best reflects Milton's private thoughts on religious freedom, but his late public writings convey a similar perspective. *Of True Religion* continues to advocate for religious freedom, defined by a lack of interference from institutions, but Milton alters the framework to suit the current political climate. Milton published *Of True Religion* in 1673, at a time when England was gripped with fears of Catholicism. A year earlier, Charles II had issued the Declaration of Indulgence, which suspended the laws that penalized Roman Catholics and dissenters. The Declaration of Indulgence was part of a broad effort by Charles, whose military setbacks caused him to feel vulnerable, to re-structure the Restoration settlement (Scott *England's* 426-9). Charles' actions in the early 1670s concerned many MPs who feared that he planned to bring both Catholicism and arbitrary government to England. Although the Restoration returned monarchy to England, Jonathan Scott detects republican intellectual currents (sometimes in exile) throughout the 1660s, which expanded as tensions increased in the early 1670s. Many republican tracts from this period invoked the natural right to resistance when government infringed upon liberties (Scott *England's* 365-72). Milton, however, avoids resistance discourse and political liberties, choosing instead to focus on religious freedom in *Of True Religion*.

With anti-Catholic sentiment sweeping across the nation, Milton, no longer convinced that religious liberty was impossible under monarchy, calls for unity among Protestants of all denominations so that they can defeat Catholicism. Corns and Campbell note changes in both the style and message of *Of True Religion*. The writing in *Of True Religion* is simpler, reflecting Milton's desire to reach a broad audience. Milton also focuses on the few general principles on which all Protestants, even strict Anglicans, could agree, rather than the controversial theology of *De Doctrina* (Corns and Campbell *John Milton* 367-8). Similarly, Sauer refers to Milton as a

“Protestant coalitionist” who points to the common history among all Protestants (“Milton’s *Of True*” 8). Stevens argues that *Of True Religion* reveals significant optimism in Milton, as Milton views the English people as undergoing a regeneration (“Milton and National Identity” 345). Milton does convey a sense of hope in *Of True Religion*, as the recent anti-Catholic sentiment in England gave him cause to believe that Protestant unity was possible. At the same time, however, Milton is silent on political matters. The political system in the early 1670s, with the Stuarts on the throne, was one in which, Milton believed, political freedom was impossible, and he, unlike some republicans who advocated for resistance, expresses no confidence that the government would change any time soon. Yet, even in this dark political moment, Milton could still see the potential for religious freedom.

Milton’s positivity about religion represents a shift from *The Readie and Easie Way*, which insists that monarchs would inevitably restrict religious liberty. Some of Milton’s other late writings also suggest that he no longer tied religious liberty exclusively to a commonwealth. In addition to the optimism for spiritual regeneration in *Of True Religion*, Milton’s *History* also points to early British monarchs who respected religious liberty. Ethelbert, for example, understood that the “Christian Religion ought to be voluntary, not compell’d” (*CPW* 5.1:189). At the heart of Miltonic religious liberty was a lack of coercion from institutions in matters of faith. By the early 1670s, Milton could at least imagine a monarch adhering to these principles.

Milton opens *Of True Religion* with an argument for Protestant unity based on religious liberty. This section reiterates many points in his other prose tracts, but in this instance Milton does not discuss the role of civil magistrates, but rather Protestants compelling Protestants of a different sect. *Of True Religion* explores how the institutions within the Protestant religion can violate religious liberty when Protestants forget their principles. Milton defines Protestants as

believing that “true Religion is the Word of God only” and that faith should not be implicit, meaning that Protestants should not follow an idea simply because an authority tells them to do so; one’s conscience must be convinced before accepting a belief (*CPW* 8:420). Beyond these two defining points, there can be sects within the true church without “the breaking of Communion” (*CPW* 8:422). Some Protestants may err, but error results from “misunderstanding the Scripture after all sincere endeavours to understand it rightly,” not deliberately ignoring the scriptures (*CPW* 8:423). Consequently, God would not abandon those Protestants who studied the scriptures, even if they were mistaken in their reading of them (*CPW* 8:424). Compelling someone’s faith should be, Milton asserts, particularly repellent to Protestants, as such compulsion changes a person’s faith to “implicit faith” (*CPW* 8:421). Since both “implicit faith” and forcing someone to act against his conscience are contrary to the essential tenets of Protestantism, such action violates the conscience of both the compeller and compelled: “how unequal, how uncharitable must it needs be, to Impose that which his conscience cannot urge him to impose, upon him whose conscience forbids him to obey” (*CPW* 8:428). Religious compulsion becomes the antithesis of Protestantism.

The second section of *Of True Religion* turns to the dangers of Catholicism, specifically its institutionalized salvation. Catholicism was spreading in England, according to Milton, because the people were looking for an easy means of salvation. An institutionalized system of salvation was, to some people, appealing, as it offered “easy Confession, easy Absolution, Pardons, Indulgences, Masses for him both quick and dead, *Agnus Dei*’s, Reliques, and the like” (*CPW* 8:439). The Catholic Church had developed a complex series of actions to guarantee salvation, but for Milton, such a system lacked individualization. He did not want Christians to rely on a set formula for salvation; rather, the true Christian should be “Working out his

salvation with fear and trembling” (CPW 8:439). The “fear and trembling” that Milton associates with salvation are individual experiences that no institutional rituals could produce. Milton expresses frustration with the English people in the Restoration for not taking enough ownership over their salvation, and instead delegating it to the institutions of the Catholic Church. Many Englishmen “through unwillingness to take the pains of understanding their Religion by their own diligent study, would fain be sav’d by a Deputy” (CPW 8:434). No “Deputy” could achieve a person’s salvation, the individual Christian had to put in the necessary work. In some ways, Milton’s attack on Catholicism is similar to modern critiques of the welfare state, namely that it provides free handouts rather than inspiring hard work. *Of True Religion* makes few specific references to religious freedom, but the tract’s critique of Catholicism further differentiates Catholicism’s institutionalized salvation, which is based on implicit faith, from Protestantism’s church discipline, which works with and respects an individual’s conscience.

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With the breakdown in order that followed the collapse of the Protectorate in 1659, Milton returned to the topic of political settlement. Richard Cromwell succeeded his father as Lord Protector in September 1658, but, unlike his father, he could not manage the army effectively and the Protectorate collapsed in the spring of 1659. In aftermath of the Protectorate, the army restored the Rump Parliament to power, but it only ruled until October 1659 when tensions with the army prompted Major-General John Lambert to dissolve the Rump. The urgency and chaos of these months caused Milton to be even more committed to using institutions to secure freedom, as only institutions could be trusted during political uncertainty, particularly when the shadow of a Stuart restoration hung over England. Gregory argues that Milton’s tracts from 1659-60 are “improvisational lobbying” rather than political theory, as



Milton explored a variety of means to prevent the return of the Stuarts (“Milton and Cromwell” 61). Although Gregory is correct that Milton does not produce anything resembling a coherent political philosophy in these years, these writings consistently stress the importance of institutions in securing political liberty in the face of popular resistance, but with an even greater strain on the relationship between institutional liberty and popular sovereignty than his commonwealth prose.

The two institutions on which Milton focuses in his late prose are parliament and the army. Milton wrote *A Letter to a Friend* after the army dissolved the Rump in October 1659, but he looked back on the return of the Rump in the spring of 1659 as a joyful time: “God was pleased with their [the Rump’s] restitution, signing it as he did, with such a signall victory, when so great a part of the nation were desperately conspir’d to call back again their Egyptian bondage” (CW 6:447). The institution of the Rump was a safeguard against “Egyptian bondage,” as only it could prevent the broader population from following its natural inclinations and recalling the Stuarts. This brief work does not refer to the Rump as embodying the political nation, and Milton seems more interested in achieving a commonwealth than in even pretending to incorporate popular sovereignty. Liberty depends not on the people, but on being “able to cement & unite for ever the Army either to the parlament recall’d, or this chosen councill” so that they are “not to desert one another till death” (CW 6:449). Reviving the institutional alliance between parliament and the army is, given the political circumstances, more important for liberty than broad political participation.

Although he continues to discuss the importance of the army in creating freedom, Milton sometimes expresses contempt for the army’s actions in his late prose. Most notably, despite the fact that he celebrated the forced dissolution of the Rump in 1653, Milton criticizes the army for

dissolving the Rump in 1659, calling the dissolution “Barbarous” in *A Letter to a Friend* (CW 6:448). Milton’s perception of the army’s motives for intervening in politics in 1659 explains his shift in attitude. While the selfish interests of the Rump’s members had prompted Cromwell and the army to intervene in 1653, in 1659 it was the army, in Milton’s account, that pursued its own rather than the common good. Milton interprets the army as acting “for no apparent cause of publick concernment to the Church or commonwealth, but only for the discomissioning of nine great officers in the Army” (CW 6:447-8). The army removed parliament not for the betterment of the English Commonwealth, but in retaliation for a few officers being dismissed by the Rump. Such selfish motives are, for Milton, insufficient reason to dissolve an institution that was needed for liberty. Force is only consistent with Miltonic political freedom when it serves the whole commonwealth, not the interests of select individuals. Consequently, the army, which had been so essential to political freedom in Milton’s commonwealth prose, is the subject of scorn in *A Letter to a Friend*.

Despite his disapproval of the army’s actions, Milton still envisions the army safeguarding liberty and even finds ways to excuse the army’s recent conduct. *A Letter to a Friend* acknowledges that there may be more to the recent dissolution than Milton realizes: “I presume not to give my censure upon this action, not knowing, as I doe not, the bottome of it” (CW 6:448). The dissolution is “greivous,” “infamous,” and “dishonourable” (CW 6:448), but that description is only valid if Milton has all the facts. By opening the window for the army to present an alternative version of events, Milton tries to avoid antagonizing the army, as he knows the current circumstances dictate its involvement in politics. Additionally, Milton manages to avoid smearing the entire army with the dissolution by blaming the “Achan” (whether or not Milton knew that Lambert was behind the dissolution is unknown) whose “ambition” prompted

him to proceed against the Rump (CW 6:448). The dissolution becomes the act of a single person, not the whole army. With the army not completely tainted, Milton outlines the role he wants them to play in government. If parliament was “not complyeing fully to grant liberty of conscience & the necessary consequence therof, The Removall of a forc’t maintenance from Ministers, then must the Army forthwith chuse a councill of State” (CW 6:449). *A Letter to a Friend* empowers the army to seize the reigns of government if parliament does not grant liberty of conscience. Even with its questionable behavior regarding the Rump, the army remains a pivotal institution in Miltonic political liberty.

In *A Letter to a Friend* Milton separates the “Achan” who led the dissolution from the rest of the army, but otherwise he frames the army as a single institution. Such an interpretation of the army was no longer possible after October 1659. Prior to this month, the army had been a united force. There were some mutinies and tensions over pay, but when it came to shaping the political system, most members of the army were on the same page. After Lambert dissolved the Rump in October 1659, General Monck in Scotland declared himself for the Rump. There was now the potential for a civil war between two factions in the army. The one work that Milton wrote between the dissolution of the Rump and Monck’s arrival in London, *Proposalls of Certain Expedients for the Preventing of Civil War now Feard, & the Settling of a Firme Government*, reflects the danger posed by the division in the army. For guidance during this period, Milton looks to the Committee of Safety, which was established after the army dissolved the Rump, and hopes that it will “hasten as much as may be the settling of som firme & durable government” (CW 6:458). Even though Monck had declared for the Rump, which Milton praises in *A Letter to a Friend*, Milton turns to the Committee rather than Monck to restore order. Since Monck only had 6,000 men compared to the 28,000 in England, Milton may have doubted

Monck's ability to reshape the government. When Milton does mention the army in *Proposals of Certain Expedients*, he says nothing about their involvement in building a new government, and requires them to take an oath of allegiance once a new parliament is elected. Although Milton makes the army's allegiance conditional on parliament promoting liberty of conscience and not allowing a single person and the house of lords a place in government, he is silent on exactly what the army should do if parliament breaks these conditions. With a pending civil war between two factions in the army, Milton is reluctant to empower the army to intervene in politics. To do so, he would have to specify which army, Monck's or Lambert's, and such a statement would have painted the opposing side as illegitimate. Milton might have agreed with Monck's stance, but the uncertainty of the conflict between him and Lambert renders Milton unwilling to take a side.

Monck succeeded in restoring the Rump, but he soon faced pressure to allow the members secluded by Pride's Purge to return to parliament. In February 1660, Monck agreed to permit the purged members to take their seats on several conditions: they had to grant Monck supreme military power over the army; they had to preserve a commonwealth government with a Presbyterian church that tolerated some religious separatists; and they had to quickly dissolve themselves and hold new elections (Hutton 96). Aside from the Presbyterian church, these conditions are in line with Milton's thinking. The prospect of new elections prompted Milton to produce the first edition of *The Readie and Easie Way* in February 1660, and a second edition in late March as the elections were occurring.<sup>36</sup> Both editions assert that a perpetual parliament is the only means by which England can secure liberty, but the second edition offers a much more expanded account of parliament and its role in liberty.<sup>37</sup>

More than any of Milton's prose tracts, *The Readie and Easie Way* ties political freedom to the establishment of a commonwealth, which is the ultimate expression of political liberty. Lana Cable argues that in *The Readie and Easie Way*, Milton frames his temporal political hopes in terms of a "transcendent ethical ideal." Milton's path to a free commonwealth requires citizens to be fit choosers who have already, in essence, created a commonwealth just by their existence. These citizens are so like-minded that toleration and government are not needed. Milton's commonwealth, according to Cable, does not depend on republicanism, laws, or election guarantees, but fit choosers; it is a "secular theocracy" (Cable 272-4). Cable's analysis captures Milton's ideal vision, but, as Cable herself notes, Milton is unable to identify fit citizens for such a commonwealth (Cable 273). In all his political prose, Milton attempts to outline a viable path to establishing his commonwealth that maintains at least the illusion of popular sovereignty. With *The Readie and Easie Way*, Milton is unsure if there are any fit choosers in England, yet he is faced with an impending election, the clearest expression of popular will in the seventeenth century. Fearing the result of an uncontrolled election, Milton again turns to strong institutions to contain the popular will, defining his commonwealth by a perpetual parliament, schools, and the army. These institutions are the practical application of the vision that Cable outlines, as they can create political freedom even without any fit choosers, pushing the actual English people to the margins.

Milton's late prose tracts not only stress the importance of a perpetual parliament in creating and maintaining liberty, they also attempt to quell any concerns regarding the power of such an institution. The English people, according to *The Readie and Easie Way*, "have no cause to fear" a perpetual parliament "if thir [the MPs] ends be faithfull and for a free Commonwealth" (CW 6:501-3). In the first edition of *The Readie and Easie Way*, Milton goes even further: "if

they [the English people] understand thir own good rightly, [they] will solicit and entreat them [the MPs] not to throw off the great burden from thir shoulders which none are abler to bear, and to sit perpetual” (CW 6:502). Not only should the English people not “fear” a perpetual parliament, they should “entreat” the members to “sit perpetual[ly].” This entreating is conditional on the English “understand[ing] thir own good rightly.” If they know what is in their best interest, the English, according to Milton, will want to be powerless to change the members of parliament and will “thank” them for sitting perpetually (CW 6:502). The parliament that Milton proposes in *The Readie and Easie Way* is not the representative of the people, but the protector of the people’s liberty (Hammond 193). No longer claiming the parliament is the people, Milton simply presents parliament as the guarantor of liberty. This process of the people surrendering the custody of their liberty to an institution is the opposite of what Milton advocates in *Of True Religion*, namely that a Christian should not delegate his salvation to a deputy. Miltonic political freedom requires institutions rather than individuals to maintain freedom because institutions were better qualified for such a task.

Although the electorate could not remove the perpetual parliament, Milton does build institutional checks into his commonwealth. In *The Present Means*, Milton insists that the parliament would not be able to act “without Assent of the standing Council in each City” (CW 6:534). Therefore, even though the parliament is perpetual, it “will then, thus limited, have so little matter in thir Hands, or Power to endanger our Liberty” (CW 6:534). In *The Readie and Easie Way* Milton repeats this point and insists that parliament “will then be rightly call’d the true keepers of our liberties, though most of thir business will be in forein affairs” (CW 6:501). The requirement of obtaining consent from city councils while entrusting parliament with “foreign affairs” suggests that Milton divides political issues into those of national importance, in which

parliament had absolute authority, and those of local significance, in which the city councils could veto laws passed by parliament. Only when the liberty of the entire nation is involved can parliament exercise supreme, unchecked power. Parliament's ability to regulate the daily lives of people is, in Milton's system, limited by other institutions, namely city councils. The extent of the city councils' powers is not mentioned. In this case, one institution, parliament, establishes liberty, and another institution, city councils, protects liberty.

With Monck firmly in command of the political situation in early 1660, Milton, in *The Readie and Easie Way*, is comfortably pointing to the army as a means of preventing the perpetual parliament from sliding into tyranny: "Neither do I think a perpetual Senat, especially chosen and entrusted by the people, much in this land to be feared, where the well-affected either in a standing armie, or in a settled militia have thir arms in thir own hands" (CW 6:497).

Milonic political freedom can only occur through the work of institutions, not individual Englishmen whom Milton does not trust to act freely. Therefore, Milton empowers the army rather than the broader electorate to challenge the perpetual parliament if needed. As with the relationship between parliament and local assemblies, freedom comes from one institution, parliament, and was protected by another, the army. Milton has moved a long way from the theory of popular sovereignty in *The Tenure*, which permits the people to change their government if it becomes tyrannical. There is still a check on the potential tyranny of government, but that check comes from the army, an institution that Milton no longer pretends represents the people. Milonic political freedom is, in 1660, built on relationships between institutions, not popular support.

In touting the benefits of a perpetual parliament, Milton repeatedly states that one of the key principles of a free commonwealth must be the "Abjuracion of a single person" (CW 6:449).

He even uses commitment to government without a single person as a test for determining who can sit in parliament (*CW* 6:458). The repeated references to “a single person” has prompted much scholarly speculation about whom, if anyone, Milton meant. Robert Fallon insists that Milton is only thinking of Charles II when he refers to “a single person,” while Worden argues that Milton did not mean a specific individual, but “the principle of rule by a single person, whether Cromwellian or Stuart” (Fallon 191, 202-5; Worden *Literature and Politics* 340 n. 45).<sup>38</sup> If Milton does mean single-person rule in general, then his comments in 1659 represent a dramatic shift from *Defensio Secunda*, where he praises Cromwell’s rule. Looking at Milton’s comments through the lens of institutions provides a means of reconciling Milton’s celebration of Cromwell’s power with his later criticism of single-person rule. Milton’s disapproval of single person-rule stems from the fact that an individual would likely serve his own interest rather than the common good. Although Cromwell was in fact a single person, Milton describes him as possessing the same institutional power as parliament, with the people entrusting him with their liberty. He rules not as an individual, but as “*pater patriae*,” the embodiment of the nation and the people. Cromwell, in *Defensio Secunda*, loses his status as an individual and becomes something larger and more all encompassing. The hereditary nature of monarchy, by contrast, trained and encouraged kings to act as individuals and pursue their own interests. Kings were “accustom’d from the Cradle to use thir will onely as thir right hand, thir reason alwayes as thir left” (*CW* 6:279). Milton supports rule by arbitrary institutions, but not arbitrary individuals. Consequently, he believes that Cromwell, unlike the Stuarts or other ambitious military commanders like Lambert, did not possess the flaws of a single person.

A perpetual parliament is necessary for securing English liberties, but Milton is not interested in having a free election. For Milton, a free parliament does not mean that its



members were freely elected. Rather, a parliament “only will indeed be free, and deserve the true honour of that supreme title, if they preserve us a free people” (CW 6:493). A free parliament is defined by how it governs, not how it is elected. This definition likely relates to the lack of qualifications for the impending election in 1660. Despite the efforts of committed republicans, conservative MPs abolished the requirement of declaring loyalty to the commonwealth to stand for election (Hutton 103). Without this requirement, the possibility of a parliament filled with members open to restoring the Stuarts increased. When Milton describes the moment when Englishmen vote in *The Readie and Easie Way*, he stresses the conditions for freedom:

if the people, laying aside prejudice and impatience, will seriously and calmly now consider thir own good both religious and civil, thir own libertie and the only means therof, as shall be heer laid before them, and will elect thir Knights and Burgesses able men, and according to the just and necessarie qualifications ... men not addicted to a single person or house of lords, the work [of protecting liberty] is don (CW 6:493).

The process of voting does not automatically result in political freedom unless a specific outcome is achieved in the election, namely a parliament filled with men who are against returning to kingship. It is no longer sufficient for a people to choose their government in order to be free, they must also choose a specific type of government. This one choice is the “only means” of achieving “thir own libertie.” Unlike religion, there are no acceptable schisms in political elections that avoid the “breaking of Communion” (CPW 8:422). Any deviance from the one correct vote, even if it follows the desires of the people, results in slavery. Consequently, Milton refuses to consider a pro-Stuart parliament as free, regardless of how it is elected.

