

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that theodicy was a predominant concern of early modern English literary culture, and that response to the so-called “problem of evil” was one of its major leitmotifs. With chapters spanning from the Elizabethan to the Restoration eras, its interpretations of canonical poetic and dramatic texts (by Spenser, Shakespeare, Lucy Hutchinson, and John Milton) shed light on the avidity of interest and diversity of approach early modern writers brought to questions of evil. Bringing philological evidence from the literary archive to bear on existing historical-theoretical theses regarding the relationship between early modern theodicy and the constitution of modernity (theodicy drives secularization; theodicy motivates the development of German Idealism from Leibniz to Kant), I argue that these existing theories tend to oversimplify the complexity of seventeenth century thinking about the origin and persistence of evil in the world and in human experience. I attend to the hybridity of early modern literary discourse, which speaks at the thresholds dividing secular and sacred, private and public spheres, in order to restore this sense of complexity and open up new avenues of inquiry regarding the imagination of evil in the modern age. Much early modern theodicy, I find, contributed to the constitution of the modern in a negative way, comprising directions not taken, forms of thought excluded in pursuit of rationality, and legitimizing institutions superseded as modernity took shape.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. “Theodicy” in Early Modern Literature?

In its broadest contours, this dissertation argues that theodicy and the problem of evil are formative concerns of early modern English literature, measured from roughly 1600 to 1680.¹ That claim is itself potentially controversial, because there is a tendency to regard theodicy as a product of modern philosophy. Odo Marquard’s statement of the case is lapidary: “Where there is theodicy, there is modernity, and where there is modernity, there is theodicy.”² According to this restrictive view of how to talk about theodicy—one of the two major approaches to theodicy and the problem of evil I will describe in this introduction—the premise of this dissertation risks both category error and historical anachronism. So to begin I will introduce this restrictive sense of what theodicy means, which I will call the modernist view, and go on to show why the findings of this dissertation are nevertheless warranted and fruitful.

According to the modernist view of theodicy, the publication of Leibniz’s *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l’homme et l’origine du mal* (1710) may be seen as a watershed dividing premodern from modern ways of thinking about and responding to evil in the domain of European intellectual history. Although the existence of evil has troubled thinkers across a wide variety of cultures, and although one sees in other philosophers nearly contemporary with Leibniz (i.e. Descartes, Pierre Bayle) similar

¹ William Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 195, lends support: “[...] the reading of Genesis 1-3 was one of the defining acts of early-modernity, as was worrying about the problem of evil.”

² Odo Marquard, “Unburdenings: Theodicy Motives in Modern Philosophy,” in *In Defense of the Accidental: Philosophical Studies*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 11.

approaches to the one found in the *Essais de Théodicée*, this work introduces the word “theodicy” into the philosophical lexicon and it also serves as an important periodizing marker of real historical change. Marcel Sarot summarizes the modernist view of theodicy and its periodization as follows:

The change in the reflection on evil, marked by the introduction of the term ‘theodicy,’ allegedly took place in the eighteenth century. Leibniz, it is argued, was the first [...] to approach God and evil in terms of a lawsuit, in which the question is to what extent God is ‘guilty’ of the evil in the world. The ‘defence’ of God thus acquires juridical overtones [...]. Of all the changes in our thinking about evil that are associated with the introduction of the term ‘theodicy’, this is the one that is most intimately connected with Leibniz’ own thought, and also the one that is most difficult to trace in twentieth-century theodicies. Though the metaphor of a lawsuit is still sometimes used, the form of a lawsuit is seldom applied. Besides the introduction of juridical imagery, modernity is said to have affected our views on evil in at least four closely connected ways. (1) Before the eighteenth century the problem of evil was a problem within the Christian faith: the problem to account for the existence of evil, given the benevolent omnipotence of God. From Leibniz onwards, however, the problem of evil becomes a problem about the Christian faith. From then on, it is God’s justice, and even God’s existence, that is at stake in discussions of the problem of evil. (2) Before the 18th century, fathoming the problem of evil led man to doubt himself. It is the perversion of our will that introduced evil into the world, it is the perversion of our intellect that renders our endeavours to resolve the problem of evil futile. Only a God-given conversion can restore our will and cleanse our vision, and thus heal us and help us to attain blessedness. From Leibniz onwards, however, the intellect of the autonomous theodicyist is no longer doubted, and this intellect leads him to doubt God and God’s justice instead. (3) Before the eighteenth century, the problem of evil had a practical focus: How can we attain happiness in spite of evil? From Leibniz onwards, however, the problem of evil became a theoretical enterprise: the rational attempt to show the compatibility of the existence of the Christian God with the presence of evil in the world. This theoretical project does not have any direct practical implications. (4) Before the eighteenth century, thinking about the problem of evil was aimed at winning over those within Christianity holding false beliefs, whereas from Leibniz onwards, theodicy is aimed at winning over non-believers.³