Milonic political freedom required that the upcoming election produce a commonwealth, but Milton knew that most Englishmen, in their current condition, were unlikely to vote for a commonwealth; therefore, educational institutions were necessary. Milton’s discussion of

education represents his final attempt to reconcile the theory of popular sovereignty with the realities of seventeenth-century England. The only way, for Milton, “To make the people fittest to chuse, and the chosen fittest to govern, will be to amend our corrupt and faulty education” (CW 6:501). Mohamed notes the difference between the education advocated in *The Readie and Easie Way* and Milton’s earlier writings. Milton, in 1660, is no longer preparing active, engaged citizens. Instead, he focuses on “promoting acquiescence to political authority” (Mohamed 78). This position comes quite close to the implicit faith that Milton decries in religion. In political liberty, making the English “fittest to chuse” does not mean training them to use their reason to decide for themselves who was best to sit in parliament, but rather training them to use their reason to reach the same conclusion that Milton already had. In *Areopagtica*, Milton opposes the new licensing bill because “it will be primely to the discouragement of all learning, and the stop of Truth ... by hindering and cropping the discovery that might bee yet further made both in religious and civill Wisdome” (CPW 2:491-2). Milton frames “civill Wisdome” as being produced by a process of “discovery” whereby people build on their existing knowledge and get closer to the truth. In *The Readie and Easie Way*, Milton seeks to accelerate this process. Since he already knows the ideal type of government for England, Milton wants to use institutions to compel people to accept his vision, rather than give them the freedom to work it out on their own. This system still has an element of popular sovereignty through elections, but educational institutions guarantee that the electorate will select the appropriate government.

Milton includes some details of how the education system should be structured, placing schools within the federated system he envisions. Each city in Milton’s commonwealth had “schools and academies of thir own choice, wherein thir children may be bred up in thir own sight to all learning and noble education not in grammar only, but in all liberal arts and

exercises” (CW 6:517-9). This description gives the impression that each city would have autonomy over its schools and curriculum, which would mark a dramatic break from the strict, regimented curriculum that Milton advocated in *Of Education*. The following sentence in *The Readie and Easie Way*, however, casts doubt on how much control cities actually would have. The purpose of this system of education is “[to] spread much more knowledge and civilitie, yea religion through all parts of the land, by communicating the natural heat of government and culture more distributively to all extreme parts, which now lie numm and neglected” (CW 6:519). If the education system allows the “heat of government” to reach the “extreme parts” of the nation, then it expands the influence of the central government within the federal system. Milton is bothered that the limits of seventeenth-century bureaucracy have left so many areas “numm and neglected.” Since he desires all corners to England to be incorporated into his commonwealth, Milton needs to find a way to extend central authority into federated states. Schools are the answer. Any “choice” that the cities have in erecting schools will be set by the central government to ensure sufficient “heat” in each city. As with voting for the perpetual parliament, there is a choice, but institutions control the choice to ensure that it is correct.

To stress this dichotomy between the choice that leads to freedom and the choice that results in slavery, Milton, throughout *The Readie and Easie Way*, portrays wise people as supporting a commonwealth and ignorant ones being in favour of kingship. According to Norbrook’s analysis, Milton portrays regal language as expressing a false supremacy over the nation, while he uses a “common republican language” to defend liberty (412-3). The problem with Norbrook’s reading is that Milton, to promote republican government in 1660, must control political participation through institutions, denying much of the population any say in government. A small, elite group is still projecting its will and interest onto the nation.

Although this group might espouse the principles of popular sovereignty and claim to be acting in the name of the people, they are taking no more stock of the electorate's opinion than a king. Milton does not care what the broader electorate thinks, but he is eager to attach his commonwealth to the wisest men in society, both past and present. Milton first appeals to past authorities to defend the structure of a commonwealth. A free commonwealth, he notes, is "held by wisest men in all ages the noblest, the manliest, the equallest, the justest government, the most agreeable to all due libertie and proportiond equalitie" (*CW* 6:485-7). Milton's string of superlatives highlights both the quality of the men who endorse commonwealth government and the positive features of such a government. When he comes to his contemporaries, he similarly claims that "all ingenuous and knowing men will easily agree" that a commonwealth is the optimal form of government (*CW* 6:493). As he does in other tracts, Milton unites the wisdom of the past and present to strengthen his argument.

On the other side, Milton reduces all contrary ideas to mere nonsense: "Certainly then that people must needs be madd or strangely infatuated, that build the chief hope of their common happiness or safetie on a single person" (*CW* 6:489). A few sentences later, he repeats the same point: "What madness is it, for them who might manage nobly thir own affairs themselves, sluggishly and weakly to devolve all on a single person" (*CW* 6:498). Twice within a few sentences, Milton refers to the supporters of kingship as "madd." His attacks on defenders of monarchy does not end there. To stress the "madness" of returning to kingship, Milton repeatedly asks questions regarding the soundness of monarchy. Within a few lines, Milton wonders how "any Nation styling themselves free, can suffer any man to pretend hereditary right over them as thir lord ... how they can change thir noble words and actions ... how any man who hath the true principles of justice and religion in him, can presume to take upon him to be a king

and lord over his brethren ... how he can display with such vanity and ostentation his regal splendor so supereminently above other men" (CW 6:491). Milton uses these questions to interrogate kingship, revealing its flaws and the "maddness" of returning to it. When subjected to these rational questions, monarchy, in Milton's mind, is delegitimized as a political institution. Milton is distinguishing monarchical and commonwealth governments not only by their structures, but by the type of people who support them. He presents, on the one side, a timeless alliance of wise men standing for the freedom offered by a commonwealth, and on the other side, a group of "madd" and "infatuated" men who behave "sluggishly and weakly" as they surrender their freedom to a monarch. Freedom, a commonwealth, and intelligence all become connected.

To further enhance the value of his proposed settlement in *The Readie and Easie Way*, Milton links a commonwealth to Christ's eventual rule. Once Milton's perpetual parliament is set up, "they [members of the parliament] shall so continue (if God favor us, and our wilful sins provoke him not) even to the coming of our true and rightfull and only to be expected King, only worthie as he is our only Saviour, the Messiah, the Christ" (CW 6:503). Milton believes that his proposed government is so ideally suited for protecting freedom that it could rule until the Second Coming. He is not outlining a band-aid solution that would hold the country together until a better government can be organized; he is presenting the final government that a free England will ever need. The perfection of Milton's commonwealth renders the right to change governments, which is so important to political liberty in *The Tenure*, unnecessary, and further removes popular sovereignty from Milton's ideal commonwealth. Milton's reference to the return of Christ reflects both his belief in the superiority of his proposed government and his strategy of associating his commonwealth with Christ. Earlier in *The Readie and Easie Way*, Milton questions: "what government coms nearer to this precept of Christ [that chiefs should

serve], then a free Commonwealth” (CW 6:487). By comparing the rule of a commonwealth to Christ’s actions, Milton gives his desired institution a quasi-divine status. The link that Milton draws between his commonwealth and Christ reflects the “transcendent ethical ideal” and “secular theocracy” that Cable detects in *The Readie and Easie Way* (272-4). Milton does not merely suggest that a commonwealth was slightly preferable to monarchy; he presents a commonwealth as the ultimate symbol of freedom.

Milton’s guidelines for establishing political liberty are very specific in *The Readie and Easie Way*. Yet, given the minimal restrictions on who could stand in elections, Milton must have known that the English people were unlikely to follow his proposals. Laura Knoppers identifies *The Readie and Easie Way* as a jeremiad in which Milton rails against a covenant nation that had backslid into apostasy. She argues that Milton’s motives for writing *The Readie and Easie Way* extend beyond preventing a Stuart restoration to the performative acts of calling down the covenant curse on England and expressing his final farewell to liberty (Knoppers “Milton’s *The Readie*” 222-3). Milton undoubtedly knew that the English people would not embrace his ideas, but that did not mean that he viewed his proposals as hopeless. The Commonwealth, Nominated Assembly, and Protectorate had all existed not because of popular support but because of the army. Gregory interprets the final passage in *The Readie and Easie Way*, which appeared in both editions, as a call for a military coup that never materialized. The verbs bethink, exhort, and unite at the close of *The Readie and Easie Way*, according to Gregory, reveal that Milton is calling for immediate, forceful action to save the Commonwealth of England, not expressing hope for an indefinite future (“Milton and Cromwell” 61-2). There was some army resistance to Monck’s decision to recall the secluded members in 1660. In late February, there were two failed army uprisings against Monck, one by Colonel Robert Overton

and the other by Nathaniel Rich. Both revolts were prompted by fears that the return of the secluded members would lead to the restoration of monarchy (Reece 221-2). Monck may have been the dominant military figure, but Milton could still, in February and March, imagine the army rising to preserve the freedom of the English Commonwealth.

The most explicit reference in Milton's late prose to using force to create a commonwealth occurs in *The Present Means*. In this unpublished work, Milton hopes to educate the voting population on the dangers of kingship, but the success of such an education was far from guaranteed. If the gentlemen in the counties "refuse these fair and noble Offers of immediate Liberty, and happy Condition," the political leaders still have "a faithful Vetern Army, so ready, and glad to assist you in the prosecution therof" (CW 6:534). The refusal of the "chief Gentlemen" to accept Milton's ideas is not an insurmountable obstacle to erecting a free commonwealth so long as the army is present. The prominent role that Milton gives to the army has provoked numerous interpretations. According to Fallon, Milton saw the army as "an autonomous body" that served a political purpose by checking the power of the executive and legislative branches (203). Milton's willingness to allow the army to ignore the wishes of the electorate reveals that the army is more than merely the check that Fallon describes. Keeble views the position of the army in more sinister terms: "Something very like a military dictatorship now appears to be the condition of freedom" (322). Empowering the army to create governments in defiance of the popular will may appear akin to a military dictatorship, but for Milton such a situation was true freedom. His late prose consistently express confidence in the army's ability to free the English nation from its own tendency to restore the Stuarts. Milton believes that after people experience the benefits of the new government, they "will be soon convinc'd, and by degrees come in of thir own accord, to be partakers of so happy a

Government” (CW 6:534). The broader population may initially reject Milton’s commonwealth, but once the army had forced it on them, they would realize that it represents true freedom.

Milton is convinced that at some level every person would accept a commonwealth as the ideal government; if they could not be persuaded, then the army had to impose such a commonwealth on them.

Milton’s willingness to allow the army to forcibly create a commonwealth in spite of the wishes of the electorate is perhaps his strongest expression of institutional liberty. Regardless of what they think now, the English people, Milton insists, will one day, when they fully comprehend freedom, be grateful for the institutions that created the commonwealth. This position is similar to Milton’s claim that the people, once they recognize their own good, will thank the MPs for sitting perpetually. Explicit popular sovereignty, to the extent that it is still present in Milton’s late prose, comes in the form of the people’s eventual acceptance of the commonwealth that institutions have forced on them. Even if such acceptance never occurs, there is still indirect popular sovereignty. Imposing a commonwealth on a reluctant population reflects what Milton sees as the people’s underlying (if unacknowledged) desire for freedom; therefore, the commonwealth is an expression of popular will, even if the people do not realize it. The individual is represented in Miltonic political liberty only in so far as Milton accurately knows what each person actually wants. *The Readie and Easie Way* urges each person to place “his privat welfare and happiness in the public peace, liberty and safetie,” which only Milton and other wise men understood (CW 6:501).

Although Milton presents an uncompromising position in *The Readie and Easie Way*, *Brief Notes*, his final prose tract before the Restoration, displays a possible shift in attitude towards kingship. At the time of *Brief Notes*’ publication, mid-April 1660, the elections for the



new parliament were over. Even if Milton did not know the exact results, he likely had a sense that the convention parliament, as it became known, would vote to restore the Stuarts. The provision that barred royalists from standing for election was ignored throughout the country, resulting in the election of at least sixty-one MPs who were either wartime royalists or the sons of royalists (Hutton 112). In April 1660, Milton faced his worst nightmare as a group approximating the traditional English electorate had just elected a parliament that would act contrary to his interpretation of liberty. Throughout his commonwealth prose and even in *The Readie and Easie Way*, Milton had found ways to use institutions to curtail popular sovereignty while insisting that the people were still represented. Faced with a true expression of popular sovereignty in April 1660, Milton, in *Brief Notes*, still refuses to abandon his earlier position from *The Tenure*: “This choice of Government is so essential to thir freedom, that longer then they have it, they are not free” (CW 6:545). At this time, however, there was no institution to which Milton could turn to compel the English people to accept his version of liberty.

The most significant institutional change between the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way* and *Brief Notes* occurred in the army. There was an impulse towards restoration in England long before 1660, but that impulse was never realized because of the power of the army (Scott *England's* 406). In both his commonwealth and much of his late prose, Milton frequently turns to the army as a means of securing liberty, but that was no longer possible in April 1660. Many officers in the army anticipated that the elections in April 1660 would produce a pro-Stuart parliament and that a Stuart Restoration would result in the break-up of the army. This knowledge caused anxiety among the officers and some rumblings of resistance. To quell any rebellion, Monck and other commanders decided to apply a loyalty test to the whole army. Every army officer had to take an engagement to accept whatever settlement the new parliament

proposed. Copies of the engagement were given to units around London, presented to Monck on April 9, and then sent out to regiments in the provinces (Hutton 109-10). The army did make one final attempt to stop the Restoration. On April 10, Major-General John Lambert, whom Monck had imprisoned, escaped from the tower, and after a few days in London headed to the Midlands to stir up a rebellion. The uprising was a dismal failure and was crushed on April 22, but Monck and his supporters took it seriously and feared that the rebellious spirit would spread throughout the army's ranks (Reece 223).

Although he disapproved of Lambert's dissolution of the Rump in October 1659, Milton, had he known of Lambert's attempted coup, would not have hesitated to support him, as Lambert was the only hope of halting the Restoration. Milton wrote *Brief Notes* between April 5 and 20 (CW 6:538), and given that he does not call on the army to prevent the Restoration, he likely finished it after the engagement was presented to Monck on April 9, but before Lambert's rebellion fully materialized. With regards to the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way*, Barbara Lewalski argues that although Milton may have been preparing it during the elections for a new parliament, he revised some sections after the publication of *Brief Notes* and published it later in April, directing it at the convention parliament (*The Life* 664, n. 96). If Milton believed that *The Readie and Easie Way* could sway the members of the convention parliament, he was grasping at straws, but a later publication date of the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way* might reflect the evolving military situation. If the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way* appeared after *Brief Notes*, then the call for a military coup at the end of the second edition might signify Milton's hope for Lambert. Lambert's rebellion disintegrated on April 22, so it is unlikely that Milton published the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way* after that date, as military resistance to the Restoration was no longer possible.

By April 1660, the institutions to which Milton previously had turned to help the English become free, parliament, the army, a Lord Protector, and schools, lacked either the will to enforce a free commonwealth, or the time and capacity to re-shape the electorate. Consequently, Milton had to face the reality of the theory of *The Tenure* without any institutions to control it. Grudgingly, Milton accepts that the English people can choose to return to monarchy and slavery: “if we will needs condemn our selves to be of the latter [men not worthy of freedom], despairing of our own vertue, industrie and the number of our able men, conscious of our own unworthiness to be governed better, sadly betake us to our befitting thraldom” (CW 6:546). Having established the principle of popular sovereignty on philosophical grounds and repeatedly tied it to political liberty, Milton refuses to abandon it. At the same time, Milton’s philosophy of liberty is, in 1660, destroying the practical application of liberty by restoring the Stuarts. *Brief Notes* represents the full expression of the tension in Miltonic political freedom. In April 1660, the theory and reality of Miltonic political liberty are no longer possible at the same time.

Although the political situation forced Milton to accept the return to monarchy, he still sees an opportunity to shape his readers’ political decisions. Milton’s objective in *Brief Notes* switches from promoting a free commonwealth, to advocating for a king who will be less oppressive, namely General George Monck. If the English people are going to return to monarchy, they should, in Milton’s opinion, at least choose for king “one who hath best aided the people, and best merited against tyrannie [i.e. Monck], [so that for] the space of a raign or two we may chance to live happily anough, or tolerably” (CW 6:546). Norbrook argues that this proposal is not serious, as it lacks the concrete details of Milton’s other tracts from the period (422), while Stevens believes that Milton’s desire to protect liberty of conscience trumps government forms, therefore he turns to Monck as the nation’s deliverer (“Milton’s Polish

Pamphlet” 73). Walker asserts that Miltonic political freedom has nothing to do with government structure; all that matters is that the people choose their government. If the people choose a monarchy, then it is consistent with political freedom (Walker *Antiformalist* 19-24).<sup>39</sup> Milton, however, is clearly not happy that the political situation has devolved to a point where all he can do is encourage his fellow countrymen to select the least tyrannical king. The process of returning to monarchy is undertaken “sadly,” as the English are entering a state of “thralldom” (CW 6:546). This language is very different from Milton’s enthusiasm for Cromwell’s rule in 1654. Milton’s willingness to consider Monk as a potential king reflects the desperate situation in 1660 rather than genuine support for such a settlement. For Milton, the worst outcome of the chaos would be the return of the Stuarts, and he is willing to consider any alternative.

Milton’s comments in *Brief Notes*, unlike those regarding Cromwell in *Defensio Secunda*, do not suggest that King George will usher in an era of freedom. His rule will only allow the English people the “chance” to “live happily enough, or tolerably,” and even that will only last for a “reign or two.” The short length of this tolerable life connects *Brief Notes* to Milton’s commonwealth prose. One of Milton’s repeated criticisms of monarchy is that kings are raised to use their will rather than their reason. The hereditary nature of kingship ensured that a man devoid of reason and incapable of comprehending the public good would eventually become king. In *The Readie and Easie Way*, Milton continues to stress the danger of hereditary monarchy: “I denie not but that ther may be such a king, who may regard the common good before his own, may have no vitious favorite, may harken only to the wisest and incorruptest of his Parliament: but this rarely happens in a monarchie not elective” (CW 6:505). Milton’s chief concern with monarchy is not concentrated power, but hereditary succession. To depend on a hereditary monarchy was to “commit the summ of thir [the people’s] wellbeing, the whole state

of their safetie to fortune,” as there was no way to predict the quality of the next king (CW 6:505). In an elective monarchy, government officials and the nobility could ensure that each king had the appropriate qualities to rule. Hence, even if Monck’s personal qualities made him a tolerable king, it would not be long before one of his heirs made the lives of the English people miserable. Choosing to return to kingship was, for Milton, not freedom; it was a choice that at best made life tolerable and resulted in “perpetual bondage” for generations to come (CW 6:546).

There is one instance in his late prose when Milton does praise kings who were hereditary rather than elective, namely in his *History of Britain*. Throughout *History*, Milton depicts the British people as slothful and full of vices. The end of Roman rule in Britain should have ushered in a new era of freedom, but instead the British “shrunk more wretchedly under the burden of thir own libertie, than before under foren yoke” (CPW 5.1:31). The years of living under Roman subjugation had rendered the British servile, but, as Martin Dzelzainis points out, Milton’s *History* places greater emphasis on how the slavish nature of the British people fitted them for slavery under various conquerors (“Conquest and Slavery” 423). Since most of the British people preferred slavery over liberty, prosperity was only possible when strong, virtuous leaders emerged. Nicholas von Maltzahn notes that Milton’s *History* stresses the role of an elite leadership in governing and educating a nation with a flawed character (194). The first such instance occurs during the Roman occupation of Britain. The Romans, according to Milton, “beate us into some civilitie; likely else to have continu’d longer in a barbarous and savage manner of life” (CPW 5.1:61). During the rule of the Saxon kings, the theme of a single ruler reforming an ignorant nation continues. Although most of the Saxon kings were tyrants, Milton lauds the achievements of Ethelbert and Alfred. Ethelbert was “a favourer of all civility in that rude age,” and “gave Laws and Statutes after the example of Roman Emperors” (CPW 5.1:195,

196). Alfred also focused on improving the legal system and was “more severe [than any man] in punishing unjust judges or obstinate offenders” (CPW 5.1:290-1). As result of this policy, “justice seem’d in his [Alfred’s] daies not to flourish only, but to tryumph” (CPW 5.1:291). Given Milton’s low opinion of the British people, it is unsurprising that all the political achievements in *History* are the product of individual leaders.