³ Marcel Sarot, “Theodicy and Modernity: An Inquiry into the Historicity of Theodicy,” in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, eds. Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor (Leiden: Brill, 2003). Sarot draws on several sources; the most important are Marquard’s essay cited

As Sarot admits, this is a broad generalization and a rough periodization; but both the generalizing and the periodizing are helpful in their way. For students of theodicy, the generalizations help to explore valid connections between such seemingly disparate forms of thought as Leibnizian metaphysics and the Menshevik view of history.⁴ The periodization serves as a useful reminder to historicize, and take care with terminology that was born in a specific historical-cultural context. But the periodization also serves a limiting, territorial function; it allows the practitioner of philosophical, modern theodicy to claim discursive territory: preachers or poets may worry about evil in all kinds of ways, but if they abandon philosophical criteria of reason, if they refuse at the outset to question the tenets of their faith, if they focus on practical matters to do with suffering instead of dealing with the theoretical problem of evil, then they are not engaged in theodicy, they are engaged in something else: apologetics, pastoral care, or contemplation of providential mystery.

Clearly not all instances of theodicy across history are of the metaphysical / modernist / Leibnizian type, according to this schema. But that type, too, must have its history, and so *some* examples of thinking through and responding to evil that take place before the rise of optimistic rationalism and outside of the modern disciplinary boundaries of philosophy *must* bear a family resemblance to the modernist type—unless we want to suppose that Leibniz and friends invented the thing out of whole cloth. To illustrate, take Sarot’s second distinguishing point above: before ‘Leibniz’ our inability to come to terms

above and Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), esp. 1-28.

⁴ As does Terry Eagleton, *On Evil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 137.

with evil is a failure of intellect (perhaps wrought by original sin); whereas after ‘Leibniz’ confidence in our intellect leads us to doubt God, or the rationalizing stories told about God. Positive of the intellect’s witness to truth, we lodge legitimate complaints about the world as it is and may also try to move it toward how we humanly perceive that it ought to be. But from what quarter did this confidence in the human intellect come? In several books that trace (with exquisite clear-sightedness and care) the fortunes of theory from ancient times to modernity, Hans Blumenberg has tried to answer that question.⁵ And in one of them, he suggests that the history of modernist, metaphysical theodicy begins more than one hundred and fifty years prior to the publication of Leibniz’s foundational book. It is in fact the Copernican turn that inaugurates modern theodicy, “by relieving the Creator of the reproach that it is the object [i.e. the starry heavens] that confuses cognition, rather than cognition that fails when faced with its object.” Therefore after Copernicus, “we are called upon not to rest satisfied with a state of theory that renders questionable God’s intentions with the world and with man.” Copernicus is hardly a brash freethinker willing to lodge charges against God based on his own intellect; yet at the same time he is not willing to submit meekly to the notion that intellect must fail when confronted with astronomical phenomena.

This brief example is meant to show that the modernist view is to some extent justified in trying to restrict the usage of the word “theodicy,” since there are real differences between, for example, the book of Job and Hegel’s philosophy of history. Yet

⁵ Hans Blumenberg, *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman: A Protohistory of Theory*, trans. Spencer Hawkins (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015); *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987); *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985).

the modernist view suffers from an overblown sense of its autonomy with respect to other forms of discourse about evil, and is burdened by an overconfidence in the purity of the philosopher's reason. In this dissertation I use the word theodicy liberally, in a broad sense drawn from the sociology of religion (about which more shortly). But I will also frequently argue that the texts under consideration are responding to evil in ways that bear comparison with modern philosophical theodicies: as a metaphysical condition of the world as a whole (*Two Cantos of Mutabilitie*), as a theoretical problem to which theory can respond (*Paradise Lost*), as an occasion for doubting providence *in toto* (*Measure for Measure*). In short, these literary texts in many ways meet the criterion laid out by Susan Nieman for examining modern philosophical theodicies: they view the problem of evil as “fundamentally a problem about the intelligibility of the world as a whole,” rather than trying to deal in a pastoral way with suffering, or identifying evil simply as a cultural or religious other to be extirpated.⁶

The modern philosophical theodicy has its history, and part of that history is written in and through the early modern literary theodicies under investigation here, and others like them. In their bold use of juridical metaphors, in their attempts to place new discoveries in natural philosophy into renovated metaphysical frames, in rethinking the connections between ontology and ethics, in questioning the category of mystery and the political metaphors that depend on it, Spenser, Shakespeare, Hutchinson and Milton provide resources which the modernists draw upon, despite claims of autonomy and purity.

2. Theodicy in the Sociology of Religion

⁶ Susan Nieman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 7-8.

A far less restrictive view of what theodicy can mean comes down to us from the sociology of religion. Beginning with Max Weber, and continuing on through Talcott Parsons, Clifford Geertz, Peter Berger, and others, sociologists have viewed theodicy as the single most important function of religion. In the words of John Milbank, such thinkers “have [...] suggested that while religion is not reducible to theodicy, or coping with anxiety, nonetheless its point of intersection with society can be primarily understood in these terms.”⁷ Put in slightly different terms, the sociological view of theodicy would claim that “the most primary function of religion is to cope with the chances and changes of this life, by providing us with a reflection on the problem of misfortune, suffering and evil.”⁸ Although Milbank’s aim is to show that the sociological theory of religion is reducible to a “secular policing of the sublime,” I have in mind nothing so tendentious by citing his work here; his description of the sociological view of theodicy stands regardless of whether one agrees or not with his final analysis.

If we adopt this framework for thinking about what constitutes a theodicy, the fact that one finds theodicy in early modern literature will not be especially noteworthy. The texts discussed here deal with religious themes and were written in a society whose legitimating discourses depended upon religion in crucial ways. If religion is primarily about doling out theodical comforts, then these texts would be expected to have their theodical moments insofar as they are religious texts.

What is noteworthy is how fructifying the theodical approach happens to be in each individual case. When one reads carefully for theodicy in these texts, the wide diversity of

⁷ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, Second Edition (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 123.

⁸ Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 126.

theodicies swims into our ken, despite the tendency of the sociologists to limit theodicy to a handful of basic forms.⁹ For example, in Spenser's *Fowre Hymnes*, Protestant apologetics and Neoplatonic thought combine to produce a unique, hybridized approach to the problem of evil, one not reducible to Calvinist theology or Florentine philosophy, though having elements in common with both. Without attending to the specific question of evil, one might pass over the curious way that the word "mortal" is used in the poem to apply to unfallen human beings in Eden, or the ambivalent attitude toward matter which seems to depart from Plato. Thus the power of approaching these texts informed by the view of theodicy coming from the sociology of religion becomes evident primarily through the close readings of each individual text, and the chapter summaries adumbrate my findings.

3. Chapter Summaries

My first chapter discusses theodicy in Spenser's late verse, specifically the *Fowre Hymnes* and *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie*. I treat the two texts as if they were parts of a theodical whole: the *Hymnes* being mostly concerned with ethical issues, and the *Cantos* being mostly concerned with ontological or cosmological ones (though this is a matter of emphasis rather than choice and exclusion, given Spenser's commitment to the idea of a connection between macrocosm and microcosm). Though differing in their mode of inquiring into the problem of evil, both texts resolve upon a common answer, putting forward a Sabbatarian vision of rest, of the cessation of desire, even and especially the

⁹ Weber posited only three such forms: dualistic theodicy in which good and evil are locked in perpetual war, karmic theodicy in which evil in the present is explained by evil done in a past beyond memory, and predestination, which rationalizes theodicy by putting the total distribution of goods and ills into the hands of an omniscient and supervening providence. In this he is followed by Berger and others. See Max Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and eds. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 2009), 323-59, esp. 358-9.

desire for intellectual satisfaction about the nagging problem of evil. They are not anti-intellectual poems by any stretch; they both make bold claims to truth, and handle weighty philosophical, theological, and poetic themes. Yet in both poems the truths generated within the poem are shown to be inadequate with respect to the Real: in the *Hymnes*, the beatific vision of divine Sapience; in the *Cantos*, the arrival of the cosmic goddess Dame Nature. The encounter with an ineffable symbol of the Real effectively brackets the poetically generated truths the poems work to generate, and both poems conclude with images of stillness and rest which nevertheless harbor within them a textual restlessness and openness. In the *Hymnes* the openness stems from a cyclical overall structure; in the *Cantos* it stems from a fragmentary ending. In both cases this tension between stillness and openness defines the theodical resolution of the problem of evil the poems raise.

The next chapter addresses the discourse of “mysteries of state” in Shakespeare, primarily in the tragicomedy *Measure for Measure*. Here I argue that in this play and elsewhere the sense of “mystery” is suspended in a conflict between secular and sacred senses. It is ambiguously poised between a numinous substance, and a mundane but secret technique. *Measure for Measure* highlights this tension in the semantics of the word “mystery” and uses it to probe the limits of the metaphors of the “mysteries of state”—especially the metaphor connecting God’s providence to the Sovereign’s governance—in the early years of James I’s reign. James was a ruler fond of invoking “mystery” in order to defend his sovereign prerogatives, a trait echoed in the figure of *Measure*’s Duke Vincentio. But James’s kingly rhetoric was put under pressure by practitioners of law, who could and did also claim to have their own set of “mysteries,” secular in nature but still powerful in matters of state. I argue that the play demonstrates how sovereign mystery,

despite its claim to be tied in some way to the sovereign's body-of-power, depends in crucial ways upon the intercession of governmental intermediaries. *Measure* thus casts a dubious light on the metaphors of state mystery, and in so doing, cannot but create doubt around God's providence as well. By making mystery an occasion for doubting the legitimating discourse of the mysteries of state, *Measure for Measure* emerges as a play with a remarkably modern view of political-theological evils.