Although he praises select kings, Milton never explicitly connects any of their reigns to freedom. He notes the accomplishments of Ethelbert and Alfred, but these do not include bringing liberty to Britain. Liberty is a major theme throughout Milton’s *History*, as the work reiterates Milton’s claim that only the fit few are capable of liberty. In the “Digression,” which turns from ancient Britain to the Long Parliament to draw comparisons between the two eras, Milton stresses that only a few men have sufficient virtue to handle true liberty: “libertie hath a sharp and double edge fitt onelie to be handl’d by just and vertuous men, to bad and dissolute it become[s] a mischief unwioldlie in thir own hands. neither is i[t] compleatlie giv’n, but by them who have the happi[e] skill to know what is grievance and unjust to a people” (CPW 5.1:449). Since Milton lauds Ethelbert and Alfred, one would assume that Milton includes these kings among the few who have the “happi[e] skill” to bring liberty to their people. When outlining the achievements of Britain’s successful kings, however, Milton is silent on the subject of liberty. Although it is impossible to say with certainty when Milton wrote various sections of his *History*, this silence brings to mind his discussion of Monck becoming king in *Brief Notes*. Monarchy would never result in freedom, but if the right person were king, then for “the space of a reign or two we may chance to live happily anough, or tolerably.” The brevity of prosperity under kingship in *History* is consistent with Milton’s point from *Brief Notes* that monarchy will,

at best, produce short periods of happiness, but never long-term freedom. Only a perpetual parliament could achieve such freedom.

Milton's late prose represents the culmination of his division of religious and political liberty based on institutions. Although Milton hopes that institutions like the church could work with the individual conscience of Christians, religious liberty ultimately elevates and trusts the individual conscience above all institutions. The political instability of the late 1650s drove Milton to be even more explicit in describing powerful institutions ignoring the electorate, as political liberty centred on an end result achieved by institutions without concern for the opinions or representation of the English people. Religious liberty only permitted persuasive institutions that respected the individual conscience, while political liberty might depend on coercive institutions that erased the individual will. This neat division explains how liberty functions on earth, but it disappears once Milton takes the question of freedom to the theological realm of heaven in *Paradise Lost*.

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<sup>33</sup> N. H. Keeble similarly views Milton as being willing to limit civil liberty to protect religious liberty in his late prose. See Keeble, "‘Nothing Nobler than a Free Commonwealth’: Milton's Later Venacular Republican Tracts," 309.

<sup>34</sup> Keeble asserts that in his late prose, Milton began to reverse his earlier positive attitude toward Cromwell, while Paul Stevens and Tobias Gregory view the evidence that Milton turned on Cromwell as weak. Stevens also interprets Milton as continuing to look for a "deliverer" like Cromwell throughout 1659 and 1660. See Keeble, "‘Nothing Nobler than a Free Commonwealth’: Milton's Later Venacular Republican Tracts," 307; Stevens "Milton's 'Renunciation'" 365; Stevens "Milton's Polish Pamphlet" 72; Gregory "Milton and Cromwell" 61.

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of Milton's heterodox views, see Campbell and Corns, "*De Doctrina Christiana: An England that Might Have Been*," 430-4.

<sup>36</sup> For a discussion on the dating of the second edition, see *CW* 6:469-72.

<sup>37</sup> Unless otherwise state, all quotation from *The Reddie and Easie Way* are from the second edition.

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<sup>38</sup> Similar to Fallon, Gregory views Milton's commitment to government without a single person in 1659-60 not as a change in philosophy, but as a desperate way to argue against a return of the Stuarts. See Gregory, "Milton and Cromwell" 51.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Corns has perhaps the most unusual explanation for Milton's suggestion of Monck becoming king. According to Corns, Milton envisioned Monck ruling as king for a short time until the republican cause was ready to rise again. See Corns, *Uncloisured Virtue*, 293. Given the extent of the disappointments Milton had experienced by April 1660 and the language he uses in *Brief Notes*, it is unlikely that he could be optimistic about the resurrection of commonwealth values after a return to kingship.



## Chapter 4

### Beyond Institutions: Theological Freedom in *Paradise Lost*

While Milton's prose addresses the real challenges facing seventeenth-century England, *Paradise Lost* moves the action well above earth and explores freedom in the context of heaven, hell, and Eden. Consequently, *Paradise Lost* endorses a theological freedom distinct from anything in Milton's prose, as God's role as creator causes him to differ from any earthly institution. The theological focus of *Paradise Lost* has prompted some scholars to view Milton as retreating from earthly politics during the Restoration and turning his hopes toward internal, spiritual matters as he awaits the millennium (Worden "Milton's Republicanism" 245; Knoppers *Historicizing Milton* 78-94). The political and ecclesiastical institutions of the Restoration (a Stuart monarchy and a state church) did render Miltonic liberty impossible; however, there is still a significant overlap between the language of freedom in Milton's prose and epic poem.<sup>40</sup> Milton does not abandon all the tensions and dimensions of freedom that he spent over two decades working out, but rather refashions them to suit a theological context and then exports them into *Paradise Lost*. *Paradise Lost*'s mythical components are not a withdrawal from earthly politics, but an opportunity for Milton to extend and develop his interpretation of liberty. The poetic portrayal of theological freedom represents the completion of his version of liberty, not an entirely new interpretation of freedom.

*Paradise Lost* continues to ask the same fundamental questions with regards to freedom that Milton's prose does: to what extent do people need help and direction to be free, does any such involvement limit freedom, or does only excessive interference diminish freedom? Instead of probing this question in relation to institutions, *Paradise Lost* explores God's contribution to freedom. Theological freedom combines the individual free choice of religious freedom (each

individual chooses without compulsion) with the dependence of political freedom (free choice, both prelapsarian and postlapsarian, is only possible through God, who is personally invested in such freedom). Dependence in theological freedom creates rather than suppresses free choice. God places freedom beyond the bounds of institutions while also safeguarding liberty in much the same way that institutions do. When read alongside Milton's prose, *Paradise Lost* incorporates and questions many elements of Miltonic freedom; the end result is an additional type of freedom that is centred in theology, but incorporates much of the language of institutional freedom.

Milton's prose does not ignore theological freedom, as *De Doctrina* contains a lengthy examination of the subject. *De Doctrina* engages with major theological debates regarding freedom, but *Paradise Lost* goes further. As a narrative poem, *Paradise Lost* enables Milton not only to explain theological freedom, but also to display it in action.<sup>41</sup> Theological freedom centres on an all-powerful God who occupies a space far beyond human comprehension rather than on concrete institutions that can be dissected authoritatively. Such freedom contains elements of awe and uncertainty that are best expressed in poetry. At the same time, the narrative nature of *Paradise Lost* restricts Milton's ability to portray certain aspects of God which simply cannot be expressed in the English language. Aware of both the strengths and limitations of epic verse, Milton depicts and amplifies aspects of freedom associated with dependence on God's grace in *Paradise Lost*. It is the illustrative quality of *Paradise Lost* that separates it from the prose and maximizes its impact on the reader. In terms of religious and political freedom, Milton's prose need only point to recent events in England to help readers understand how these freedoms function. In contrast, using examples from contemporary England was not an option for theological freedom. *Paradise Lost* presents theological freedom

in a way that *De Doctrina* cannot, but only because it creates a mythical setting for the story of the poem. It is through this narrative of a mythical story that Milton enables the reader to witness and experience that complete dependence that accompanies theological freedom.

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Milton's exploration of theological freedom is part of a longstanding debate in Christianity over the role of free will in salvation which dates back to Saint Augustine. Augustine's theology includes both free will as a means of explaining sin and the necessity of God's grace for humanity to perform good works. In a prelapsarian world, Adam, according to Augustine, was capable of either sinning or not sinning, but the Fall corrupted human nature so that all human choices became sinful. Humanity still had the free will to choose, but people could not choose rightly because of their sinful nature. From this view of human corruption, Augustine argued that only God's prevenient grace, which God distributed to certain people, could restore humanity's freedom to make right choices (Myers 16-8). In the Middle Ages, Saint Thomas Aquinas refined Augustine's ideas, as he described freedom as residing in the intellect's ability to perceive the good. After the Fall, sin prevented humanity from accurately determining the good, thus destroying freedom. For Saint Thomas, God orders everything to its proper end, but God's providence does not eliminate human freedom. Since the proper end of the human will is to be free, God moves the human will so that it functions as a free will. God's engagement with human will, therefore, enables the will voluntarily to direct itself towards the good (Myers 22-4).

During the Reformation, the debate over free will intensified. Erasmus of Rotterdam argued in favour of free will to explain God's justice. A person, according to Erasmus, can only take action that will lead to salvation with God's grace, and since God is good, he bestows his

grace on everyone. Because Erasmus assumes that all people receive grace, he balances humanity's free choice and grace in the struggle for salvation (Danielson *Milton's Good* 66-7). This view was challenged by Martin Luther, who rejected free will outright: "whatever is done by us is done not by free choice, but of sheer necessity" ("The Bondage" 64). Luther differentiates necessity from compulsion. Necessity, for Luther, is acting in accordance with one's will; without the spirit of God, a person's will is inclined necessarily towards evil (Luther "The Bondage" 64). A person's will could be changed, but only by God, not any human action: "if God works in us, the will is changed, and being gently breathed upon by the Spirit of God, it again wills and acts from pure willingness and inclination and of its own accord, not from compulsion, of that it cannot be turned another way by any opposition" (Luther "The Bondage" 65). The process of God breathing his spirit into people left no room for human agency, as people become "slaves and captives—though this is royal freedom—so that we readily will and do what he wills" (Luther "The Bondage" 65). Luther still, however, interprets God's grace as establishing freedom for Christians. Through faith, Christians are freed from the law and works, thus rendering all their actions free, not compelled by law (Luther "The Freedom" 361). Although Luther's Christian liberty frees the faithful from the compulsion of works, a good Christian still does "works out of spontaneous love in obedience to God" (Luther "The Freedom" 359).<sup>42</sup>

Luther's writings mark the first complete rejection of free will and they inspired further challenges to free will from Protestant theologians across Europe. An additional assault on free will came from John Calvin. For Calvin, God predestined certain people for salvation, the election of those people was unconditional, and they achieved salvation through irresistible grace. Calvin stresses the extreme corruption in all of humanity after the Fall and how incapable

every person is of doing good without God: “from first to last, [all people are] tangled up in such wretchedness that they cannot get out of it unless God’s mercy delivers them” (79). Since humanity is so sinful, God must radically transform humanity. To illustrate the profoundness of this transformation, Calvin points to a biblical passage from Ezekiel which describes God changing a heart of stone to a heart of flesh: “If, when the Lord converts us to good, it is as if one transformed a stone into flesh, then it is certain that everything that belongs to our own choice is brought to nothing and all that follows afterwards is from God” (84). God’s impact on humanity is so powerful that it removes all choice from people. After this experience, a person does not choose to obey God, but rather must obey because God moves the heart “with such effectiveness that it must follow” (Calvin 86). In describing God’s influence over a regenerate person, Calvin emphasizes God’s complete control: “God, by His Spirit, directs, turns, and governs our heart and rules there as in His own property” (87). Such lordship over the human heart prevents even the possibility of human agency. Calvin frames the lack of choice that accompanies God’s grace not as oppressive, but as positive: “But since Adam made known by his example how poor and unhappy free choice is unless God wills in us and does everything, what good is it to us when He distributes His grace in such a limited way as people have imagined” (86-7). Grace that preserves free will becomes “poor and unhappy” in Calvin’s theology because it does not guarantee good choices; a happy outcome is only certain if God exercises total control over the hearts he regenerates. Calvin’s formulation, like Luther’s, removes any level of human choice in matters of salvation and good actions.

Calvin’s theology influenced both continental and English theologians throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth century. A Reformed orthodoxy emerged, which expanded on Calvin’s work. According to the Reformed orthodoxy, Adam, in a prelapsarian state, was

naturally inclined towards the good, but could move towards evil through his own weakness. After the Fall, humanity is enslaved by sin and can not perform any good acts. Recovery from this state comes from God, not any merit in humanity. Reformed orthodoxy also asserts that God's decrees are free and absolute, meaning that human action can not influence God.

Responding to the strict predestination of Reformed orthodoxy, the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius followed Erasmus by insisting on free will that was only possible through God's grace. In contrast to Calvin, Arminius states that God offered sufficient grace to all, but His grace was resistible, meaning that people could choose to turn away from God. At the same time, Arminians agrees with Reformed orthodoxy that fallen humanity was completely depraved and incapable of doing anything without God's grace (Danielson *Milton's Good* 64-71; Myers 36-9).

*De Doctrina* addresses the same issues regarding free will and grace as earlier Christian theologians, but it also reflects elements of Milton's political philosophy from *The Tenure*. Dennis Danielson argues that in *De Doctrina* Milton adopts an Arminian position as he defends free will while also maintaining that God's grace is necessary at every stage of salvation (*Milton's Good* 76). Diverging slightly from Danielson, Benjamin Myers, who notes some variations between Milton's views and Arminianism, does not tie *De Doctrina* to any one theological tradition, interpreting the treatise as drawing on a range of theologies (52).<sup>43</sup> For Myers (and for Danielson), Milton's theology expresses his "deep commitment to the idea of freedom" (52). Milton's theological freedom, however, differs from the religious freedom of his prose, which tied liberty to individual autonomy that was free from any kind of external control. In *De Doctrina*, Milton argues that after the Fall, humanity no longer has "right reason," which "aimed at perceiving the supreme good" (*CW* 8.1:433). Here, *De Doctrina*'s depiction of

prelapsarian humanity is similar not only to that of other theologians, but also to that of *The Tenure*. Both of Milton's works portray prelapsarian humanity as having the natural capacity for goodness and, therefore, not needing any external guidance. Fallen humanity's freedom in *De Doctrina*, however, is dependent not on human institutions, but on God, who "gave us back the ability to wish, that is, to act freely, when freedom of choice had been recovered through the renewal of the spirit" (CW 8.1:97). Milton ties freedom to being able to "wish" for "the supreme good," which, after the Fall, comes only from God's grace. Both *The Tenure* and *De Doctrina* present the Fall as destroying humanity's natural goodness, but the two tracts differ on who helps people recover from their fallen state and how they do so. Politically, humanity recovers through institutions compelling them to live in a commonwealth; theologically, humanity relies on God creating a capacity to "wish."

Like some theologians, Milton attempts to reconcile human will with God's omnipotence so that theological freedom can include an element of choice. His challenge is that an omnipotent being is very different from the civil and ecclesiastical institutions that he addresses in his other prose. According to Milton, "God's grace is acknowledged as supreme," but God's "decree's condition ... is left in the power of human beings acting freely" (CW 8.1:97). The "supreme" power of God to bestow grace is much more invasive than the activity of a church. God is not simply preaching like a pastor, he is doing what earthly institutions cannot, changing the nature of fallen humanity to create the capacity for good. Sharon Achinstein correctly notes Milton's interpretation of conscience as separating him from proto-liberal theorists who stress individual choice. Since each person's conscience belongs to God, people, Achinstein argues, are subject to divine impulses (*Literature and Dissent* 129). Theological freedom permits, and even requires, much greater involvement from external forces than religious liberty. Milton,

however, insists that God's involvement does not erase free will: "if religious matters too were not under our control, and in some way in our power and choice, neither would God [have been able] rightly to enter into a covenant with us, nor would we have been able to fulfil it, let alone swear that we would fulfil it" (CW 8.1:437). Christians have "control" over "religious matters," but that "control" occurs only after God has bestowed his grace, which is itself a type of control, as it sets humanity's potential.

God's involvement in freedom exceeds that of all institutions, but it also reflects his abilities. In analyzing *A Treatise of Civil Power*, Woods argues that Milton not only describes God persuading consciences, but also seeks to reach people's consciences with his tract ("Elective Poetics" 200). Although all of Milton's texts try to persuade, Woods overstates how they interact with their readers. Many Protestant ministers believed that it was essential for their words to pierce the hearts of their congregation (Clark 179), but Milton, by the 1650s, had a different perspective. The Epistle of *De Doctrina* calls on readers to scrutinize the text with their conscience, but it does not claim to touch the readers' conscience: "judge of this writing according to the spirit of God guiding you" (CW 8.1:11). Only divine power, not human prose or admonitions, could penetrate people and interact directly with their consciences. The best a human writer could do is place an idea before readers so that their conscience could examine it. In *Defensio Secunda*, Milton advises church congregations not only to use "reason and admonitions" with a member who is in error, but also to pray because God "alone has the power to dispel all errors from the mind and impart the heavenly light of truth to whomever he will" (CPW 4.1:649). Earlier in his career, Milton was more optimistic about the ability of pastors to engage with the internal man, particularly in *Reason of Church Government*: "besides which two [admonition and reproof from a pastor] there is no drug or antidote that can reach to purge



the mind” (CPW 1:846). While *Reason of Church Government* empowers pastors to “reach” “the mind,” *A Treatise of Civil Power* restricts such interaction to God and Christ, insisting that the “spiritual power by which Christ governs his church” can “reach the conscience and inward man with whom it chiefly deals and whom no power els can deal with” (CPW 7:257). Milton follows this explication of Christ’s abilities by pointing to the limits of earthly institutions, which “can only recommend or propound it [religion] to our free and conscientious examination” (CPW 7:258). The church consists of both human and divine components, but only the divine can actually touch the consciences of Christians. God’s abilities are necessary for freedom, but they also lessen the significance of individual agency in theological freedom.

With its focus on theology, *De Doctrina* also introduces the issue of God’s foreknowledge, which places additional tensions on human freedom. *De Doctrina* goes to great lengths to defend human choice in the face of divine foreknowledge, insisting: “what God has foreseen will come about, but not also by necessity ... What therefore is to happen according to contingency and freely is not at last produced as a result of God’s foreknowledge, but of its own freely acting causes, whose future spontaneous inclination is not hidden from God” (CW 8.1:65). Milton’s effort to show that human freedom can co-exist with divine foreknowledge runs on for several pages, but it comes under pressure later in the treatise when Milton describes God communicating with people. God, according to Milton, “invites fallen humankind to knowledge of how his godhead is to be placated and worshipped; inviting believers indeed out of gratuitous kindness for the purpose of salvation; [but] non-believers for the purpose of removing their every excuse” (CW 8.1:539-41). Milton presents God as providing humanity with every possible opportunity to make a wise choice through a general invitation to all people, but never forcing anyone to do so. At the same time, the fact that God knows that “un-believers” will not listen to

him raises uncomfortable questions regarding human freedom. God's invitation to "un-believers" is done not out of the hope of converting them, but to remove their excuses so that they can later be punished. God, due to his foreknowledge, seems to accept his failure to persuade much quicker than a church in which the ability to persuade is a cornerstone of liberty. Even labeling these people "un-believers" suggests that there is something in their nature that prevents them from ever following God, which means that they are not fully free. Theological freedom requires the inclusion of divine foreknowledge, grace, and free human choice; these concepts sometimes undermine each other. By exploring the theological dimensions of freedom, Milton faces new challenges in describing how an all-powerful, all-seeing God helps rather than hinders human freedom.

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Although *De Doctrina* explores theological freedom in detail, epic poetry enabled Milton to convey theological freedom through characters and plot rather than formal explanations. In his epic, Milton employs the character God to articulate the tenets of theological freedom, principally in two speeches in Book III, which God delivers while presiding over heaven. Although the content of these speeches is similar to that of *De Doctrina*, the verse of *Paradise Lost* enables Milton to present theological freedom in a more compact manner. The first speech centres on the freedom of the angels and humanity before Satan's rebellion and the Fall, and it conveys the notions of both free choice and dependence. Referring to Adam, God notes: "I made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (III.98-9). God frames the choice to obey or disobey his commands as a free choice, not something over which divine control is exercised. This choice, however, stems from the manner in which God created humanity. God's creations have free choice because God "made" them "Sufficient to have

stood, though free to fall.” God could have constructed the angels and Adam and Eve in such a way that they must stand or must fall, but he did not. The angels and Adam and Eve owe their initial freedom to their creation at the hands of God, a fact they can never escape. Although lines 98-9 are part of a longer speech, they encapsulate theological freedom more succinctly than any of the lengthy passages of *De Doctrina*. In less than two lines of poetry Milton conveys through the mouth of God the principles of free choice and dependence that comprise theological freedom.

Not only does *Paradise Lost* condense theological freedom, it also allows Milton to present theological freedom from God’s perspective (or at least how Milton interprets God’s perspective). The free choice that God outlines echoes the religious freedom of Milton’s prose, but God also presents freedom as a purely binary choice. Humanity and the angels can stand or fall; there is no mention of different paths that lead to standing. The broad Protestant coalition that Milton outlines in *Of True Religion* includes Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Socinians, and Arminians (*CPW* 8:423). Although some of these Protestant denominations differ in noticeable ways and some of them err, they are all, according to Milton, still on the divine path. While the range of beliefs that Milton tolerates in his prose presents freedom as a multiple-choice question, the role of God in *Paradise Lost* reduces free choice to a true or false statement, namely: God is God and the only God. This difference reflects God’s perspective. While people, churches, and governments see and are obsessed over the differences between Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Socinians, and Arminians, such differences are not significant to God. The details of different denominations become meaningless in theology, as God cares only if people accept and adhere to his authority. By presenting a God who does not even acknowledge differences among Protestants, Milton reveals the pettiness of Protestants who fight among each

other on earth; such conflicts have no meaning on the grand, theological scale. The individual free choice of Milton's prose remains in the theological freedom of *Paradise Lost*, but God simplifies that choice.