The third chapter uses shipwreck metaphors as a way of investigating Lucy Hutchinson's critique of Epicurean / Lucretian ethics. Epicurus was one of the primary conduits for the logical problem of evil from antiquity to the early modern period, a thinker whose questions still exercised Hume's meditations on the possibility of natural religion. Thus Hutchinson's rethinking of the ethical vision of *De rerum natura* involves her in theodicy, and in questions about ontology, ethics, and the relationship between the two. Hutchinson mounts a strong defense of the idea of Providence, bound up with a form of affective piety in which the "duties" of the faithful are construed in terms of emotional responses to ills. I describe Hutchinson's approach to theodicy as "existential," as opposed to Milton's more "theoretical" approach; in doing so, my argument once again shows the diversity of dealing with the problem of evil even within a 'narrow' religious context of Restoration-era dissenters.

My final chapter, then, takes up *Paradise Lost*. It is here that I find the most affinity between an early modern literary theodicy and the modern philosophical theodicies discussed above, because *Paradise Lost* treats theodicy as, in part, a theoretical issue, one that can be responded to using the tools of philosophical rationality. Yet where Leibniz and the modern theodicians will insist upon the univocal rationality of theory, *Paradise Lost*

explores several distinct forms of theory, apparent in the way the poem uses the word “survey.” The poem also goes part of the way toward putting a positive valuation on curiosity; this bespeaks a confidence in the intellectual capacities of human beings characteristic of modernist theodicy. Yet it does not go all the way, and there remain good reasons for thinking that the prohibition on forbidden knowledge still ought to set limits on human thought, by the poem’s lights. Besides the complex use of the word “survey,” I attend to the way the poem deploys the image of Galileo and his telescope, which I read as an ambiguous emblem of the advancement of learning, holding out the possibility that the perfected human form of theory lost in the fall might be partially reconstructible by means of human technics.

In sum, these chapters show that by reading early modern literature through the lens of theodicy broadly construed (i.e., as it is understood by sociologists of religion), one can see the diverse ways that religion and poetry combine and recombine to give sense to ills that might appear senseless, to undeserved suffering, to metaphysical imperfections in the world order, and to the troubling propensities toward evil that reside in human nature. In addition to this, I show how many of these texts mount theodicies which, while not modern philosophical theodicies in the strict sense, nevertheless resemble them in some respects. Taken cumulatively, the dissertation shows that the problem of evil is a predominant concern of several canonical works of English literature, and that it is a productive problematic for thinking about the way that literature responds to the rolling crises of legitimacy in natural philosophy, in politics, and in religion that in many ways define the seventeenth century, and that early modern literature participated in giving form to the theodical preoccupations of the modernity.

CHAPTER 2: THEODICY MOTIFS IN SPENSER'S LATE VERSE

1. Introduction

This chapter is about the forms of theodicy in Edmund Spenser's *Fowre Hymnes* and *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie*.¹⁰ I argue that both poems reflect upon anxious questions affecting late Elizabethan intellectual life—questions having to do with good and evil, order and disorder, meaning and meaninglessness. The *Cantos* focus on metaphysics, raising issues emerging as a longstanding Aristotelian consensus about natural philosophy began to break apart in the latter half of the sixteenth century; the *Hymnes* raise questions of ethics, taking shape in response to the influx of Platonic ideas about love.¹¹ Both sets of questions—ethical and metaphysical—concern the preservation-through-change of Renaissance England's "sacred canopy," the interleaved reason-giving ideas and legitimating frames of reference orienting the culture and giving meaning to lived experience.¹² I will show that in both these poems, Spenser responds to the anxiety produced by the forces of meaning-loss by appealing to a transcendental source of meaning, attained by contemplation, which in a sense supersedes worry about the problem of evil by promoting a cessation of desire, including and especially the desire for discursive

¹⁰ Citations of the *Fowre Hymnes* are drawn from Edmund Spenser, *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, eds. William Oram et. al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). Citations of *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie* are drawn from Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Harlow: Longman, 2001).

¹¹ Definitions of what constitutes "Aristotelian" natural philosophy will vary. I follow Mary Hart Crane, *Losing Touch With Nature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), with its useful description of early modern Aristotelianisms, and my argument is informed throughout by her contention that "the core of the 'Aristotelian' understanding of the natural world coincided with intuitive science, folk theories about the natural world that arise to provide commonsense explanations of ordinary experience" (20).

¹² The term "sacred canopy" is taken from Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, Anchor Books, 1969), discussed briefly in the introduction and at length below.

mastery of the vexing aspects of life and the world.¹³ The late works promote an ideal of fixity—a Sabbatarian vision of stillness—in response to the persistent interplay of good and evil that marks worldly existence, and open this fixity up as a consolation for, rather than an explanation of, the existence of evil. They aim to recover lost sources of permanence—figured forth by the personifications of Sapience and Nature—at a time when established ways of knowing were growing threadbare, an heirless monarch was advancing in years, and the poet himself was approaching the end of a self-fashioned, and rather tumultuous, laureate career.¹⁴ The *Hymnes* and *Cantos* put the goodness of Love and of Nature to the test, they enact trials that seek to answer the perennial question *unde malum?* They are poetic theodicies. And in the forms of the tests they enact, in the discourse in which they render their judgments, in the historically conditioned answers they give to the questions they raise, we see a snapshot of the Renaissance sacred canopy in the midst of a transition into early modernity. In this way they set the stage for the development of poetic theodicy that was brought to its most famous expression in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and they shed light on the poetic forms employed to justify the relationship of evil to good, and to God, in the early modern period.

In this introduction, I wish to lay out a theory of theodicy that captures the poetic aims of the *Cantos of Mutabilitie* and *Fowre Hymnes*, and to discuss some of the specific

¹³ Feisal Mohamed, *In the Anteroom of Divinity: The Reformation of the Angels from Colet to Milton* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), reads this gesture slightly differently, as suggesting the inability of the individual contemplator to penetrate divine mystery, and so endorsing “the implicit value of the mediating presence” of church and ecclesiastical hierarchy (33-54).

¹⁴ Crane, *Losing Touch*, 1-18. On the historical and biographical circumstances surrounding the composition of the *Fowre Hymnes* and their reception, see Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 349-357.

historical contexts informing those poems' justifications of evil. In using the term "sacred canopy," I have already hinted at the theory I will employ: the term comes from the sociologist Peter Berger, who approaches the problem of evil as a perennial and universal problem, one especially prominent in societies legitimated in religious terms. This is the framework I will use, but I will also show how a reading of early modern poetry makes us reconsider this framework, showing its limitations as well as its potentials. In *The Sacred Canopy* (1967), Berger wrote that while religious legitimations define and defend the normative areas of social order and individual experience, the function of a given social order's sacred canopy becomes most apparent in limit-cases: times of individual or social disarray. These can be rare, as in the unique case of approaching one's own death, or common, as in the case of sleeping and dreaming. What unites them is that such experiences are inherently "denomizing" or "anomic"—they don't seem to fit easily with the normative structure of one's waking life or the social order. Of these limit-cases or "marginal situations," Berger writes:

Religion [...] maintains the socially defined reality by legitimating marginal situations in terms of an all-encompassing sacred reality [i.e. the 'sacred canopy']. This permits the individual who goes through these situations to continue to exist in the world of his society—not 'as if nothing had happened,' which is psychologically difficult in the more extreme marginal situations, but in the 'knowledge' that even these events or experiences have a place within a universe that makes sense.¹⁵

It is here at the margins—in experiences of upheaval or meaning-loss, be they common or rare—that theodicy comes to shore up the religious legitimations that make a given social order appear coherent to those living in it. Religious legitimations work in such cases to incorporate marginal experience within the normative order—the "nomos"—of a given

¹⁵ Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 44.

society. Theodicy brings the abnormal into the domain of the nomos by justifying it, and thus gives the anomic or denomizing experience meaning.

Yet the repeated tendency of events that befall a society or an individual to challenge this nomos have a cumulative effect, combining together to challenge the legitimations themselves and the normative order they subtend. Berger elaborates:

Every nomos is established, over and over again, against the threat of its destruction by the anomic forces endemic to the human condition. In religious terms, the sacred order of the cosmos is reaffirmed, over and over again, in the face of chaos. It is evident that this fact poses a problem on the level of human activity in society, inasmuch as this activity must be so institutionalized as to continue despite the recurrent intrusion into individual and collective experience of the anomic (or, if one prefers, denomizing) phenomena of suffering, evil and, above all, death. However, a problem is also posed on the level of legitimation. The anomic phenomena must not only be lived through, they must also be explained—to wit, explained in terms of the nomos established in the society in question. An explanation of these phenomena in terms of religious legitimations, of whatever degree of theoretical sophistication, may be called a theodicy.¹⁶

For Berger, then, the task of theodicy is to explain anomic phenomena, guided by the lights of religious legitimations subtending a given society. The goal of the explanation is world-maintenance, the preservation of bonds of meaning holding together a social reality, and linking individual lives to it. Another formulation clarifies what is at stake in the world-maintaining activity: “The worlds that man constructs are forever threatened by the forces of chaos, finally by the inevitable fact of death. Unless anomy, chaos and death can be integrated within the nomos of human life, this nomos will be incapable of prevailing through the exigencies of both collective history and individual biography. To repeat: every

¹⁶ Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 53.

human order is a community in the face of death. Theodicy represents the attempt to make a pact with death.”¹⁷

The need for such a pact does not go away, despite the changing fortunes of given world religions or *nomoi* and forms of social order. This is the strength of Berger’s model: it gives to theodicy the proper breadth of scope, and views it as a social activity expressed in religious terms, rather than a narrowly theological activity. The weakness of the model, though, is that it fails to account for changes to the justificatory regimes within a given social order. That is, because it exists at the highest level of social abstraction and theorization, it does not do well at describing the modulations of theodicy, its variations, and the cumulative variations which, when observed, present evidence of some historical change. Here we begin to understand the importance of poetic theodicy: such texts are in a sense experimental forms of theodicy, ways of forging a “pact with death” anew, related to, but not always perfectly conforming to, social and religious norms, and responsive to the specificities of the historical moment and lived experience they witness. Further, as individualized expressions of collective belief, they reveal variations of the general problem of theodicy—they explain suffering not only in terms of social normativity, but also in terms of self-fashioning and the personal integration of anomic experience. Attending to such variations can reveal the specific forms of theodicy at a much finer-grained level, and they show that literature can often succeed in capturing elusive, evanescent forms of meaning which other kinds of reason-giving—philosophical and theological—may miss, since those kinds of reason-giving are frequently more beholden to the normative rationality of a given social order. Spenser’s late poetry, read in terms of

¹⁷ Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 80.

theodicy, helps to see this depth-dimensions of theodicy which Berger's approach overlooks.