Although choice is simplified, God still frames the choice to stay loyal as one that involves active mental calculation. In this sense, the key theological choice is much like the religious decisions that a Christian makes on earth. God's assertion that he made the angels and Adam and Eve "Sufficient to have stood" stresses the capacity of all beings to understand the option of remaining loyal through reason. As God elaborates on the use of reason he reiterates some of the principles from Milton's prose:

What pleasure I from such obedience paid,  
When will and reason (reason also is choice)  
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,  
Made passive both, had served necessity,  
Not me (III.107-111).

When necessity dictates behaviour, one's reason becomes "passive" because it is not actively evaluating choices, but serving some other master. Any resulting obedience would be the equivalent of Catholicism's implicit faith, something in which a Protestant God had no interest. For the God of *Paradise Lost*, the belief and motivation behind people's actions are just as important as the actions themselves. "Passive" obedience to God, which is prompted by necessity, would still result in happiness for humanity, but it would not be free because it did not occur through rational choice. God, even though he knows which choice provides the most happiness, leaves the angels and humanity free to choose for themselves. By not forcing Adam and Eve to be obedient (and happy), God enables them to be free.

At the same time, God's explanation of theological freedom reveals that his motive for endowing his creations with such freedom is personal. God may not force Adam and Eve to be

happy, but he gives them a type of freedom that increases his own “pleasure.” This sense of God’s personal investment in freedom is heightened by the fact that God, in *Paradise Lost*, is not a theological abstraction, but an actual character whom the reader can see react to the angels’ and Adam and Eve’s choices. Each choice that his creations make prompts an emotional response in God, as only the voluntary choice to remain loyal will give God “pleasure.” The active use of “will and reason” becomes a form of service to God, and it is this service that God craves. Here, freedom is no longer about achieving a higher goal or protecting individuals, but satisfying the needs of a deity. God, in Book III, does not celebrate the individual dignity that each person achieves through freedom (although he may very well care about individual dignity); he refers only to his own pleasure as a reason for granting his creations freedom. God’s personal relationship with humanity’s freedom separates him from pastors or any other element of ecclesiastical institutions. Although pastors hope to be successful in their preaching, they are not the creators of humanity and, therefore, do not have the same personal investment in human freedom as God. The “pleasure” of human free will is reserved for God. In a theological context, freedom exists for the personal “pleasure” of the creator, but the result is still the ability of individuals to make their own choices free from coercion and necessity.

God’s personal stake in humanity’s freedom explains the tone of his speech. While Milton’s prose accepts that freedom from coercion in religion will inevitably lead to some poor decisions, God is enraged that some beings misuse their freedom. Much of God’s language gives the impression that he is mounting an anger-fuelled defence of theological freedom and its ultimately negative consequences for Adam and Eve. God is the first character to speak in Book III, but his claim that “they themselves [angels and Adam and Eve] decreed / Their own revolt, not I” (III.116-7) sounds like he is answering an accusation. To clear himself of all charges of

stacking the deck against Adam and Eve God questions “whose fault? / Whose but his own?” and insists “he [Adam] had of me / All he could have” (III.96-7, 116-7). God’s questions, outbursts, and frustrations sound reminiscent of Milton’s polemical prose, as God seems to argue with an accuser and attacks those who will not co-operate, such as Adam, who is “Ingrate” (III.97). Milton was no stranger to aggressively defending his position, particularly in political matters. Like God, Milton gets frustrated when Englishmen refuse to act in a certain way. According to *Eikonoklastes*, Milton’s countrymen, much like Adam, are “an ingratefull and perverse generation” (CW 6:284). To remove any excuse for remaining loyal to the dead king, Milton lays Charles I’s “guilt” “at his own dore” so that those who continue to follow the king “have none to blame but thir own folly, if they live and dye in such a strook’n blindness” (CW 6:281). Milton’s defence of Pride’s Purge in *Defensio*, much like God’s defence of free will, shifts blame off the army and onto the purged members themselves: “they [the purged members] were at fault and to blame for their absence (for the inclination of their hearts to the common foe was absence of the worst kind)” (CPW 4.1:518). Although defensive language sounds awkward in the mouth of an all-powerful deity, it is consistent with Milton’s political prose. God provides a freedom that has much in common with the religious liberty of Milton’s prose, but he responds to that freedom in a distinctly political tone that reflects his own investment in human freedom.

Perhaps the most complex aspect of God’s first speech in relation to freedom is foreknowledge, but in this instance, Milton backs away from expanding on what he wrote in *De Doctrina*. Danielson explains the compatibility of foreknowledge with free will in *Paradise Lost* by pointing to Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*, which argues that God can see past, present, and future together, thus allowing for both foreknowledge and free choice. The problem, Danielson notes, is that God’s ability to see all moments in time does not translate well into a

narrative poem (Danielson “The Fall” 151-2). Brian Cummings interprets the problems in God’s speech as stemming from the grammatical ambiguities of the English language. Although *Paradise Lost* sometimes suggests that Milton is receiving divine inspiration, the poem was ultimately written in a fallen world with a fallen language that effects all of its characters, even God (Cummings 430). The most interesting aspect of God’s comments on foreknowledge in *Paradise Lost* is how simple they are in relation to the complex and detailed discussion in *De Doctrina*. God simply denies that foreknowledge reduces freedom: “if I foreknew, / Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault, / Which had no less proved certain unforeknown” (117-9). This statement captures none of the particular arguments of *De Doctrina*, which include analyses of both the nature of divine decrees and the cause of events (*CW* 8.1:59-67). Milton’s decision to limit God’s comments on foreknowledge in *Paradise Lost* suggests that he was aware that an epic poem was not the ideal genre for such a subject due to the restrictions of narrative. He could have converted the arguments from *De Doctrina* into verse and placed them in the mouth of God, but such writing would not have aided in the explication of theological freedom. God is simply not the best figure to explain to people how he can create them, know exactly what they will do, and yet not disrupt their free choice.

Given the limits of what *Paradise Lost* could add to the foreknowledge question, Milton devotes more energy to an issue that poetry could illuminate, prevenient grace. While God’s first speech in Book III focuses on prelapsarian freedom, his second speech introduces the concept of prevenient grace and its importance for fallen humanity. Postlapsarian freedom still involves free choice and the absence of coercion, but there is also an additional sense of dependence. To prevent humanity from remaining “enthralled” by sin, which would control all future choices, God proclaims: “once more I will renew / His lapsed powers” (III.175-6). God’s

words imply that he previously renewed humanity's powers and is doing so again after the Fall. The only earlier point that can be associated with establishing humanity's powers is the initial creation of humanity. If God's act of "once more" renewing humanity's powers after the Fall parallels his creation of humanity, then prevenient grace restores prelapsarian freedom. A few lines later in the same speech, God reiterates this point: "once more he shall stand / On even ground against his mortal foe" (III.178-9). The repetition of "once more" further suggests that humanity is returning to an earlier state. God's language at the moment of the Fall continues to indicate similarities between prelapsarian and postlapsarian freedom. After Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, God asserts that he did not "touch with lightest moment of impulse / His free will, to her own inclining left / In even scale" (X.45-7). If before the Fall God left Adam and Eve "In even scale" and after the Fall prevenient grace places humanity "On even ground," then humanity's potential to follow God is the same in both circumstances. Through prevenient grace people "once more" have the same free choice that Adam and Eve did in Eden.

Prevenient grace comes from God, but the poem presents grace in such a way that it does not nullify free will as Calvin claimed. Stevens argues that Milton, in Book III, presents grace "as something that grows in the human heart," which validates human agency. People must gradually learn through God's grace to achieve salvation (Stevens "Obnoxious Satan" 297). Myers similarly asserts that all of Book III counters the image of God as a dictator, which Satan presents in the first two books, by stressing that grace gives human will "autonomy that allows it even to ordain its own future" (92). The importance of individual agency is something that God goes to great lengths to stress. Grace enables people to be saved, but God asserts that only those who choose to follow him will be saved. Grace, according to God, is "offered" and it "Invites" (III.187-8); it does not compel. God proceeds to describe how he engages with fallen humanity:



“I will place within them as a guide / My umpire conscience, whom if they will hear, / Light after light well used they shall attain” (III.194-6). The phrase “if they will hear” emphasises the orality of conscience and suggests that it functions like a pastor preaching the Word of God, which people can either listen to or ignore. By installing a personal pastor in each person, God pushes theological freedom beyond the bounds of institutions while maintaining the principles of religious freedom in relation to institutions; like a pastor, conscience admonishes, but it does not compel.

God’s comments to the Son continue to stress the role of the individual Christian in achieving salvation. After the Son volunteers, God proclaims that his sacrifice will “redeem what Hellish hate / So easily destroyed, and still destroys / In those who, when they may, accept not grace” (III.300-302). These lines present grace as an opportunity that an individual must seize rather than as a state that seizes an individual. People cannot accept grace at any given moment, they can only do so “when they may.” This temporal quality suggests that there is a specific window for accepting grace, which individual Christians must determine and then pursue. God does create the possibility for fallen humanity’s salvation, but each individual person must make specific choices to be saved.

Individual free choices lead to salvation, but fallen humanity is not even aware of such choices without divine aid through prevenient grace. God’s language captures this duality in theological freedom through the near repetition of key phrases:

Upheld by me, yet once more he shall stand  
On even ground against his mortal foe,  
By me upheld, that he may know how frail  
His fallen condition is, and to me owe  
All his deliv’rance, and to none but me (III.178-82).

Lines 178 and 180 begin with the same three words, but in a different order. By shuffling the word order, Milton allows God to make the same point twice, but with different implications. Beginning line 178 with the word “Upheld” places the emphasis on humanity’s new state after God intervenes. The two lines that follow “Upheld by me” note the “even ground” on which humanity stands, highlighting the choice that people can make when “Upheld” by God. Here, Milton explains what humanity can do when they receive help from God; being on “even ground” people can, if they make the right choices, defeat their “mortal foe.” Line 180, conversely, opens with “By me,” shifting the focus to God himself. The important point of the subsequent lines is God’s power rather than humanity’s choice. Lines 180 to 182 each contain the word “me,” moving the attention off people and onto God, to whom each person “owe[s]” his/her freedom. Humanity is now “frail” and “deliv’rance” depends on God rather than free choice. Both positions are part of the theological freedom of *Paradise Lost*, even though they seem to express the contradictory values of free choice and dependence.

Milton’s strategy of showing the two sides of theological freedom by repeating the same phrase with subtle variation occurs again in the same speech by God:

for I will clear their senses dark,  
What may suffice, and soften stony hearts  
To pray, repent, and bring obedience due.  
To prayer, repentance, and obedience due,  
Though but endeavored with sincere intent,  
Mine ear shall not be slow, mine eye not shut (III.188-93).

Lines 190 and 191 are essentially the same, yet each one means something different in relation to freedom. “To pray, repent, and bring obedience due” comes after God outlines how he will transform fallen humanity. The verbs of line 190 are the results of God’s actions in humanity. The key actor here is God, as he brings out positive behaviours in people. Following line 191 (“To prayer, repentance, and obedience due”) is God’s reaction to human behaviour. The

emphasis is now on humanity's ability to catch God's attention, if they perform the appropriate deeds. Humanity becomes the entity creating results. The actions are the same in both lines, but in the first instance God induces the actions in people, while in the second people undertake actions that move God. Both God and humanity play a role in theological freedom, and the repetition of the praying, repenting, and obedience links the acts of God to those of humanity; God instilling grace and humanity praying are two sides of the same coin and cannot be separated when theological freedom functions as it should. People depend on God to clear their senses and soften their hearts so that they can reform, but once they choose to reform, they can determine their own salvation.

As with the free choice to stand or fall, fallen humanity's choice to hear or dismiss conscience affects God in a personal way. The personal nature of postlapsarian freedom for God differentiates his harsh attitude towards disobedient people from that of the church. God's "call" appears to function as a pastor, but the consequences of ignoring God are more severe than those of disregarding a pastor: "They who neglect and scorn, shall never taste [salvation]; / But hard be hardened, blind be blinded more, / That they may stumble on and fall deeper" (III.199-201). God interprets those people who ignore his call as not merely making a poor decision, but personally insulting him. The entire purpose, from God's perspective, of restoring human freedom after the Fall is to provide people with a chance "to appease betimes / Th'incensed Deity" (III.186-7). If God was already "incensed," the rejection of grace further enrages him. God is so affected by human choice that after the initial choice to hear or ignore one's conscience, God takes over and ensures that the individual either "shall attain" "Light after light" (III.196) or "deeper fall." In theological freedom, human agency only exists up to a point, as God permits fallen humanity one chance to hear his call before assuming control.

God's strict, unforgiving attitude contrasts with Milton's church discipline. A church could excommunicate a recalcitrant member, but there was always the possibility (and indeed the hope) that the member could reform and return to the congregation. The entire purpose of excommunication was to act as a "cleansing medicin" to help show the member the error of his ways (*CPW* 1:847). The spiritual "medcin" of excommunication also acts in conjunction with God: "For if repentance sent from heaven meet this lost wanderer, and draw him out of that steep journey ... then with incredible expressions of joy all his brethren receive him" (*CPW* 1:848). Spiritual healing through institutions, however, has no place within theological freedom. Milton is not so much undermining his own concept of church discipline, as showing that some aspects of institutional discipline do not apply to the theological realm. Theologically, there is only one choice that matters, but on earth people must make many religious choices. The grand scale of *Paradise Lost* transforms the choice to follow God into a single moment from which there is no going back, while Milton's prose presents that same choice as a continual journey that can include steps both forward and backward with the church offering guidance and "medcin." The choice is essentially the same, it just plays out differently in heaven than on earth.

The choice to hear God's call depends on grace, and *Paradise Lost* utilizes the characters of Adam and Eve to illustrate the impact of grace better than any of Milton's prose. *De Doctrina* also portrays God's grace as altering human nature so that people can again "wish," but *Paradise Lost* goes beyond providing a reading of scripture that stresses grace to actually showing grace in two characters whom the reader has seen throughout the narrative. Prior to receiving grace, the fallen Adam and Eve "in mutual accusation spent / The fruitless hours" (IX.187-8). This bickering, which includes some biting insults ("ingrateful Eve" [IX.1164], "thou serpent" [X.867]), is painful to read as Adam and Eve's former love and respect for each other appears

gone, and it also highlights the limited capacity of fallen humanity. The situation changes with the arrival of prevenient grace:

Thus they in lowliest plight repentant stood  
Praying, for from the mercy-seat above  
Prevenient grace descending had removed  
The stony from their hearts, and made new flesh  
Regenerate grow instead (XI.1-5).<sup>44</sup>

The freedom that accompanies prevenient grace does have an element of empowerment, as freedom in liberal interpretations does, but it is also humbling. Once prevenient grace descends, Adam and Eve are “in lowliest plight repentant;” they are not seeking greater opportunities to control their lives, but hoping to satisfy an “incensed deity.” Within this humble, lowly state, however, Adam and Eve gain strength, as they can now breathe “sighs” “Unutterable” (XI.5-6). By reducing Adam and Eve to “lowliest plight,” prevenient grace enables them to perform actions that they otherwise could not. Their freedom is as much about capability established by God as free choice. Once they have received grace, Adam and Eve leave their vindictive “accusation[s]” that were “fruitless,” and participate in a noble and powerful activity. The reader witnesses Adam and Eve at many stages in their journey, including their transformation and liberation through grace. In a narrative poem like *Paradise Lost*, God does not bestow grace on a theoretical person; he bestows grace on real characters whom the reader knows intimately. By depicting the transformation brought on by grace in two fully developed characters, *Paradise Lost* allows the reader to understand the impact of receiving grace in a way that theological treatise never could. *Paradise Lost* shows while *De Doctrina* tells.

God upholds humanity through prevenient grace so that people can “once more” be free, but God also denies that same prevenient grace to the fallen angels. God’s decision to bestow the grace necessary for freedom on some of his fallen creations but not others brings an arbitrary

dimension to theological freedom. The question of whether or not the angels had free will interested numerous theologians in the Middle Ages and early modern period. Peter Lombard claimed that some angels did fall, but other angels, who were assisted by grace, did not. Those angels who turned away from God fell, but those who turned toward God confirmed their goodness and received more grace. Both sets of angels exercised free will, but they could not change their state (Raymond *Milton's Angels* 71-3). Joad Raymond argues that Milton's depiction of the angels is a variant on Lombard's, as *Paradise Lost*, unlike Lombard's account, creates a sense that it is possible for the loyal angels to backslide (*Milton's Angels* 258). Another difference is that Milton makes no reference to the loyal angels receiving grace or remaining loyal through grace. God does not help the loyal angels in *Paradise Lost*; instead, they choose to be and remain loyal. Explaining free will to Adam, Raphael attributes his loyalty to a free choice, not grace: "freely we serve, / Because freely we love, as in our will / To love or not; in this we stand or fall" (V.538-40). Grace plays no role in Raphael's loyalty, and his use of the present tense depicts serving, loving, and standing as a continuous free choice, suggesting that he could change his choice at any time.

Although the possibility of falling remains for the loyal angels, Milton follows Lombard in making it explicit that the fallen angels cannot recover. In *Paradise Lost*, God denies prevenient grace to the fallen angels in the same speech in which he promises grace for humanity. God's justification for treating fallen angels and fallen humanity differently is: "The first sort [the fallen angels] by their own suggestion fell, / Self-tempted, self-depraved: man falls deceived / By the other first" (III.129-31). This explanation is unsustainable, as even the loyal angels acknowledge that the rebel angels were in fact tempted by Satan. When Michael sees the

rebel angels ready for war, he questions how Satan has managed to persuade so many angels to join him:

                  how hast thou disturbed  
Heav'n's blessed peace, and into nature brought  
Misery, uncreated till the crime  
Of thy rebellion? How hast thou instilled  
Thy malice into thousands, once upright  
And faithful, now proved false? (VI.266-71).

The repetition of “How hast thou” places the blame on Satan personally, not the other rebels. The only way Michael can fathom any angel rebelling against God is if the “Author of evil” implanted “malice” in them (VI.262, 270). Although it is not Michael’s intention, his interpretation of the rebellion undermines God’s justification for denying the fallen angels prevenient grace. If being “Self-tempted” is the grounds for not receiving grace, then Satan is the only rebel angel who should be denied grace. Denying grace to the fallen angels would not have been controversial to seventeenth-century readers. Most theological accounts of the angels, including those of Lombard, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Johannes Wollebius (a Swiss Protestant theologian) present the fallen angels as being incapable of reform (Raymond *Milton’s Angels* 71-3). Milton, therefore, does not feel the need to construct an elaborate justification. The result, however, is a God who appears arbitrary in his bestowal of grace.

Since God denies prevenient grace to the fallen angels, angelic freedom centres on their response to the Son’s elevation. Milton structures his moment in the poem to give the angels the free choice on how they interpret the elevation. When he elevates the Son, God is much briefer than when he discusses free will in Book III:

                  This day I have begot whom I declare  
My only Son, and on this holy hill  
Him have anointed, who ye now behold  
At my right hand; your head I him appoint;  
And by myself have sworn to him shall bow

All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord:

...

him who disobeys

Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day

Cast out from God and blessed vision" (V. 603-13).

God's speech at the Son's elevation is not a justification but a command followed by a clear punishment. Gone are the defences and explanations that filled God's two speeches on free will, but the threatening tone of a potentially "incensed deity" remains. For John Rogers, the Son's elevation illustrates how freedom is built into Milton's theology. God's elevation of the Son is arbitrary in that it is not in accordance with natural law, meaning that it cannot be understood by applying rational principles. Since the justness of the elevation cannot be determined through natural law, the exercise of reason does not bind the angels to a specific response to the elevation. Consequently, the angels have no instinctive inclination towards the elevation of the Son; they are free to choose whether or not to accept it. Such a choice becomes a perfect means of testing their loyalty to God (Rogers "The Political" 76-81). Rogers attributes the "reasonlessness" of the Son's elevation to the fact that it occurs chronologically before God declares the Son's merit and the angelic choir praises the Son for his role in creation in Book III (Rogers "The Political" 73-5). God deliberately withholds the information that would justify the Son's elevation from the angels so that their choice will be a free expression of their loyalty, or lack thereof. Although the angels' choice is, as Rogers points out, free, it is not made without reason. The angels are not using their reason to assess whether or not the Son is worthy of his new position, they are using their reason to answer the crucial theological question: is God God and the only God? An affirmative answer leads to the celebration of the Son's position, while a negative answer prompts rebellion.



Rogers is correct that the poem's chronology ensures that the angels make a free choice, but the order in which Milton reveals information controls the reader's interpretation of events. This presentation exposes differences in the prelapsarian freedom of the angels and the postlapsarian freedom of Milton's readers. Book III provides a justification for the Son's position before the reader actually encounters the elevation. When God looks for someone in heaven to sacrifice himself to redeem humanity, the Son volunteers:

Behold me then, me for him [man], 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 (III.236-40).

This speech leaves no doubt in the reader's mind who has created the possibility for humanity's salvation. Within five lines, the Son says "me" and "I" six times and "for him" and "for his sake" three times, emphasizing what he going to do for humanity. Nor are the Son's actions on behalf of humanity vague. Milton packs seven verbs within these five lines ("Behold," "offer," "let ... fall," "Account," "leave," "put off," "die"), outlining everything the Son must do in order to save humanity. After reading this speech, the reader cannot help but be struck by the Son's commitment to humanity. The angels then proceed to sing praise for the Son, revealing his role in creation (III.390-1). The structure of the narrative allows the reader to see the Son's worthiness before seeing the Son's elevation. With this information, the reader stays one step ahead of Satan. Far from testing his readers in the manner that Stanley Fish describes (ix), Milton organizes his narrative to shape the reader's reaction to the elevation. Rogers refers to a choice to which one has no predisposition as "the highest form of human liberty Milton was able to imagine" ("The Political" 70). That may be true, but such liberty was only accessible to people in a prelapsarian world. In crafting the narrative structure of *Paradise Lost*, Milton

assumes the role of conscience and supplies his fallen readers with sufficient information to interpret the elevation of the Son rightly.

Milton illustrates God's commitment to not violating human freedom through Raphael's mission to earth. A divinely appointed embassy appears to be an intervention into Adam's choices, but God ensures that Raphael's precise message does not disrupt Adam's freedom to choose. God's instructions to Raphael centre on free choice rather than necessity:

... advise him [Adam] of his happy state,  
Happiness in his power left to free will,  
Left to his own free will, his will though free,  
Yet mutable; whence warn him to beware  
He swerve not too secure (V.234-8).

Three times within two lines (V.235-6) God refers to Adam's "free will." The repetition of free will, Feisal Mohamed notes, reveals the true significance of Raphael's mission, reducing God's subsequent warning about Satan to an "afterthought" (*In the Anteroom* 124). For his part, Raphael, when he first arrives in Eden, finds three different ways of saying that Adam has free will within eleven lines ("that thou are happy, owe to God; / That thou continu'st such, owe to thyself," "ordained thy will / By nature free," "Our voluntary service he requires, / Not our necessitated" [VIII.520-30]) and then repeats the message of free will twice more before leaving Adam ("take heed lest passion sway / Thy judgement to do aught, which else free will / Would not admit," "to stand or fall / Free in thine own arbitrament it lies" [VIII.635-41]). The repetition of free will by God and Raphael suggests that Milton is conscious that the extent of Adam and Eve's freedom in relation to an all-powerful, all-knowing deity is questionable. Free will, however, is essential to the premise of the poem; therefore, Milton has God and Raphael state the theme of free will again and again so as to leave no doubt in the reader's mind that Adam and Eve's choices are free.

God, through Raphael, delivers a warning to Adam, but he constructs the warning in such a way as not to infringe on Adam's liberty. The emphasis is on Adam's freedom and ability to decide for himself, not on specific behaviour that is required to fulfill God's purpose. If anything, God is reminding Adam of the active nature of freedom; the freedom to choose means that Adam cannot be "too secure" because no one will bear the burden of liberty for him. Kenneth Graham views Raphael's visit to Eden as a scene of discipline with Raphael functioning as a pastor who admonishes Adam (149). Milton's prose emphasizes that church discipline contributed to religious liberty and *Paradise Lost* presents Raphael's mission as consistent with theological freedom. Since Adam has not yet fallen when he meets Raphael, he has not yet received the conscience that God promises for fallen humanity in Book III. Raphael becomes the prelapsarian version of conscience. Rather than tell Adam exactly what to do, Raphael issues a general caution: "God made thee perfect, not immutable; / And good he made thee, but to persevere / He left it in thy power" (V.524-6). These lines reveal that Adam's freedom is both terrifying and empowering, as he cannot depend on God or any other entity to help him maintain his goodness, but he also has the ability to shape his own destiny. This situation, although intimidating, should not be problematic because Adam, according to Raphael, is capable of resisting any temptation on his own: "To stand or fall / Free in thine own arbitrament it lies. / Perfect within, no outward aid require" (VIII.640-2). This message informs and reminds Adam of his freedom and the responsibility that accompanies such freedom, but it does not control his future decisions; it leaves him in "even scale."<sup>45</sup>

Milton also uses this moment in the poem to illustrate both God's concern for his creations and his commitment to punishment. While the tension between foreknowledge and free will also appears in *De Doctrina*, *Paradise Lost* manages to ease this tension by again

highlighting the personal nature of theological freedom for God. Knowing Satan's plan, God looks on Adam and Eve "With pity" and dispatches Raphael to alert them to the present danger (V.220). The fact that "pity" is God's initial motivation for sending Raphael reveals that he is not happy that Adam and Eve will fall and experience future suffering. He clearly would prefer it if Adam and Eve choose to obey his command, and he does everything short of violating their freedom (which would be a true expression of totalitarianism) to help them remain loyal. If, however, God's efforts are in vain, as he knows they will be, he wants to strip Adam and Eve's disloyalty of all excuses. Raphael's intervention is not designed to alter Adam and Eve's future actions, but to render their eventual sin "inexcusable" (V.The Argument). To legitimize his punishment of Adam and Eve, God ensures that the first two humans cannot claim ignorance: "this let him know, / Lest willfully transgressing he pretend / Surprisal, unadmonished, unforewarned" (V.243-5). In this instance, God treats Adam and Eve more like "unbelievers" with no chance of success than potential converts. As the author of theological freedom, God can simultaneously "pity" Adam and Eve and view them as "unbelievers." Milton captures God's investment in freedom through his desire to see humanity remain happy and to punish those who transgress. This depiction does not change the fact that theological freedom includes both divine foreknowledge and human free choice, but it renders God less cold and legalistic in his communication with humanity.

God not only ensures that Adam and Eve's choice regarding the Tree of Knowledge is free, he also ignores his own rule regarding self-temptation and maintains their freedom through prevenient grace; this arbitrary bestowal of prevenient grace emphasizes God's power at the expense of human choice. Critics such as Danielson and more recently Deni Kasa attempt to reconcile grace with Adam and Eve's free will (Danielson *Milton's Good* 87-90; Kasa 270-2).

Adam and Eve do respond to God's grace in a manner that pleases God, but the only reason they can do so while the fallen angels cannot is prevenient grace, and the only reason that Adam receives prevenient grace is an arbitrary decision by God. As mentioned above, Satan is the only rebel angel who is truly "Self-tempted," but Adam's temptation also comes from himself. Eve is certainly "deceived" by Satan, but Adam never has any contact with Satan; therefore, he does not fall "deceived / By the other first," he just falls. Both Michael Schoenfeldt and Joshua Scodel stress the role of Adam's love for Eve in his fall (Schoenfeldt "Commotion" 62; Scodel 181-6). Adam's love, however, does not blind him to the consequences of the situation and the choice he is about to make. He informs Eve: "with thee / Certain my resolution is to die" (IX.906-7). Adam, unlike Eve, understands full well that he will experience death, yet he needs no persuading to exclaim: "from thy state / Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe" (IX.915-6). C. S. Lewis views Adam's fall as less ignoble than Eve's (126), but Adam's words also render him less worthy of prevenient grace than Eve. Untempted and undeceived by either Satan or Eve, Adam's fall is just as much the result of self-temptation as Satan's. If self-temptation is the standard by which God distributes prevenient grace, Eve and the other fallen angels should receive prevenient grace while Satan and Adam should be condemned to hell. Adam's freedom after eating the forbidden fruit hinges on receiving prevenient grace, which, according to God, he never should have received.

Milton addresses this problem during the judgement of Adam and Eve by revising the nature of Adam's fall so that he is eligible for grace. When the Son arrives in Eden to pass judgement, Adam invents a new account of his transgression:

This woman whom thou mad'st to be my help  
And gav'st me as thy perfect gift, so good,  
So fit, so acceptable, so divine,  
That from her hand I could suspect no ill,

And what she did, whatever in itself,  
Her doing seemed to justify the deed;  
She gave me of the tree, and I did eat (X.137-43).

In Adam's alternative version, he is deceived and tempted by Eve. A. J. A. Waldock notes that this report, despite its inaccuracies, becomes the official version of what happened (50), as the Son accepts it and proceeds to chastise Adam for listening to Eve: "was she made thy guide, Superior, or but equal, that to her / Thou didst resign thy manhood" (X.146-8). Adam's temptation at the hands of Eve needs to be the official version because it justifies Adam's receipt of prevenient grace. The Son's acceptance of an account that is clearly false represents an attempt to reconcile the commands of God with what actually happens in the poem. Adam's excuse provides an opportunity to make God look consistent, and the Son takes it. The Son then abruptly questions Eve—"Say woman, what is this which thou hast done?" (X.158)—not to hear her side of the story, but to ensure that she will not contradict the official version. Her brief response, "The Serpent me beguiled and I did eat" (X.162), represents her being pressured into silence. The reader is witnessing the first cover-up in human history, as religious beings act like political agents. This new interpretation of Adam's fall, however, does not erase what actually happened. He, like Satan, was self-tempted. The fact that God does not adhere to his own criteria for distributing prevenient grace renders salvation dependent on divine whims. This aspect of theological freedom has no parallels on earth.

Despite the fact that God differs from any institution, he still operates much like the institutions that Milton idealizes in his prose. Both Joan Bennett and Walker argue that God's rule in heaven is an appropriate example for earthly government, while Worden, as mentioned above, views *Paradise Lost* and its divine monarchy as reflecting Milton's withdrawal from politics (Bennett 66-7; Walker *Paradise Lost* 230; Worden "Milton's Republicanism" 242-4).

Although God's power and status as the creator prevent any absolute parallel between him and earthly institutions, his behavior is at least a partial model for how earthly institutions should engage with threats to religious liberty. When confronting Satan's rebellion, God favors the persuasive components of discipline over the use of force. God's praise for Abdiel's loyalty expresses his preference for verbal admonition rather than physical conflict:

Well hast thou [Abdiel] fought  
The better fight, who single hast maintained  
Against revolted multitudes the cause  
Of truth, in word mightier than they in arms (VI.29-32).

God refers to Abdiel's verbal sparring with Satan as a "fight," but it is "The better fight" because it is the only way of actually changing someone's mind. Theological truth, just like religious truth on earth, cannot be imposed through arms; it can only be explained through language. Graham interprets Abdiel's admonitions and the subsequent expulsion of Satan and the rebels as consistent with the principles of church discipline. Since Satan and the rebels cannot be persuaded, they must be removed from heaven (Graham 161-4). God's denial of prevenient grace to the fallen angels, however, differentiates the expulsion of the rebels from an act of church discipline in Milton's prose. Excommunicated members have the opportunity to reform and rejoin the congregation, while the fallen angels have no such option. This difference illustrates how God's personal reactions differentiate theological freedom from the institutional procedures of the church.

The expulsion of Satan and the rebels involves the use of military force, but God employs his army in a manner that is consistent with religious liberty on earth. God's initial response to Satan's rebellion is to gather the loyal angels "In our defense" (V.731), not to convert the rebels forcibly. In *De Doctrina*, Milton mocked the notion of using temporal power to force unbelievers to attend religious worship: "it is outlandish and impious, in equal measure, to force

religious people to [adopt] a religion of which they do not approve, and [to force] profane people whom God bans from sacred things to [join in] public worship of God” (CW 8.2:1233).

Similarly, God does not utilize the army of loyal angels to compel the rebels to accept his rule, be part of heaven again, and participate in the worship of himself and the Son. Instead, the rebel angels can continue “to despise / God and Messiah” “as likes them” (VI.17-18), but they must do so in hell, away from the true religion of heaven. God sees no value in forced conversions (only admonition can produce a sincere change of mind), but he still marshals military forces to protect his realm and all those who enjoy freedom within it. God’s monarchical rule is not a quasi-republican state that preserves republican liberty with a king, as Norbrook suggests (474-5); rather it is an example to civil magistrates of how to operate in the religious sphere. Facing rebellion from angels who ignore verbal admonitions, God acts as both a civil and religious leader protecting his congregation and preventing further contamination.

With *De Doctrina* and *Paradise Lost*, Milton adds further depth to his interpretation of liberty by extending it into the theological sphere. Although Milton tackles theological freedom last, it occurs first in that it pre-dates all human institutions and without it religious and political freedom would be impossible. The exploration of theology in a mythical setting marks, as Gordon Teskey points out (345-8), a return to the origin for Milton. Milton focuses on the origin not only because he seeks to understand failures in seventeenth-century England, as Teskey argues, but also because he wants to complete his version of liberty and he can only do so by looking at the origin of freedom. Being free in the theological sense involves a double dependency on God (for creation and prevenient grace) which creates and preserves free choice. While *De Doctrina* articulates these principles, the epic poem *Paradise Lost* best illustrates them in action. Through the character of God, his application of prevenient grace, and his



commitment to protecting freedom, Milton presents a divine perspective and conveys a sense of dependency in a way that he never could in a theological treatise. This sense of dependence is strong because the poem makes it clear that fallen humanity should not, according to God's rule about self-temptation, be free. To be free, one should not think too deeply on how Adam actually fell, but recognize that the official lie benefits humanity. "Justify[ing] the ways of God" (I.26) amounts to convincing the readers of *Paradise Lost* to embrace and be thankful for the freedom that God has given them while refraining from questioning the validity of that freedom. God's actions, although arbitrary, are justified because they result in human freedom.

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<sup>40</sup> The extent to which Milton's prose relates to his poetry has divided scholars. C. S. Lewis claims that it is not necessary to consider Milton's prose and private thought in order to interpret his poetry, as he wrote poetry for a different audience and different purpose (91-2). At the other end of the spectrum, Joad Raymond, focusing on Milton's depiction of the angels, draws a strong connection between Milton's thought and poetry, arguing that it is a mistake to separate Milton's beliefs from the narrative of *Paradise Lost* (*Milton's Angels* 214). Michael Lieb, adopting a middle ground as he analyzes Milton's God, acknowledges that *Paradise Lost* draws on the theology of *De Doctrina* while allowing the deities in each text to "enjoy distinct identities" (*Theological* 127-8).

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of how *Paradise Lost* differs from philosophy see Kerrigan, 263-4.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Strier views the spontaneity of Luther's Christian liberty as differentiating it from Milton's liberty with its emphasis on deliberative choice rather than an outpouring of gratitude toward God (27-8).

<sup>43</sup> Myers notes that Milton, unlike Arminians, believed in general rather than particular election. Milton also departed from Arminians by not including reprobation as part of predestination and in asserting that the reason people accepted grace and others rejected it lay in human nature (Myers 49-51).

<sup>44</sup> The reference to God replacing a stony heart with a heart of flesh is from Ezekiel 11:19 ("and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and, and will give them an heart of flesh") and it is the same passage to which Calvin refers when arguing that grace removes any human agency. Calvin frames God as destroying everything in a person so that he can replace a heart of stone with a heart of flesh (85). In *Paradise Lost*, Milton maintains the feeling of transformation that Calvin emphasizes, but renders God less aggressive by saying nothing about destruction, stating only that the "stony" is "removed."

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<sup>45</sup> The language of God's warning does not interfere with Adam's free choice, but critics are divided over whether God's foreknowledge undermines the viability of Raphael's mission. William Empson, perhaps Milton's harshest critic, compares God's foreknowledge to a totalitarian state and describes Raphael's mission and its inevitable failure as an "unpleasant" task (146, 174). From this perspective, God's foreknowledge renders Raphael's warning similar to God calling both believers and "unbelievers" in *De Doctrina* so that they have no excuses for sinful behavior. Feisal Mohamed, on the other hand, asserts that even though Adam does not fully grasp Raphael's lesson, Raphael's mission is not meaningless. For Mohamed, the significance of Raphael's lesson is his depiction of God and the Son, which is essential for the Redemption and the Apocalypse. Raphael's story prompts a spiritual awakening for fallen humanity and it is part of the spiritual journey that the reader of *Paradise Lost* takes (Mohamed *In the Anteroom* 133-40). Graham, examining the scene through the lens of discipline, also argues that God's warnings, although they do not change the outcome, are not pointless. Discipline, for Milton, is not only about preventing sin, but also about revealing sin and guilt, and Raphael's mission is unquestionably a success in this regard (Graham 161).

## **Chapter 5**

### **Failures in Theological Freedom: Satan's Rebellion and Adam and Eve's Fall**

Through *Paradise Lost*, Milton displays not only theological freedom in operation, but also failures in theological freedom. A theological failure stems from a poor choice that leads to future enslavement; the initial choice is free, but it renders future theological freedom impossible (short of divine intervention). These events are just as useful in illustrating theological freedom and its implications for humanity as God's speeches. Satan's rebellion and Adam and Eve's Fall represent two different failures in the theological realm. Satan misunderstands the very notion of theological freedom. Seemingly unaware of his heavenly surroundings, Satan pursues the institutional liberty of Milton's prose. For Satan, liberty comprises institutions and leaders that enable the angels to express their true nature. Since he views God and the Son not as the source of creation but as political institutions that suppress angelic freedom, Satan leads a rebellion against them. Those angels who follow Satan transfer the custody of their liberty to Satan as they believe that his leadership frees them. While Satan pursues a faulty version of freedom, Adam and Eve are less deliberate in their violation of God's command, but they fall none the less. Their difficulties begin in the separation scene when Adam struggles to reconcile conflicting pieces of Raphael's advice in an effort to follow God's will. Unlike Satan, Adam truly wants to remain loyal to God, but his inability to process the challenges of the separation scene raises questions regarding his capacity to follow God. Adam makes an honest attempt, but he still fails. Through this failure, *Paradise Lost* undermines the reader's own confidence in humanity's potential for freedom before finally reaffirming theological freedom through grace at the end of the poem. The result is a series of dramatic shifts in emotion that deepen the reader's sense of dependence on God.

In depicting failures in theological freedom, *Paradise Lost* continues to incorporate elements of Milton's prose. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of *Paradise Lost* to square with Milton's prose is the fact that God rules as a monarch while Satan espouses republican principles. In an effort to reconcile Satan's republican rhetoric with Milton's own politics, David Norbrook insists that Satan's use of republican language does not discredit such language. He also claims that although God is a monarch, his rule still fits within Milton's version of republicanism (469, 474-5). Norbrook's approach is part of a broad effort to find elements of republicanism in the divine monarchy of *Paradise Lost* (Fletcher 98; Hadfield 65-6; Riebling 574; Himy 120-1). Victoria Kahn adopts a different approach to the poem's republicanism, arguing that Satan's speeches reveal the possibility of appropriating republican language for evil purposes, which ultimately makes virtue meaningful (210). Similarly, Sharon Achinstein interprets the ambiguities in Satan's parliament in hell as part of Milton's efforts to train his readers (*Milton and the Revolutionary* 202). One of the most common explanations for Milton's monarchical portrayal of God is the separation of earthly and heavenly politics. Barbara Lewalski and Walter Lim contend that Milton accepted a heavenly monarchy, but not an earthly one (Lewalski "Paradise Lost and Milton's Politics" 150, 156-7; Lim 120). Lewalski and Lim are correct to point to a distinction in Milton's thought, but the crucial difference between Satan and God is not the structures of government that they create, but the types of freedom that they promote. The conflict between God and Satan is structured around two versions of freedom; one theological, the other institutional. Whereas God espouses a theological freedom that moves beyond earthly institutions while maintaining some of their features, Satan attempts to bring institutions into the realm of theology. In the mythical setting of heaven institutional liberty results in not only bondage, but also blasphemy.

With the characters of Adam and Eve, one of the key critical challenges has been to explain how they, who are in a perfect prelapsarian state, could fall freely. Following a traditional perspective, Martin Dzelzainis views the Fall as a failure in gender roles, which in Eden is politicized (“The Politics” 561). Danielson asserts that Milton avoids portraying the Fall as either inevitable or necessary. Through the episodes like Eve seeing her reflection, Eve’s dream, and Adam’s infatuation with Eve, Milton shows the fallibility of Adam and Eve and their potential to fall (Danielson “The Fall” 152-3). Adam and Eve’s freedom is perhaps the most complex element of the poem, as they try to engage with theological freedom, often in difficult circumstances. Although Adam and Eve exist in a world without government, church, or any other institution, Milton applies the language of and tensions in institutional freedom to their circumstances, both in how they experience prelapsarian freedom and how the separation scene develops. Their struggles highlight the challenge (and sometimes impossibility) of freedom in a way that Satan’s foolhardy and misguided rebellion cannot. More than any other part of the poem, the experience of Adam and Eve reveals that theological freedom is not *Readie and Easie*; it is a maze that requires divine aid to navigate.