In the *Hymnes* and *Cantos* we encounter specific anomic phenomena animating the need for social and individual theodicy in Spenser's England. What were they? As indicated above, the first is concerned with the ontological status of the world; this is part of the subject matter of the *Cantos*. The second is taken up in *Hymnes*, which treat the "marginal situation" of love and erotic passion, attempting to set this experience within a metaphysical-religious order that stabilizes and orients it toward the good. Several historical and poetic motivations for both undertakings in poetic theodicy shape Spenser's late poetry.

Historically, the *Cantos* respond to a crisis—really more of a succession of crises—in the fundamental understanding of nature. As described in Mary Thomas Crane's *Losing Touch With Nature* (2014), beginning about the middle of the sixteenth century natural philosophers began to lose confidence in the Aristotelian Synthesis—a self-reinforcing set of natural-philosophical assumptions which served to guide natural inquiry, and with them an epistemological attitude that held the truths of nature to be evidently and openly available to the senses.¹⁸ The propositions included a belief in the four terrestrial elements and a fifth (incorruptible) celestial element, the geocentric arrangement of the heavens, and the idea that motion could be understood with reference to its 'natural' and 'violent' kinds.¹⁹ Yet at least as important as the philosophical framework provided by these

¹⁸ Crane, *Losing Touch*, 37-41.

¹⁹ Crane, *Losing Touch*, 25-31. On geocentrism, and the intuitive, anthropocentric views of nature implied by it, see Hans Blumenberg, *Genesis of the Copernican World*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987) 169-199. On motion in Aristotle and its transformation in medieval and early modern astronomy, see also Amos Funkenstein,

propositions was the affective attitude they encouraged: an assuredness about sensory evidence, a faith that inquiry into natural processes could be a matter of deducing sound conclusions from evident premises.²⁰ The dissolution of the Aristotelian Synthesis meant the intrusion of doubt, a loss of this assuredness. In this way the hunt for “secrets” of nature, for “tokens” of phenomenal significance hidden to the senses, moved out of the domain of occult or magical investigation and into the developing paradigm of the ‘new science.’²¹

The dissolution of the Aristotelian Synthesis was especially dramatic in the field of astronomy. The publication of *De revolutionibus* presented a theoretically and mathematically compelling heliocentric view of planetary arrangement that challenged Aristotle and Ptolemy. This theoretical innovation—a sun-centered universe—gave mathematical support to the solar mysticism urged by revivals of Platonism, studies in the *prisca theologia*, and hermetic philosophies of the Renaissance.²² More discretely, Tycho Brahe’s observation of a supernova in 1572 challenged the Aristotelian view of a two-story universe, divided into changeable sublunary and immutable superlunary realms.²³ England

Theology and the Scientific Imagination From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 152-78.

²⁰ Crane, *Losing Touch*, 20: “the core of the ‘Aristotelian’ understanding of the natural world coincided with intuitive science, folk theories about the natural world that arise to provide commonsense explanations of ordinary experience.”

²¹ William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 269-300. Eamon makes the distinction between ‘intuitive’ science and the hunt for secrets clear: “The professors of secrets affirmed the superiority of experience over reason in the search for scientific knowledge. They believed that nature was permeated with ‘secrets’ and occult forces that lay hidden underneath the exterior appearances of things [...] The ‘secrets of nature,’ which were inaccessible to the intellect, could be found out only by long experience in the ways of nature” (269).

²² For a fulsome account of Copernicus’s early influence, see Blumenberg, *Genesis of the Copernican World*, 259-430.

²³ Sarah Powrie, “Spenser’s Mutabilitie and the Indeterminate Universe,” *Studies in English Literature* 53, no. 1, 78. See also George Williamson, “Mutability, Decay, and

was an epicenter of this seismic shift in astronomical understanding: Thomas Digges was one of the first vernacular popularizers of Copernicus in Europe and an early proponent of a theory holding the universe to be ‘infinite.’²⁴ Giordano Bruno’s stint in England from 1583-85 brought the Italian firebrand into the orbit of Philip Sidney, and it was on English soil that Bruno wrote several of his most famous works, including the dialogues *The Ash Wednesday Supper*; *Cause, Principle, and Unity*; and *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*.²⁵ None of this necessarily argues for Spenser’s direct involvement in this change in thinking about the heavens, but it demonstrates that the intellectual climate of late sixteenth century England was one in which new astronomical ideas clashed with established Aristotelian-Ptolemaic views. The *Cantos of Mutabilitie* register the historical context of a dissolving Aristotelian synthesis; the destabilizing force driving the dissolution is figured in the poem as a Titan—Dame Mutabilitie—a bearer of original sin and the intrusion of death into the world. The poem itself, culminating in Nature’s paradoxical act of lawgiving, constitutes a theodical poetic response in the form of an allegorical trial in which the competing claims of evil / mutability and good / constancy are weighed. Its aim is to resolve the metaphysical problem of constancy amid ceaseless change via a figurative enactment of natural law as mystery.