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Even before he began composing *Paradise Lost*, Milton associated Satan with oppressive institutions that misunderstood freedom. In three of his prose tracts, Milton compares contemporary individuals and institutions to Satan. In *Reason of Church Government*, Milton refers to Lucifer as “the first prelate Angel” (CPW 1:762). *Areopagitica* states that the Court of Star Chamber, which was involved in press censorship until it was dissolved in 1641, “is now fall’n from the Starres with Lucifer” (CPW 2:570). Finally, in *Eikonoklastes* Milton, as part of his criticism of Charles I’s involvement with religion, argues: “God bids us Be subject for

conscience sake, that is, as to a Magistrat, and in the Laws; not usurping over spiritual things, as Lucifer beyond his sphere” (CW 6:370). The prelates, Court of Star Chamber, and Charles I all sought to control religious choices, often by inappropriately applying temporal power to the religious sphere. In Milton’s prose, such action was Satanic, and in *Paradise Lost* Satan follows the prelates, Court of Star Chamber, and Charles I by bringing the principles of political freedom into the theological context of heaven. Satan is not so much concerned with the individual liberty of the angels as with the institutional structures that manage the angels’ decisions and render liberty possible. Freedom, for Satan, is only possible when the appropriate institutions direct the angels to a common goal associated with their true nature. His approach is to interpret all aspects of heaven as earthly institutions, destroy oppressive institutions, and replace them with his own leadership so that the angels can experience freedom collectively through him.

In pursuing institutional freedom in heaven, Satan launches a revolt against God when he elevates the Son. From a theological perspective, Satan’s revolt stems from his poor faith, which causes him to associate freedom with institutions, rather than his staunch opposition to monarchy. Michael Bryson claims that Satan’s rebellion is not a free choice, as God’s public elevation of the Son created such a strong motive for rebellion that conflict was inevitable (95-7). For Bryson, Satan is a prince who feels required to resist the unjust actions of an arbitrary monarch (105). Satan, however, does not object to principles of absolute monarchy. Prior to the elevation of the Son, Satan had no scruples about serving God. When Gabriel confronts Satan in Eden, he reminds Satan of his previous loyalty to God:

Thou sly hypocrite, who now wouldst seem  
Patron of liberty, who more than thou  
Once fawned, and cringed, and servilely adored  
Heav’n’s awful Monarch? (IV.957-60).

Waldock questions the accuracy of Gabriel's account, noting that there is nothing in Satan's earlier behavior to suggest that he would have behaved in such a servile manner (81). Gabriel, however, interprets Satan's previous worship of God in light of his rebellion. His description of Satan "servilely" worshipping God suggests that Satan never truly embraced the supremacy of God, but rather practiced what Milton labels in his prose implicit faith. Gabriel separates Satan's visible actions from his beliefs in order to read his behaviour accurately. Although adoring God suggests loyalty, it does not represent true faith unless it is accompanied by an inner conviction. No one forces Satan to worship God, but Satan still, in Gabriel's account, worships out of a slavish compulsion rather than a free choice. Satan's former reverence of God becomes similar to Milton's portrayal of Catholics' following the Pope. Like Catholics, Satan's "will not free, becomes no will" (*CPW* 7:254) and all his actions become servile. Since Satan has only implicit faith, he views God as a political institution rather than the creator and is prone to misinterpret God's actions. Consequently, God's decision to elevate the Son aggrieves Satan.

Satan is the only angel who "thought himself impaired" (V.665), but he quickly explains the consequences of the Son's elevation to some of the other angels. In doing so, he paints the Son not as God's right hand who participated in creation, but as an institution akin to an earthly monarchy. After assembling one third of the angels, Satan describes their new duties to the Son as "prostration vile" (V.782). Such "Knee-tribute," however, can be avoided (V.782). Satan asks: "what if better counsels might erect / Our minds and teach us to cast off this yoke?" (V.785-6). "Teach" suggests that the angels require Satan's education to free themselves from the Son. As he continues his speech, Satan explains the angels' true nature to them:

Will ye submit your necks, and choose to bend  
 The supple knee? Ye will not, if I trust  
 To know ye right, or if ye know yourselves  
 Natives and sons of Heav'n (V.787-90).

Satan's words "if ye know yourselves" stress the role of the angels' self-realization in becoming free. According to Satan, any angel who understands his true self cannot accept the elevation of the Son. Such acceptance would not be the act of true "Natives and sons of Heav'n," but rather angels who "through sloth had rather serve" (V.790; VI.166). Remaining loyal to God and being a free angel become incompatible in Satan's speech. Satan repeatedly stresses the natural power and freedom of the angels. The angels are "possessed before / By none," "ordained to govern, not to serve," and their "puissance is our own" (V.790-1, 802, 865). These phrases present the Son's new institutional position as contrary to the angels' natural "puissance." If the angels by nature are destined "to govern, not to serve," then any institution externally imposed on them suppresses their true nature. Beings who "govern" should themselves erect the necessary institutions to protect their freedom, not receive institutions from others. Satan is the author of this interpretation of freedom, which is novel to the rebel angels. Since Satan has already reached self-realization, he assumes the responsibility of guiding those angels who have not yet discovered their true selves.

Satan then elaborates on how the Son's position disregards the angels' titles, corrects the angels when they do not require correction, and ultimately disrupts angelic freedom:

Who can in reason then or right assume  
Monarchy over such as live by right  
His equals, if in power and splendor less,  
In freedom equal? Or can introduce  
Law and edict on us, who without law  
Err not, much less for this to be our Lord,  
And look for adoration to th' abuse  
Of those imperial titles (V.794-801).

Satan objects not merely to the Son having institutional power, but to him having specifically monarchical power. All the angels and the Son are "equally free" (V.792); therefore the Son



cannot, in Satan's opinion, assume the role of a monarch, as that implies superiority. According to Satan's understanding of freedom, the angels' nature, signified by their "imperial titles," prevents any equal being from having monarchical power over them. The mere existence of such an institution, regardless of how it functions, "abuse[s]" their titles. As a monarch, the Son has the potential to restrict the angels through laws. Satan's reference to laws highlights the institutional terms in which he views the Son. Like the laws of an earthly king who has inherited his position and ignores the natural rights and privileges of his citizens, the Son's laws, in Satan's opinion, can only have a negative effect on the angels' freedom. The Son has not yet passed any laws, but the fact that he can is a violation of angelic freedom. For Satan, the situation is worsened by the fact the angels were experiencing freedom on their own without the Son. Prior to the Son's elevation, the angels "Err not," meaning that they made no mistake in living as true "natives and sons of Heav'n." The Son's ability to "introduce / Law and edict" threatens their previous state of freedom.

Although Satan's critique has much in common with republican rhetoric, his interpretation of liberty does not preclude all forms of monarchical leadership, only monarchs who prevent the expression of the angels' true nature. According to Satan, the Son is an institution unnecessarily imposed on free angels who "Err not." Satan's own leadership, conversely, is, in his mind, beneficial to angelic freedom because without him the angels would have remained in "prostration vile." Prior to his speeches, the angels erred by worshiping the Son; therefore, Satan's elevated position among the rebels is necessary for freedom. Leaders who tower over their subjects are not necessarily contrary to Satan's version of liberty, provided that they direct the angels out of bondage and towards their true nature as "sons of Heav'n." Satan's relationship to his followers is much like that between Milton and the English people, as

both Satan and Milton are convinced that only they know the true interests of the angels and the English. Self-realization is essential to Satanic freedom, but Satan insists that most beings, with himself being the key exception, will never understand their true self without institutional leadership.

Once Satan has made his case for freedom, he and his followers prepare to take military action, further connecting them to Miltonic political freedom. Satan plans to “try” (V.865) the authority of God with both a verbal address and armed conflict: “by supplication we intend / Address, and to begirt th’ Almighty throne / Beseeching or besieging” (V.867-9). Satan’s instinctive turn to warfare stands in stark opposition to God’s assertion that Abdiel “fought / The better fight” by debating Satan (VI.29-30). For Satan, force and violence are the obvious means to pursue freedom, while God prefers admonition and employs his army only in defence of his congregation. In his prose, Milton encourages the army to erect forcibly a commonwealth if the electorate refuse to select appropriate MPs, but he denies both the church and state any such power in religious matters. In the theological context of heaven, Satan’s use of force against God is more than merely an inappropriate means of convincing the angels; it is an act of aggression against the creator, who is the source of all freedom. The mythical world of *Paradise Lost* raises the stakes of misunderstanding freedom, as Satan leads his followers to both bondage and blasphemy.

The rebel angels express an awareness of Satan’s importance, as they view his leadership as the instrument of their liberty. After the first day of the war, the rebel angel Nisroch addresses Satan as “Deliverer from new lords, leader to free / Enjoyment of our right as gods” (VI.451-2). Nisroch links Satan’s leadership to angelic freedom, as only Satan understands and can bring the freedom that the rebels rightfully deserve. Nisroch’s speech ends with a plea for someone to

devise a more effective weapon to fight the loyal angels. Anyone who can create such a weapon “deserves / No less than for our deliverance what we owe [to Satan]” (VI.467-8). After hearing Nisroch’s remarks, Satan immediately advises the rebels to start digging to find “materials dark” for their weapons (VI.478). Satan is thus both the rebel angels’ leader to freedom and the deviser of new weapons. According to Nisroch, the rebels “owe” Satan twice for their “deliverance.” This double deliverance at the hands of Satan is a perverse parallel of the double dependency that fallen humanity has for God. Without the prevenient grace that fallen humanity receives, the rebel angels continually turn towards Satan for freedom, as they mistakenly view his leadership as the only path to freedom. Lacking the status of a creator and the ability to distribute grace, however, Satan is unable to create the theological freedom that God can. Such limitations would not be a problem for Satan on earth, as no earthly institution could do what God does, but in heaven Satan can only lead the rebels to enslavement, not “free / Enjoyment of” their “rights as god.”

While fallen humanity’s dependence on God creates a new free choice, the rebel angels’ trust in Satan prevents them from making future choices. The rebel angels’ reaction to Satan’s plan to dig for new materials stresses their need for his leadership:

Th’invention all admired, and each, how he  
To be th’inventor missed, so easy it seemed  
Once found, which unfound most would have thought  
Impossible (VI.498-501).

The rebels have become so reliant on Satan that they are unable to devise any solutions on their own. Nisroch frames the creation of new weapons as essential to the rebel angels’ “deliverance,” yet not one of the rebels puts forth any suggestions. Each one “missed” the option of digging for new materials and without Satan, such an idea was “Impossible.” The rebels appear powerless to bring about their own “deliverance.” Their freedom lies in Satan’s leadership, a position

analogous to an earthly institution that directs ignorant people towards the political liberty that they could not otherwise achieve. Having entrusted their freedom to Satan and rejected God (who encourages rational, active choices), the rebels cannot apply their reason to the problems they face.

The rebel angels' reliance on Satan continues when they are in hell. At the start of the poem, the fallen angels "Lie thus astonished on th' oblivious pool" and are making no effort to amend their situation (I.266). There is, however, still the chance for the fallen angels to recover their former state. Beelzebub insists that if they hear Satan's voice: "they will soon resume / New courage and revive, though now they lie / Groveling and prostrate on yon lake of fire" (I.278-80). As in heaven, Satan assumes the role of educator and leader in hell. He calls out his fellow rebels for abandoning their once impressive virtue in favour of the ease of defeat:

have ye chos'n this place  
After toil of battle to repose  
Your wearied virtue, for the ease you find  
To slumber here, as in the vales of Heav'n?  
...  
Awake, arise, or be for ever fall'n (I.318-21, 330).

Without Satan, the fallen angels would have remained dormant in hell, but once they hear "their general's voice they soon obeyed / Innumerable" (I.337-8). The fallen angels do not make their own decision to rise from their state of misery and gather to plot revenge; Satan does, and the fallen angels follow him. The fallen angels have, at this point, delegated almost all the responsibility for their freedom to Satan, who they believe understands their freedom better than they do. John King notes the links between Milton's descriptions of the fallen angels in hell and common representations of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church in seventeenth-century England (47-57). Milton's critique of the Catholic Church includes its institutionalized system

of salvation in which people transferred their salvation to a “deputy.” The fallen angels similarly put their faith in Satan over their individual selves.

Once the fallen angels have gathered, they continue to seek freedom through institutions and Satan’s leadership. The assembly of fallen angels is the primary institution in hell and critics are divided over whether or not it permits free discussion. As the assembly’s debate is about to end, Beelzebub steps forward and presents a plan “first devised” by Satan, which the fallen angels soon accept (II.379). Lewalski views Satan as a Machiavellian prince who manipulates the assembly by using Beelzebub to ensure that the assembly adopts his proposal, while Peter Herman insists that the debate is legitimate (Lewalski “*Paradise Lost*” 153; Herman 93-5). Andrew Hadfield interprets Satan’s assembly as a parody of how a nation’s political institutions should function, as the fallen angels prefer easy solutions that are at odds with the hard liberty of a “free nation” (64-5).<sup>46</sup> The fallen angels’ solutions are easy in the sense that they are sought through institutions with dominant leaders rather than by each individual angel applying his reason. Institutions, however, are the means by which Miltonic political liberty should be pursued. The assembly in hell functions similarly to the commonwealth Milton envisions in *The Readie and Easie Way*, with the strongest members leading the multitude. Free debate was, for Milton, essential to religious liberty on earth, but the guiding force in the search for religious truth is “each person’s firm belief” (CW 8.1:9). Satan and Beelzebub are uninterested in each angel’s “firm belief” and prefer to follow Milton’s political program and make the angels “fittest to chuse” (CW 6:501) before voting. The procedures of the assembly in hell are consistent with Miltonic political freedom, but those same procedures render other forms of liberty impossible. By depicting the assembly in hell, Milton is not critiquing such institutions in general, but their operation in a theological context.

Voting is a regular feature of the assembly in hell, but in many cases, as in *The Redie and Easie Way*, the angels vote to hand over the custody of their liberty. Satan opens the assembly by acknowledging that he is the leader, but he justifies his position on the grounds of “fixed laws of Heav’n,” “free choice,” and “merit” (II.18, 19, 21). “Free choice” separates Satan’s elevation from that of the Son. The Son assumes his position over the angels through divine appointment, while Satan is chosen by the fallen angels. For Satan, this difference renders his own institutional power consistent with the angels’ freedom, while the Son’s was detrimental to that same freedom. Since the angels are “ordained to govern, not to serve,” they have the power to select their own leaders. As with theological freedom, the fallen angels are making a free choice, but the scope of this choice is limited. Instead of choosing how to live in accordance with divine will, they are choosing which institution to entrust with their liberty so that they will not have to make further active choices. Like the English electorate whom Milton sought to persuade, their future liberty lies with the institutions and leaders that they choose, not continually using their reason to make choices.

As the fallen angels vote, the institutional structure of the assembly in hell, with the strong leadership of Satan and Beelzebub, produces unanimous decisions. Not satisfied with simply being elected, Satan elaborates on the fallen angels’ “free choice” noting that they “Yielded [him his throne] with full consent,” meaning there are no detractors (II.24). Satan may be a king, but Milton’s late prose acknowledges that an elective monarch could be consistent with political freedom on earth. Theologically, of course, such elections are blasphemous, as there is only one true king; God could not be voted out of office. As the debate in hell unfolds, a pattern of unanimous decision-making emerges. After Mammon outlines his plan to build an empire in hell, “such applause was heard” and Beelzebub notes that the “popular vote / Inclines”

towards Mammon's suggestion (II.290, 313). Once Beelzebub presents his alternative, the fallen angels embrace it and vote "with full assent" (II.388). Only when the fallen angels are in complete agreement can they pursue their freedom collectively. The loyal angels were also unanimous in their commitment to God, but they did not achieve unity by gathering in an assembly in which two powerful angels projected their will onto the whole group. Instead, each loyal angel made the individual decision to remain loyal. No discussion with other angels was required. The loyal angels reach unanimity individually, the fallen angels do so institutionally. When Milton envisions the English people (or rather, a limited portion of the English people) voting for MPs in *The Readie and Easie Way*, he assumes that if they have been made "fittest to chuse," they will all vote the same way. The rebel angels likewise strive through their assembly to reach unanimous decisions that enable them to be free. To label Satan and Beelzebub manipulative is to misunderstand the type of liberty the fallen angels are seeking. The assembly's decisions can only be free if the wisest members inject themselves into the debate and direct the other members of the assembly towards their ultimate purpose. If Satan and Beelzebub are manipulative, then so is Milton.

The debate in hell focuses on two proposals, one from Mammon and one from Beelzebub, which express alternative versions of freedom. Mammon claims that freedom is possible in hell because the fallen angels can pursue their own ends without concern for God's rule. In hell, the fallen angels can

seek  
Our own good from our selves, and from our own  
Live to ourselves, though in this vast recess,  
Free, and to none accountable, preferring  
Hard liberty before the easy yoke  
Of servile pomp (II.252-7).

Mammon's desire to "seek" his "own good" has some parallels with Miltonic religious freedom, but the fallen angel twists this freedom for a blasphemous purpose. On earth a Christian is free by being "to none accountable" when pursuing salvation, but beyond the earthly realm a Christian is still accountable to God. By referring to life in hell as being "to none accountable," Mammon continues to frame God as an earthly institution whose jurisdiction has limits. Mammon imagines that there is a space where the fallen angels' actions are free from divine oversight, just as Milton advocates for a space where Christians are free from civil interference. Mammon's error is that God is not an earthly magistrate. In the theological realm God's dominion is total and absolute. To even consider the possibility of escaping God's jurisdiction is blasphemous. Mammon's principles of freedom are similar to Miltonic religious freedom, but when one pursues such freedom while ignoring one's theological relation to God, one only moves further away from one's own good and freedom.

Mammon's plan, however, is rejected in favour of a different interpretation of freedom that, like Miltonic political liberty, ties freedom to the angels' nature. Beelzebub argues that electing to remain in hell will change the angels' titles:

Thrones and imperial Powers, offspring of Heav'n,  
Ethereal Virtues; or these titles now  
Must we renounce, and changing style be called  
Princes of Hell? (II.310-13).

By voting to change their titles, the angels have misunderstood their true nature. As a result, they will "remain / In strictest bondage" because God's status as king and their banishment to hell remain in effect (II.320-1). Angelic freedom, for Beelzebub, requires specific actions that are aligned with the angels' nature, namely revenge on God (the monarch that enslaved them and continues to hold them in bondage) and resuming their place in heaven. Political freedom also requires a precise outcome that enables the true spirit of the English people to express itself (the



creation of a free commonwealth). Theologically, however, Beelzebub's objectives continue Satan's blasphemy of viewing God as analogous to the institution of monarchy, not as the creator. In terms of retaliating against their oppressor, the angels' easiest target is earth, the destruction of which "would surpass / Common revenge" (II.370-1). After receiving unanimous support, Beelzebub proclaims that pursuing revenge through earth

Will once more lift us up, in spite of fate,  
Nearer our ancient seat; perhaps in view  
Of those bright confines, whence with neighboring arms  
And opportune excursion we may chance  
Re-enter Heav'n (II.393-7).

Earth is not just an opportunity to punish God, it is also a stepping stone to re-enter heaven. Only once the fallen angels have retaken their "ancient seat" will they be free from the bondage of hell because only heaven is consistent with their titles. Beelzebub ties the angels' titles to their nature rather than their creation by God. As "offspring of Heav'n," the angels will always have a right to heaven and anyone who opposes that right is an obstacle to their freedom. Consequently, Beelzebub advocates revenge against the creator of their titles in the name of those very titles.

The assembly's final resolution connects freedom to the exploration and conquest of earth, and Satan recognizes that once again his leadership is necessary for angelic freedom. Travelling to earth is difficult; it requires someone to "tempt with wand'ring feet / The dark unbottomed infinite abyss" (II.404-5). This act of discovering earth, Beelzebub points out, is crucial, for on it "The weight of all our last hope relies" (II.416). Despite the importance of this journey, when the assembly seeks a volunteer "all sat mute" (II.420) until Satan stands up: "Wherefore do I assume / These royalties, and not refuse to reign" (II.450-1). Although Satan undertakes the expedition alone, he views it as an act of liberation for all the fallen angels:

“while I abroad / Through all the coasts of dark destruction seek / Deliverance for us all” (II.463-5). The fallen angels are incapable of making the dangerous trip to earth, but since they have delegated their liberty to Satan, they can experience freedom through him. Barbara Riebling argues that Milton’s portrayal of Satan illustrates the danger of isolating virtue in a single leader (591-3). Like the Englishmen of *The Radies and Easie Way*, the fallen angels do little to pursue their freedom beyond submitting to the institution and leader most capable of establishing liberty. Milton believes such delegation of liberty was necessary in seventeenth-century England due to the flawed character of the English. Such principles, however, have no place in the world that Milton has created in *Paradise Lost*. The fallen angels certainly have a flawed character, but in terms of theological freedom, an assembly that directs the angels’ decisions does not free them, it enslaves them further.

During his rebellion in heaven and his reign in hell Satan is committed to institutional liberty, but when he first arrives in Eden, Satan begins to understand the complexities and different dimensions of freedom. As he reflects on his past conduct, Satan provides a new justification for his rebellion:

... lifted up so high  
I ’sdained subjection, and thought one step higher  
Would set me highest, and in a moment quit  
The debt immense of endless gratitude,  
So burdensome still paying, still to owe (IV.49-53).

Stevens views Satan’s discomfort with his debt to God as reflective of republican liberty, which does not tolerate dependence. The “endless” cycle of “gratitude” to God is too “burdensome” for Satan, who views it as a limitation on his freedom (Stevens “Obnoxious Satan” 296). In this moment, Satan’s rebellion transforms from being an attack on the position of the Son to an attempt to alleviate the burden of gratitude. Although Satan never explicitly discusses gratitude

during the rebellion, he does attempt to shake off any dependence on God. Satan's assertion at the start of his rebellion that he and the other angels are "self-begot, self-raised / By our own quick'ning power" is the ultimate attempt at self-mastery (V.860-1). Satan seeks to render his very creation the product of his own will, not God's.<sup>47</sup> By stripping God of his status of creator and reducing him to just another institution that extends its jurisdiction too far, Satan thinks he can free himself from theological dependence on God. Satan's blasphemies leave Abdiel aghast: "shalt thou dispute / With him the points of liberty, who made / Thee what thou art" (V.822-3). Theologically, one cannot debate freedom with God as God is, by definition, the source of theological freedom due to the fact that he created all beings with free will. The cause of Satan's rebellion varies from Book IV to V, but in both cases Satan objects to what he interprets as institutional structures (the elevation of the Son and God's position as the highest entity) that deny the angels the self-mastery that should accompany their nature.

With the admission that he sought freedom from gratitude to God rather than the Son's potential laws, Satan begins to recognize that God did provide him with a form of freedom: the freedom to choose. This recognition leads to his suffering. Riebling views Satan's inner torments in Book IV as evidence that he lacks the "mental agility" of a Machiavellian prince.<sup>48</sup> Underneath his republican rhetoric Satan is actually the classic tyrant who is a slave to his emotions (Riebling 579-80). Satan's internal struggle in Eden, however, is not a sign of slavery, but an effort to do what he should have done in heaven, individually reflect on the choices available to him. Initially, Satan resists the idea that he possessed free choice, describing himself as being fated to rebel because of his prominent position among the angels (IV.58-61). Even Satan, however, cannot maintain this fiction, as other powerful angels did remain loyal: "Hadst thou the same free will and power to stand? / Thou hadst" (IV.66-7). Satan refers to himself as

having free will because he finally accepts that he was not “self-begot,” but rather was “created” by God (IV.43). Since he now views God as his creator, Satan’s perspective on serving God changes: “What could be less than to afford him praise / The easiest recompense” (IV.46-7). Such praise was in accordance with God’s will, but Satan admits to himself that “against his [God’s] thy [Satan’s] will / Chose freely” (IV.71-72). Twice within the same speech, Satan refers to his free choice to rebel. While in heaven, Satan overlooked the freedom to choose, believing that life under God and the Son was “prostration vile” (V.782). Instead of embracing his free will, Satan tied freedom to self-mastery through rebelling against what he misperceived as institutions. In Eden, Satan no longer has such a narrow view of freedom. The fact that he “Chose freely” to rebel in the name of a faulty ideal renders Satan’s suffering even greater because he used his God-given freedom to select a path of pain. God gave Satan the freedom to choose, and he made the worst choice possible.

Although Satan briefly understands theological freedom, this moment of enlightenment does not last. After seeing Adam and Eve, the targets of his plot, Satan acknowledges that he might “melt” at their “harmless innocence” (IV.389, 388), but

public reason just,  
 Honour and empire with revenge enlarged,  
 By conquering this new world, compels me now  
 To do what else though damned I should abhor (IV.389-92).

If Satan were acting in accordance with his free will, he would “abhor” the idea of corrupting Adam and Eve. Since, however, he has now abandoned such notions of freedom, “public reason just” “compels” him to act. Satan, after his fall, is no longer capable of making free choices. His pursuit of institutional liberty in defiance of God results in the perpetual and reflexive sacrifice of his free will to an ideal. He is not doing what he wishes, but what serves “public reason.” Commitment to the well-being of the state rather than free choice dictates his behaviour. In a

similar vein, Milton wants the English electorate to lay aside their “prejudice” so they could elect MPs who would secure the Commonwealth. Satan, unlike the English electorate, complies with the “public reason” determined by the parliament of hell. He understands what must be done to be free, and he does not allow his personal desires to impede him. In earthly politics, such strength, according to Milton, was admirable, but in a theological context, liberty, as God points out, is only possible through free rational choice, not necessity that removes choice. As he announces his plans to pursue evil, Satan speaks “with necessity, / The tyrant’s plea” (IV.393-4). By turning away from free choice and embracing the necessity of “public reason just,” Satan is adopting values that are antithetical to theological freedom. God sought to free humanity and the angels from necessity so they could use their reason to chose. Satan, conversely, embraces necessity and suppresses his own free will; consequently, Satan loses his own freedom and becomes a “tyrant” to others by leading those who put faith in him to bondage and blasphemy.

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In the characters of Adam and Eve, *Paradise Lost* reveals a different failure in theological freedom, one that stems from an honest desire and effort to follow God’s will. Initially, Adam and to some degree Eve are free from necessity as they make choices in Eden. One of the types of freedom that Scodel detects in Eden is divinely permitted choices (which Scodel identifies as negative freedom) (153).<sup>49</sup> Adam recognizes that although God has forbidden him and Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, they have been given a significant space in which to make free choices:

Then let us not think hard  
One easy prohibition, who enjoy  
Free leave so large to all things else, and choice  
Unlimited to manifold delights (IV.432-5).

Since the command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge amounts to an “easy prohibition,” it has minimal effect on the space in which Adam and Eve can choose for themselves. Woods argues that God’s command is not so much a restriction as a “condition of infinite possibility.” Only one choice can “enthrall” Adam and Eve, otherwise their choices are limitless (Woods 128). Choice lies at the centre of Edenic freedom, just as it does in heaven. Adam’s reaction to this freedom differentiates him from Satan, as he, unlike Satan, comprehends the potential of his choices and rejoices that God, despite imposing one rule, has left “so large” a space for him and Eve to make their own decisions.

This “large” space of free choice relates to another of the freedoms that Scodel identifies, the freedom to make correct or rational choices. Since God endowed Adam with right reason, he knows that Adam can make such choices without any additional help. Perhaps the clearest example of Adam making a wise choice is his request to God for a companion. Initially, God expresses resistance to Adam’s request, noting that he has no companion and is still happy. This resistance requires Adam to put forward a justification for a companion beyond just his personal “rational delight” (VIII.391). It is not enough that Adam wants a companion, he must understand and articulate the importance of a companion. Adam’s response to God stresses his own imperfection without a companion:

But man by number is to manifest  
His single imperfection, and beget  
Like of his like, his image multiplied,  
In unity defective, which requires  
Collateral love, and dearest amity (VIII.422-6).

The creation of a companion was, of course, part of God’s plan all along. God “Knew it not good for man to be alone” and challenged Adam “for trial only” “To see how” he could “judge of fit and meet” (VIII.445, 447, 448). God’s “trial” of Adam is limited to debate, while Satan’s

desire to “try” God, comparatively, includes violent “besieging” that belongs only in earthly politics. By resisting Adam’s initial request, God enables Adam to utilize his own reason, determine for himself the benefits of companionship, and then make an active choice. Thus, Adam’s use of reason expands his own understanding of himself. God believes that the best means for enabling humanity to discover his divine plan is to endow each person with right reason and then permit them to work out his will for themselves. In the case of creating Eve, God’s freedom produces the desired result.

While Adam is free to use his reason to make active choices, Eve’s initial state in Eden is closer to Milton’s institutional freedom. Adam and Eve represent the first family, and in Milton’s prelapsarian world, there is no separation between the household and commonwealth. Eden, as Laura Knoppers notes, is a hybrid space that is both domestic and political (*Politicizing* 145-6).<sup>50</sup> Eve has some areas in which she can exercise free choice, such as choosing which ingredients to include in the meal for Raphael and Adam (V.332-7), but she generally entrusts Adam with her liberty, following the principles of institutional liberty. There have been considerable scholarly efforts to elevate the status of Eve and her role in Eden. Diane McColley and Woods both argue that Eve’s subordination to Adam does not signal her inferiority. Rather, she is both free and subject to Adam’s rule, as her decision to obey Adam is an active choice (McColley 35; Woods “How Free” 18). Knoppers goes even further, viewing Adam and Eve as joint rulers of Eden (Knoppers *Politicizing* 146-8). Knoppers seeks to reconcile the governance of Eden with Milton’s republicanism, but by the time he wrote *Paradise Lost*, Milton could conceive of dominating institutions operating within a free commonwealth. McColley and Woods provide a better reading of Eve’s status, as they interpret her subordination to Adam as not compromising her freedom, which is how Milton understood institutional freedom in his late

prose.<sup>51</sup> When Eve is introduced in Book IV, she is content with being submissive to Adam. Eve refers to Adam as “My author and disposer” and proclaims whatever Adam “bidd’st / Unargued I obey” (IV.635, 635-6). Since Adam is Eve’s “disposer,” he is responsible for her behaviour. Eve’s willingness to “obey” Adam “Unargued” is not a sign that she is captive to Adam’s will, but that she is free through the institution of her husband. She trusts Adam to handle all her decisions, for “to know no more [than to obey one’s husband] / Is woman’s happiest knowledge and her praise” (IV.637-8). As McColley points out, Adam and Eve have different gifts, and Adam’s ability to govern preserves Eve’s freedom so she can develop her own talents (39). For Eve, liberty consists of submitting to her husband who has the necessary skills to manage her liberty for her.

Adam and Eve’s freedom in *Paradise Lost* is not constant, but in a state of flux. The first significant disruption occurs when Raphael gives Adam guidelines that cause difficulties in the separation scene. Theological freedom centres on making a choice that either conforms to or defies God’s will. In the separation scene, however, the choice that conforms to God’s will is not clear, rendering even the best efforts to obey God fruitless. This crucial moment in the poem forces Adam, and the reader by proxy, to confront the possibility that maintaining freedom through following God’s will is impossible. As a messenger sent from God, Raphael is supposed to supply Adam with the essential information for remaining loyal to God. Although most scholarship tends to centre on Raphael’s criticism of passion (Turner 277-9; Schoenfeldt “Commotion” 65-6), the angel’s advice also contains principles that, in the next book, render loyalty to God more difficult. Raphael, after hearing Adam proclaim his passion for Eve, instructs Adam to do two things: understand his own superiority to Eve, and practice rational love, not lustful passion. If Adam “weigh[s]” himself against Eve and has sufficient “self-



esteem,” he will assume his rightful position in the marriage and Eve “will acknowledge thee [Adam] her head” (VIII.570, 571, 574). Adam’s happiness becomes bound up in the traditional gender hierarchy, which also reflects the principles of institutional liberty with Adam guiding Eve. Raphael continues by separating love from passion. Love, as defined by Raphael, is connected to reason: “love refines / The thoughts, and heart enlarges, hath his seat / In reason, and is judicious” (VIII.589-91). Since love incorporates “reason” and “judicious” choice, it is the opposite of the “carnal pleasure” that Raphael associates with passion (VIII.593). Raphael’s closing warning to Adam—“take heed lest passion sway / Thy judgement to do aught, which else free will / Would not admit” (VIII.635-7)—becomes a call to rely on reason rather than passion. Adam’s future choices should be based on reason, as reason is consistent with his “free will.” Raphael’s two pieces of advice are meant to help Adam navigate his choices in a world governed by God’s decrees.

The separation scene complicates Raphael’s message because in it Eve espouses a series of rational arguments for working apart from Adam. If Adam is to obey reason, as Raphael stated, he must submit to Eve’s rationality. Such action, however, violates the other principle articulated by Raphael, that Adam must express his superiority over Eve. The separation scene begins with Eve suggesting that they work apart to be more productive. Adam objects to Eve’s request and presents his position within the framework of patriarchal authority: “The wife, where danger or dishonour lurks, / Safest and seemliest by her husband stays, / Who guards her, or with her the worst endures” (IX.267-9). Here, Adam is, as Raphael recommended, valuing himself more highly than Eve. Eve responds with rational arguments for facing their adversary alone:

If this be our condition, thus to dwell  
In narrow circuit straitened by a foe,

Subtle or violent, we not endured  
Single with like defense, wherever met,  
How are we happy, still in fear of harm?

...

Let us not then suspect our happy state  
Left so imperfect by the Maker wise,  
As not secure to single or combined.  
Frail is our happiness, if this be so,  
And Eden were no Eden thus exposed (IX.322-41).

Eve's reference to "fear" echoes the antiprelatical tracts' claim that the prelates restrict freedom through fear. If fear of Satan dictates Adam and Eve's decisions, then they, like a Christian living under a prelate, will be confined to a "narrow circuit" and lack the liberty to choose for themselves. As mentioned above, Milton, in *Reason of Church Government*, refers to Lucifer as the first prelate angel (CPW 1:762). In *Paradise Lost*, Milton presents Eve as refusing to give Satan the prelatial power of fear. She cannot imagine that God did not endow them with a sufficient "defense" against their foe, as that would render them "imperfect," their happiness "Frail," and their ability to make free choices impossible. Eve essentially reaffirms God's assertion that she and Adam are "Sufficient to have stood." By tying her arguments to God's earlier statements, Eve presents a case that Adam cannot deny is rational.

To further highlight the rationality of Eve's position, Milton fills her speeches with the values of his own prose. In Miltonic fashion, Eve asserts that working separately will render her faith stronger: "what is faith, love, virtue unassayed / Alone, without exterior help sustained?" (IX.335-6). Eve wants to be free from her husband in the moment of temptation so that she can prove her ability to follow God's will, "without exterior help." For McColley, Eve's arguments are consistent with Milton's own stance in *Areopagitica*, in which he encourages people to confront temptation rather than hide from it (172, 179). By having Eve espouse the principles of *Areopagitica* and the antiprelatical tracts, Milton connects her speeches to his early prose with its

scepticism about institutions. Previously in *Paradise Lost*, Eve had desired only liberty through her husband, but that does not mean that she is destined to remain in that position permanently. One of the hopes that Milton has with institutional liberty is that those people who relied on institutions would eventually develop sufficient knowledge to be free on their own (CW 6:534). Eve's expression of rational arguments in the separation scene is in many ways the ideal conclusion to institutional liberty. Eve had already, as McColley and Knoppers point out, developed her own God-given gifts through her choices (McColley 39; Knoppers *Politicizing* 148-50), but the decision to work separately represents new territory for her. Eve, however, is not yet fully comfortable with her new freedom. When Adam agrees to let her work alone, she replies that she goes "With thy permission then" (IX.378). Eve wants simultaneously to make her own rational choice and to have her husband endorse that choice as a good one. Despite these nerves regarding her new freedom, Eve echoes Milton's own rationality.

Eve's use of reason presents a dilemma for Adam that forces him to disregard part of Raphael's advice. Raphael instructed Adam to practice simultaneously two contradictory types of freedom. One type, institutional, assumes that some people are inferior and require guidance to achieve success. The other type centres on rational choice that all of God's creations are capable of exercising. Adam's situation in the separation scene parallels that of Milton in *Brief Notes* when Milton could no longer reconcile popular sovereignty with a commonwealth. Confronting a resistant Eve armed with reason, Adam debates Eve in an attempt to persuade her to stay with him. According to Richard Strier, the freedom to make correct choices based on rational debate is not a major component of prelapsarian Eden. Adam and Eve do not need to be constantly deliberating because they choose good instinctively (Strier 42-3). Strier's assessment is true for Adam and Eve's early choices, but by the time of the separation scene, Adam, due to

Raphael's conflicting advice, is not sure what the right choice is and must rely on rational debate. Adam's inability to persuade Eve through their debate forces the issue. No longer able to be both a patriarch and rational, Adam sides with reason, noting "for what obeys / Reason, is free" (IX.351-2). Adam is not just reiterating part of Raphael's advice, he is presenting a case for listening to Eve, who is employing reason. This speech ends with Adam agreeing to let Eve work separately; therefore, his comments regarding reason are not an attempt to convince her to stay with him, but a self-justification for what he has already decided. Yet, Adam does not let Eve leave without a warning: "reason not impossibly may meet / Some specious object by the foe suborned, / And fall into deception unaware" (IX.360-2). If Eve reaffirms God's claim that they are "sufficient to have stood," Adam's response is the second part of God's statement, that they are also "free to fall."

Adam concludes his speech by acknowledging Eve's new freedom, but also expressing some frustration (as Milton did in 1660), seemingly aware of the consequences of Eve's freedom. He tells Eve: "if thou think, trial unsought may find / Us both securer than thus warned thou seem'st, / Go; for thy stay not free absents thee more" (IX.370-2). The word "think" illustrates that Adam sees Eve as applying rational calculation to her choice. She is not acting on pure emotion, and neither is he for that matter. In Book VIII, Adam claims that he is unable to think rationally in the presence of Eve: "All higher knowledge in her presence falls / Degraded, wisdom in discourse with her / Looses discount'nanced, and like folly shows" (VIII.551-3). Adam's conversation with Eve in the separation scene, however, shows no signs that he has lost his reason. Adam does not give in to Eve out of passion; he has a rational debate with her and, ultimately, accepts the value of her arguments. His comments to Raphael in Book VIII may be an exaggeration, or he may have taken Raphael's advice regarding reason to heart.

Although their discussion is rational, Adam, like Eve, still must adjust to Eve's new freedom. The abrupt "Go" that starts line 372 conveys Adam's frustration at his inability to reconcile institutional freedom (which guarantees a positive outcome) with rational free choice (which carries some risk, but allows everyone to exercise reason). Just as Milton accepts the choice of the English people to restore the monarchy, Adam accepts the choice of Eve to work alone, even though both Milton and Adam believe that these choices will (or in the case of Adam, may) have negative consequences.

Through Adam's struggle to reconcile Raphael's conflicting advice, Milton turns what was a personal crisis in 1660, into a universal experience. In the separation scene, all of Milton's fears and frustrations from 1660 are transformed into a moment of significance for the entire human race. The debate between Adam and Eve becomes a debate between the Milton of *Brief Notes* and the Milton of *Areopagitica*. By having Eve voice Milton's early position before she leaves Adam's side and eats from the Tree of Knowledge, Milton questions if the rational free choice of his early prose consistently leads to desirable outcomes, particularly with regards to theological freedom. Although the separation scene is not the Fall, the reader will come to the poem knowing where it will lead. The consequences of the separation scene raise the question: could Adam have done anything to stop Eve from working separately? Danielson insists that Adam should have commanded Eve not to work separately, as a command does not violate freedom, but it likely would have stopped Eve (*Milton's Good* 127). Bennett views Adam as incorrectly giving Eve absolute freedom, that is, the freedom to do what she wants, while violating the true freedom, that is, making the right choice (113-4). Myers argues that Adam had to let Eve leave, as Eve is simply exercising her freedom in a prelapsarian world (128). Scodel, comparatively, objects to debates centred on Adam's husbandly duties and sees Adam as

mistakenly encouraging Eve's reason's potential to err (174). Interpretations that excuse or blame Adam miss the point. Adam both could not have done anything different and should have prevented Eve from working alone. He needed to exercise institutional freedom over Eve while accepting the reason of her free will. It is the impossibility of the scene that makes it so unsettling, as Adam faces an unwinnable situation on which the future of humanity hinges.

The separation scene allows Milton not only to replay and universalize his own crisis of 1660, but also to shake his reader's confidence in theological matters in a way that his prose never does. Focusing on Adam's actual Fall, David Urban argues that Adam's transgression is not sincere (meaning not theologically pure) because he "values his emotional link to Eve more than God's command" (104). Urban is correct about Adam's decision to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, but in the separation scene, Adam is as sincere as he can be, yet he still makes a decision with negative consequences. If Raphael's advice is the key to remaining loyal, and Raphael's advice is impossible to follow in its entirety, then Adam had no chance. Much of Milton's prose assumes that Christians, when not subject to institutional coercion, are capable of interpreting and following God's will. *A Treatise of Civil Power* defines religion as "that full persuasion whereby we are assur'd that our beleef and practise, as far as we are able to apprehend and probably make appeer, is according to the will of God & his Holy Spirit within us" (CPW 7:242). If Raphael's muddled advice is meant to convey the will of God, then Adam's actions in the separation scene adhere to the will of God as he is "able to apprehend and probably make appeer." Adam does his best in a difficult situation, but the result, the separation of Adam and Eve, is still unfavourable. Before he even eats from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam is failing because he cannot determine which choice is in accordance with God's will. One's best efforts to comprehend the will of God are no longer sufficient to discover true religion. Adam's

struggle in the separation scene undermines the optimism of religious liberty in Milton's prose and raises the spectre of hopelessness regarding humanity's ability to experience theological freedom at all. By highlighting Adam's inability to handle the separation scene, Milton renders theological freedom less about the individual Christian and more about God's prevenient grace, which returns fallen humanity to a state of freedom.