Seventeenth-Century Melancholy,” *English Literary History* 2, no. 2, 123: “[...] the new astronomy introduced corruption and change into the most retired regions of the incorruptible and unchangeable heavens. And Tycho Brahe was instrumental in upsetting these received opinions, although (and even more because) he did not accept the Copernican theory but compromised with the Ptolemaic.” Williamson’s account links this with the fashionable melancholic pose of the seventeenth century, and usefully gives describes the affective charge attached to the crisis in astronomy.

²⁴ See Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957), 36-39.

²⁵ Powrie, “Indeterminate Universe,” 72. See also Hillary Gatti, *Essays on Giordano Bruno* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 26-45; 111-119.

The theodical context to which the *Fowre Hymnes* respond shares in some ways this sense of meaning-loss, carrying over the metaphysical concern with natural law and its discontents into the ethical domain, the law of human nature. We can deduce from the remarks of Berger above that the connection between ethics and metaphysics—between macrocosm and microcosm—is a central issue in theodicy; more recently Susan Neiman has confirmed and elaborated on this view.²⁶ If the *Cantos* deal with the problem of locating Being within a world of unending becoming, the *Hymnes* take up the human manifestation of this problem, namely the question of grounding in some kind of permanence all the urgings and displacements of eros, and the cycle of birth, growth, decline and death that eros entails. Here we may note in a preliminary way the strange fact that this theme is largely absent from the *Cantos of Mutabilitie*. Strange, because the *Cantos* explicitly advertise their participation in the medieval tradition of poetry representing the Goddess Natura (claiming continuity with Chaucer’s *Parlement of Foules* and Alain de Lille *De planctu naturae*), a tradition in which the law of kind, that is, the norms governing human sexuality and reproduction, usually occupy a central position.²⁷

²⁶ Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 7-8: “The problem of evil can be expressed in theological or secular terms, but it is fundamentally a problem about the intelligibility of the world as a whole. Thus it belongs neither to ethics nor to metaphysics but forms a link between the two.”

²⁷ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953; 2013), 106-127. See also George Economou, *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 53-103; 125-150. Economou’s classic study outlines several roles Natura can play, among them: *pronuba*; *procreatrix*; and *vicaria Dei*. The *Cantos* seem exclusively occupied with the latter role, the former two are scarcely present in the poem. On connections between Chaucer and the *Cantos*, see Glenn Steinberg, “Chaucer’s Mutability in Spenser’s ‘Mutabilitie Cantos,’” *Studies in English Literature* 46, no. 1 (2006), 27-42; on Chaucer’s “Parlement” as a theodical text in its own right, see Helen Cooney, “The

Instead, Spenser reserves the ethical dimension of his theodicy for another poem. On this basis, I read the *Hymnes* and the *Cantos* as being related poetic enterprises: one dealing with the anomic or denomizing metaphysical situation of a loss of self-evidence in matters concerning macrocosmic phenomena, the other dealing with the ethical “marginal situation” of erotic desire, conceived in the poem as a species of Platonic *mania* (L. *furore*). The *Cantos* enact an allegorical trial, setting right the Law of Nature, whereas the *Hymnes* describe the successive tests and tribulations required to ascend the ladder of love, in which process the Law of Kind—human nature as expressed in human sexuality broadly considered—is guided to wisdom under the governance of ideal Love and ideal Beauty.

With these introductory remarks about theoretical and historical context in place, we can turn our attention to the poems themselves. I will start with the *Fowre Hymnes*, drawing out the theodical structure implicit in the palinodic form of the poems as a whole. Special attention will be given to the work’s engagement with the *Phaedrus*, specifically the theory of four forms of divine madness which, I will show, help to explain the sequence of the poems. I will then move on the *Cantos of Mutabilitie*, showing its divergence from previous entries in the Natura tradition and bringing to light its responses to the breakdown of the Aristotelian consensus, and demonstrating how these features of the poem inflect its theodical bearing.

‘Parlement of Foules’: A Theodicy of Love,” *The Chaucer Review* 32, no. 4 (1998), 339-76.