In the final two Books of *Paradise Lost*, in which Michael relates to Adam the course of human history, the action moves from the mythical setting of Eden to the postlapsarian world. Consequently, Books XI and XII have clear links to the principles of liberty from Milton's prose. Several moments in Michael's story illustrate Miltonic religious liberty, particularly Milton's dislike of oppressive institutions. Michael points to the ancient Hebrews, who, in an effort to mitigate the realities of sin, turned to the institution of the law. Such a strategy, however, is limited as one cannot be theologically or religiously free through a coercive and punitive institution. The law, Michael explains, is "imperfect" (XII.300), meaning that it does not completely free humanity from the limited choices of sin. The weakness of the law is that it can "discover sin, but not remove" it (XII.290). If sin is not removed, then people cannot make free choices and they will follow the law only out of necessity, that is, fear of punishment, rather than voluntarily. Law can change behaviour, but not one's mind, hence, as an instrument of freedom, it is "imperfect." True freedom is only possible when humanity's sinful state is reformed, and that is only possible through grace.

When Michael relates the arrival of Christ, he stresses the opportunity for freedom. The transition from the old law to the new covenant is a movement "From imposition of strict laws to free / Acceptance of large grace" (XII.304-5). Milton juxtaposes "imposition" and "free / Acceptance" to highlight the difference between how coercive institutions and God interact with

people. Unlike the “strict” institution of the law, grace is given and accepted freely. As Michael explains to Adam how Christ’s sacrifice saves humanity, he first stresses that Christ’s sacrifice cancels out the sins “Of all mankind,” but then adds that only those who “rightly trust / In this his satisfaction” will be saved (XII.417, 418-9). Salvation is accessible but not guaranteed for everyone. Michael’s description is consistent with Milton’s prose and God’s statements in *Paradise Lost* as it criticizes coercive earthly institutions while tying freedom to God’s grace. In a postlapsarian world, religious and theological freedom overlap.

Although much of Michael’s depiction of human history centres on the struggle to be free in the religious sense, he does address politics as well. William Walker downplays the significance of civil liberties in Michael’s account, noting that nothing in the final two books of *Paradise Lost* suggests that founding political societies will be fulfilling for fallen humanity (*Paradise Lost* 66, 237). It is true that Michael never mentions civil liberties to Adam, but since Michael belongs to the spiritual realm, this is unsurprising. Michael’s goal is to prepare Adam for theological and religious freedom in a fallen world, but he still mentions one political episode that catches Adam’s attention. When Michael comes to Nimrod and his establishment of kingship, Adam is horrified and censures Nimrod for “assuming / Authority usurped, from God not giv’n” (XII.65-6). Nimrod, according to Adam, had no right to become king because God reserved for himself the title of lord over humanity, “human left from human free” (XII.71). Adam’s disapproval of kingship has prompted Norbrook to view him as “instinctively republican” (463). Milton certainly presents Nimrod’s rule as tyrannical, but, as outlined in previous chapters, he had no scruples about investing Oliver Cromwell with quasi-monarchical power, acknowledged that some Saxon kings brought prosperity, desired rule by a perpetual parliament, and permitted the army to erect a government in the face of popular resistance. On



this last point, Michael also describes Nimrod using “war and hostile snare” against “such as refuse / Subjection to his empire tyrannous” (XII.31-2). As the first king, Nimrod is a monarch by conquest rather than inheritance; therefore, Milton’s criticisms of hereditary monarchy do not apply to him. Why is his institutional power so much more appalling than the authoritarian governments that Milton defended during the Interregnum?

The answer lies in part in the state of society before Nimrod’s rule. Prior to Nimrod, people were “reaping plenteous crops” and spending “their days in joy unblamed, and dwell / Long time in peace by families and tribes / Under paternal rule” (XII.18, 22-4). Society was prospering without any formal government structure. There was some leadership in the form of “paternal rule,” but nothing beyond that was required to live in “joy.” Consequently, these people had already established the appropriate institutions. These circumstances are nothing like those of the British people in Milton’s *History*, who were so disorganized that strong kings, like Alfred, were an improvement. Nimrod’s motives for ruling are also very different from the authoritarian institutions that Milton praises. While Cromwell and parliament ruled in the interest of the people (even if the people did not realize it), Nimrod rules only for himself. His initial effort to seize power was prompted by a “proud ambitious heart” that was “not content / With fair equality” (XII.25-6). Serving himself before the common good renders Nimrod, according to Milton’s commonwealth prose, the worst sort of tyrant. As a result of his ambition and lust for power, Nimrod does not bring freedom as Cromwell did, but rather “dispossess [es] / Concord and law of nature from the Earth” (XII.28-9). The negative depiction of Nimrod in *Paradise Lost* is not an attack on all forms of kingship. Rather, it distinguishes Nimrod’s rule from the authoritarian leaders whom Milton celebrated. Consequently, the Nimrod episode does not confirm that Milton was a committed republican.

Adam's disapproval of Nimrod, however, extends beyond the manner in which he rules to the fact that Nimrod rules at all. This objection to human authority separates Adam from Milton, who by the time he wrote *Paradise Lost* believed that dominant political institutions could be consistent with political liberty. Adam's perspective is closer to Milton's early prose, which centre on freeing Englishmen from institutions. By having Adam speak out against earthly government when he first sees it, Milton may be reflecting on his own political naiveté in the early 1640s, before he advocated the use of coercive institutions to preserve political freedom. Adam is appalled that "man over man" sought to rule (XII.69), but he has not experienced the same frustrations as Milton. If Adam is "instinctively republican," it is only because he has no political experience. "Upstart passions" were a permanent feature of fallen humanity and the enemy of both religious and political liberty. In the religious sphere, Milton believed that individual Christians, with no guidance beyond God's grace, could overcome such passions by themselves. Politically, however, it was not individuals whom Milton trusted, but institutions. In the prelapsarian world of Eden, "man [ruling] over man" defied the will of God, but in the postlapsarian world of Earth, such rule, in the appropriate institutions, was necessary for Miltonic political freedom. Adam's innocence prevents him from acknowledging the political realities to which Milton had become accustomed.

In addition to reflecting aspects of political and religious liberty from Milton's prose, Michael's discussion with Adam also restores the theological freedom, which recently seemed impossible. To empower Adam to take control of his own salvation, Michael's final words stress Adam's potential to direct his own life. The free choice that Michael articulates is a part of the theological freedom that God outlined in Book III, but Michael's precise words reveal how little agency Adam really has and how dependent his freedom is on God. Adam must, according to

Michael, “add faith / Add virtue, patience, temperance, add love” to achieve “A paradise within thee” (XII.582-3, 587). Michael’s use of the imperative suggests that Adam can “add” all these qualities to himself without any help beyond Michael’s initial exhortation. This inward turn that Michael promotes is not unlike Satan’s position in Book I: “The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” (I.253-5). Milton begins and ends the poem with proclamations regarding the ability to overcome the limitations of one’s external environment through internal strength. Yet for Adam, such efforts are a real possibility, while for Satan they only produce an internal hell from which he cannot escape (IV.75). The difference between Adam’s condition and Satan’s predicament is God’s prevenient grace. Without God’s willingness to overlook Adam’s self-temptation, Adam would not be able to “add” the necessary qualities to create a “paradise within” and, consequently, would not be free. Michael does not mention dependence in his speech, but his echo of Satan’s words speaks to the readers rather than Adam, reminding them of their dependence on God. The freedom to create a “paradise within” is present in fallen humanity, but only because God permits it.

Although the closing sections of *Paradise Lost* highlight humanity’s dependence on an arbitrary God, this new dependence is in some ways just as free as prelapsarian freedom. While in Eden, Adam and Eve do not rely on prevenient grace and are capable of making good choices. After the Fall, good choices are not possible without God’s grace, but Michael’s lesson reveals that a few people, such as Enoch and Noah, do succeed in following God’s will. Since Enoch and Noah are lone figures in a world of sin, it is possible that their goodness results more from God rather than their own free will. Back in Book III, God declares: “Some I have chosen of peculiar grace / Elect above the rest” (III.183-5). Such “peculiar grace” could give its recipients an advantage in following God’s will. The word “peculiar” does appear in Michael’s relation of

human history, but with reference to the ancient Israelites: “one peculiar nation to select / From all the rest” (XII.111-2). The “peculiar grace” of Book III may refer to God selecting the Jews as his chosen people. This interpretation is further supported by Milton’s comments in the Preface of *Reason of Church Government*. Milton refers to the ancient Hebrews learning “the universall goodnesse of God to all creatures in the Creation, and his peculiar favour to them in his election of Abraham their ancestor” (CPW 1:747). Here, God bestows “peculiar” favor on the Jews and elects Abraham, “their ancestor.” Alternatively, Danielson suggests that the “Elect above the rest” refers to those whom God has chosen for some special employment (*Milton’s Good* 82-3). If so, then Enoch and Noah might be the beneficiaries of “peculiar grace” that enables them to remain good and play a part in the divine plan.

Although it is possible that Enoch and Noah receive “peculiar grace” (the poem never states that they do), the language of Book XI suggests that their own choice was a significant (and perhaps decisive) factor in their goodness. Michael displays Enoch walking with God so that Adam can see “what reward / Awaits the good” (XI.709-10). Milton thinks that if Enoch is being rewarded, he must have exercised some level of agency to merit the reward, even if it was just hearing and responding to God’s call. For Milton, if “peculiar grace” ensured that Enoch would follow God, there would be no point in holding him up as an example of what humanity could achieve. In Noah, “God observed / The one just man alive” (XI.817-8). The image of God searching the globe for any signs of righteousness suggests that Noah was not predestined to be good, or God would have been aware of his goodness and not needed to search. After the flood, “Such grace shall one just man find in his [God’s] sight, / That he relents, not to blot out mankind” (XI.890-1). If Noah’s justness moves God, it must come from Noah’s own choice rather than special grace that gives him a decisive edge in leading a good life. Both Enoch and

Noah may receive peculiar grace, but if they do it does not alter their freedom to choose whether or not to follow God.

Enoch and Noah prove capable of adhering to God's will, but they are each one man in a generation. The number of loyal followers of God, however, increases after Christ's arrival.

Michael describes a division between the followers of true and false religion:

Whence heavy persecution shall arise  
On all who in the worship persevere  
Of Spirit and Truth; the rest, far greater part,  
Will deem in outward rites and specious forms  
Religious satisfied (XII.531-5).

Although the "greater part" of humanity will abide by the "outward rites" of Catholicism and the hierarchical Protestant churches to which Milton objected throughout his career, the phrase "all who in the worship persevere / Of Spirit and Truth" creates the impression that the followers of true religion are a sizeable minority. God states that Adam and Eve are "Sufficient to have stood" in Eden, and Michael shows evidence that humanity is also sufficient to stand in a postlapsarian world, particularly after Christ's sacrifice. The ultimate good choice, obeying God, is still possible after the Fall. People in a postlapsarian world lose some agency, but they maintain the potential for good results. Michael informs Adam that "Since thy [Adam's] original lapse, true liberty / Is lost" (XII.83-4), but such a statement assumes that liberty is tied to autonomy. The loyal angels, who neither need nor receive prevenient grace, have such freedom, but fallen humanity does not. Raymond notes that in the seventeenth century, theology shifted and began to view people as superior to angels due to their receipt of grace (*Milton's Angels* 84). If theological freedom is understood as reaching a desired end through a combination of dependence and free choice, then humanity, despite Michael's claim, is just as free after the Fall

as Adam and Eve were before. If *Paradise Lost* ends on a positive note, it is this sense of continued freedom in a fallen world.

In constructing his epic poem, Milton places freedom at the centre of both a cosmic struggle between God and Satan and a domestic debate between Adam and Eve. These conflicts express, challenge, undermine, and transform the principles of freedom in Milton's prose and ultimately present a theological freedom. God sets the standard for theological freedom, but it is the failures in theological freedom that have the greatest impact in shaping the reader's understanding of such freedom. The result of witnessing first Satan's and then Adam and Eve's failure is feelings of confusion and unease about the nature and possibility of freedom, which, according to the poem, can only be resolved by acknowledging one's dependence on God and experiencing freedom through that dependence. Although there are moments in Milton's prose that cause him to sound like a proto-modern liberal individualist, *Paradise Lost* reminds us that Milton was a seventeenth-century Christian.

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<sup>46</sup> Sharon Achinstein provides one of the most nuanced readings of Satan's assembly, connecting it to the parliament of hell genre. Unlike royalists, who opposed parliamentary power because they wanted the king to rule, Milton, according to Achinstein, objects to Satan's assembly because of how he conducts the parliament, namely limiting free speech (*Milton and the Revolutionary* 202-3).

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of how Satan's claim of being "self-begot" relates to the vitalist movement, see Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution* 122-9.

<sup>48</sup> For Machiavelli's discussion of the need for princes to be able to adapt and assume multiple roles, see Machiavelli, "The Prince," 133-6.

<sup>49</sup> The other types of freedom are voluntary motion, best or correct rational choices, and the choice to obey or disobey God (Scodel 153).

<sup>50</sup> For a discussion of the uses of the analogy between the family and the state, see Susan Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England*, especially 181-2, and Rosanna Cox, "John Milton's Free Citizens and the Politics of the Family," 151-6.

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<sup>51</sup> For an analysis of how the creation of Eve leads to her submission to paternal authority, see Mary Nyquist, “The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts and *Paradise Lost*,” 117-123.

## Conclusion

The concept of freedom appears throughout Milton's writings, yet Milton imagines freedom operating differently in three distinct contexts. Political freedom relates to how civil and military institutions engage with a citizen. Religious freedom examines how civil and ecclesiastical institutions interact with a Christian. Finally, theological freedom centres on God's relationship with a Christian. In each instance the question of freedom is the same—to what extent does an individual require help to achieve a desired end—but the answer differs in each type of freedom. Political liberty required a commonwealth; by 1660 only powerful institutions that pursued the creation of a commonwealth at the expense of the popular will could bring political freedom to England. In the case of religious liberty, any activity on the part of institutions beyond persuasion and admonition reduces the chances of a Christian understanding and following God's will; therefore, salvation is most likely when individuals are free to choose for themselves without coercion. Theological freedom combines elements of both political and religious freedom, as God's role as creator and distributor of prevenient grace renders all of humanity dependent on him, yet that dependence creates the potential for free choice. Freedom is a constant presence in Milton's prose and poetry, but its meaning shifts throughout his works.

The issue at stake in political and religious liberty appears remarkably similar to modern discussions of freedom. What role should institutions play in people's lives? Milton's ability to see both the negative and positive sides of institutions anticipates contemporary debates over big government. Who knows what is in a person's best interest, the individual or the government? While today these debates occur between liberals and conservatives, in the mid-seventeenth century the struggle played out in the mind of a single man. As the English Revolution progressed and the English people repeatedly failed to live up to the revolutionary ideals, Milton



became more and more open to the use of coercive institutions in political freedom. To any twenty-first century liberty, Milton's discussion of using the army to oppose the electorate in the name of freedom sounds suspiciously like totalitarian regimes. Reflecting on his role in collectivizing farmland in Stalinist Russia, Lev Kopelev, a former propagandist for the Soviet Union, described his attitude towards collectivization in terms that echo Milton's political writings: "For I was convinced that I was accomplishing the great and necessary transformation of the countryside; that in the days to come the people who lived there would be better off for it; that their distress and suffering were a result of their own ignorance or the machinations of the class enemy; that those who sent me—and I myself—knew better than the peasants how they should live" (12). Although Milton never advocated orchestrating a famine that would kill millions, his view of those who would not accept his commonwealth, particularly in *The Present Means* and *The Readie and Easie Way*, is eerily similar to Kopelev's.

Yet all the political frustrations and failures of the mid-seventeenth century never caused Milton to reconsider his stance on religious liberty. In fact, his late prose shows an even greater commitment to protecting the individual Christian conscience from institutions that seek to shape it. In articulating both religious and political liberty, Milton called upon all his persuasive skill to justify the supremacy of either the individual or institutions. His writings contain the seeds for the modern rhetoric of both liberalism and totalitarianism. In the twenty-first century we are accustomed to seeing politicians attach themselves exclusively to either big or small government. Milton, however, could view both types of government as sources of freedom, depending on the circumstance.

For all his similarities with the rhetoric of recent political figures, Milton valued theological freedom above all else, revealing that Miltonic freedom looks forward to modernity

while being rooted in the seventeenth century. Without God's offer of prevenient grace, neither political nor religious freedom was possible. This absolute dependence on God prevents the individual autonomy that is a cornerstone of the modern western world. At the same time, although theological freedom involves an all-powerful dictator, individual free choice is not lost in theological freedom the way it is in totalitarian regimes.

With such diverse interpretations of liberty across his writings, it is no wonder that Milton has been identified with republicanism, liberalism, authoritarianism, elitism, and Christian free will. In a sense, all are correct, yet all are incomplete. Miltonic liberty is tied to reaching an objective rather than to the absence of coercion or any constitutional structure; therefore, how freedom functions in relation to external forces (be they institutional or divine) depends on whether or not those forces increase the likelihood of a person fulfilling their ultimate purpose. Such freedom enables Milton to celebrate simultaneously individual free choice, coercive institutions, and an all-powerful deity as sources of freedom.

With *Paradise Lost*, Milton completed his version of freedom, but he did not abandon the question of liberty. The concepts of institutional and theological freedom offer the potential for fresh insights into Milton's final two poetic works, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. Although *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* are set on earth, they continue *Paradise Lost*'s shift away from earthly institutions towards theology. In *Paradise Regained*, the debate between the Son and Satan renews the conflict between theological freedom through God and political freedom through institutions that began in *Paradise Lost*. As part of his temptation of the Son, Satan tries to convince him of the merit of liberating the Roman people: "Might'st thou expel this monster [the emperor Tiberius] from his throne / Now made a sty, and in his place ascending, / A victor people free from servile yoke!" (IV.100-2). Freeing the Romans, for Satan,

involves changing the political institutions so that the emperor is replaced with a better leader. The Son responds that he was not sent to earth “to free / That people [the Romans] victor once, now vile and base, / Deservedly made vassal” (IV.131-3). Political oppression does not concern the Son, as he is part of the separate theological sphere. Rather than liberate people from a political tyrant, the Son seeks “to guide nations in the way of truth / By saving doctrine, and from error lead / To know, and knowing worship God aright” (II.473-5). While *Paradise Lost* illustrates the clash between political and theological freedom in a rebellion, *Paradise Regained* does so in a debate. The Son’s verbal dominance over Satan reiterates the message that political freedom is meaningless in the grand scale of theology

With its setting a prison and its hero in chains, *Samson Agonistes* explicitly examines the ability of institutions to enslave people. The prison in which Samson lies creates institutional bondage, as he is “In the power of others, never in my own” (78). Samson later articulates exactly what authority the Philistine institutions have over him, and in doing so he undermines institutional power. Although he is a slave, Samson views himself as only in the Philistines’ “civil power” (1367). When the Officer urges Samson to “Regard thyself” (1333) and submit to the request to perform feats of strength at the festival, Samson responds: “Myself? My conscience and internal peace” (1334). Samson may be a slave, but the Philistine Lords’ “Commands [to perform at the religious festival] are not constraints” (1372), meaning they do not compel him to do anything against his conscience. The Philistines have complete institutional control over Samson, yet such control is meaningless in matters of conscience. *Samson Agonistes* presents institutions as both physically powerful and spiritually powerless. The destruction that Samson rains down on the Philistines at the end of the tragedy after feeling

“Some rousing motions” (1382) further questions the capacity of institutions when they are viewed from a theological vantage point.

The utilization of Milton’s language of freedom continued long after the publication of Milton’s late poetic masterpieces. John Tanner and Justin Collings have shown that while both Thomas Jefferson and John Adams admired Milton, Jefferson was attracted to Milton’s libertarian ideas, Adams to his rational piety. Although Jefferson and Adams embraced him, Milton’s writings both support and undermine the ideals of the American Revolution. They tie liberty to popular sovereignty, condemn democracy, insist on protecting individual choice, and praise authoritarian institutions. Milton’s institutional freedom and freedom from institutions provide the opportunity to re-examine his influence on American revolutionaries. Early American republicans engaged with and modified Miltonic liberty as they wrestled with the same questions that troubled Milton and continue to challenge modern democracies.

Like nearly every person today, Milton desired freedom for himself and his fellow countrymen and he sought to express this desire in a manner that would convince his readers. As part of his quest for freedom, Milton had to stop and consider what a free society actually looked like. We all want to be free, but what concrete steps need to be taken to achieve freedom? Can the ideal of freedom exist in a world filled with limits and flaws? The fact that Miltonic liberty is more practical than theoretical causes Milton’s prose writings to sometimes drift away from their own ideals, but in doing so they construct a freedom that is possible, even if it is far from perfect. Even the theological realm is not immune to such issues, as Milton struggles to balance individual choice with an all-powerful deity. Milton’s willingness to modify his version of freedom to fit certain circumstances has parallels with modern public policy, which often is filled with compromises. Yet Milton never admits that he is sacrificing the principles of liberty when

he describes the role of powerful institutions or God. Milton's language of liberty stresses consistency, not deviation. Miltonic freedom is about finding compromises in theory to suit reality, while employing language that denies compromise. With his commitment to liberty and flexibility in language, Milton creates a practical freedom that can find a way to exist in any circumstances.

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