2. The *Fowre Hymnes*: A Platonic Theodicy of Love

Scholars have long noted that the *Fowre Hymnes* contain Spenser's most direct expression of Renaissance Neoplatonic philosophy.²⁸ Although other appearances of Neoplatonic ideas in the Spenserian corpus may be attributable to the diffusion of broadly Platonic notions in the syncretism of the Renaissance, the *Fowre Hymnes* make use of technical and specialized terms and concepts which indicate familiarity with technical Neoplatonic philosophy.²⁹ In this section I will show that the pattern of Spenser's theodicy of love in the *Fowre Hymnes* borrows from Marsilio Ficino's commentary to the *Phaedrus*, and put forward some reasons for the borrowing.³⁰ The suggestion of a direct association between the two texts will be somewhat controversial: having no record of Spenser's library, we do not know whether he was acquainted with this specific Ficino commentary.

²⁸ See Robert Ellrodt, *Neoplatonism in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser* (Folcroft: Folcroft Press), 1969; Elizabeth Biemann, *Plato Baptized: Towards the Interpretation of Spenser's Memetic Fictions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 152-62; Carol Kaske, "Neoplatonism in Spenser Once More," *Religion and Literature* 32, no. 2 (2000), 162-7; Carol Kaske, "Hallmarks of Platonism and the Sons of Agape (*Faerie Queene* IV.ii-iv)," *Spenser Studies* 24 (2009), 15-72; and in the same issue of *Spenser Studies* Ayesha Ramachandran, "Edmund Spenser, Lucretian Neoplatonist: Cosmology in the *Fowre Hymnes*," 373-401. Biemann's writes: "More systematically than any other Spenserian text, the *Fowre Hymnes* raise physical, moral, and metaphysical questions concerning love and creation, and offer in response, cryptically, the unmanifested 'paterne' which supports all attempts at hermeneusis" (163). The remark shows that even for scholars who see Spenser's corpus in general as Neoplatonic (thus diverging from Ellrodt), the *Hymnes* stand out as an especially "systematic" exploration of Neoplatonic ideas.

²⁹ Ellrodt, *Neoplatonism*, makes this point in order to argue *against* widespread Ficinian Neoplatonism in the rest of the corpus.

³⁰ The influence upon the *Hymnes* of Ficino's commentaries on the *Symposium* has already been noticed by, e.g., Kaske, "Neoplatonism in Spenser Once More," 166. See also Kenneth Borris, *Visionary Spenser and the Poetics of Early Modern Platonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 83-115. Borris argues for the pervasive influence of the *Phaedrus* on the *Shepherd's Calendar*.

Further, one wishes to avoid needlessly complicating an already elaborate poem by seeking out abstruse textual connections.

Recent scholarship by Valery Rees confirms the “accessibility of Ficinian Platonism” for readers in Spenser’s England. The very valuable appendix added to the essay “Ficinian Ideas in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser” (2009) shows the high probability that both Ficino’s translations of Plato’s texts (the *Platonis Opera*) as well as Ficino’s own *Opera Omnia*, containing the commentaries on Plato, would have been available to those seeking.³¹ Rees points, for example, to the connection between Spenser and Lancelot Andrews—a contemporary of Spenser’s at Pembroke college Cambridge, and a fellow-student of his at Merchant Taylor’s school. Andrews bequeathed to Pembroke a copy of Ficino’s *Iamblichus* translation, and was “later a leading bishop and chief of the authorized translators of the Bible under King James.” Rees concludes that Spenser and Andrews likely “shared interest in such Platonic works.”³² Though without records nothing can be proven to a certainty, the cumulative data assembled by Rees amply supports her conclusions that “it was certainly possible for Spenser to read Plato and to have conversations about Ficinian Platonism from his student years onward.” Thus it is well within the realm of possibility that the *Hymnes* are patterned on *Phaedrus*, and that they take into account Ficino’s particular interpretation of that work.

To the second point about needless complication, I would reply that Ficino’s commentary on and translation of *Phaedrus* rather elucidates the *Hymnes* than obfuscates them. Although the *Hymnes* clearly reflect Platonic ideas about Love that could have been

³¹ Valery Rees, “Ficinian Ideas in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser,” *Spenser Studies* 24 (2009), 100-25.

³² Rees, “Ficinian Ideas,” 124.

gotten from the *Symposium*, for example, it is in the *Phaedrus* that we find clearly and forcefully delineated the fourfold division of love which, I will propose, provides a basis for Spenser’s division of his work into four distinct *Hymnes*. The rest of this section will, I hope, confirm the value of the critical decision to compare the two texts. The schematic overview reflected in Table 1 will be explored throughout what follows.

Hymn	Divinity	Fury	Cosmogony	Remainder
“An Hymne in Honor of Love” (HL)	Cupid	Amatory	Love subdues the elements (cp. Ovid, <i>Met.</i>)	Decay; Suffering
“An Hymne in Honor of Beautie” (HB)	Venus	Poetic	Demiurge creates following pattern of Beauty (cp. Plato, <i>Tim.</i>)	Unjust Distribution; Compulsion
“An Hymne in Honor of Heavenly Love” (HHL)	God the Son	Hieratic / Priestly	Hexameral (cp. <i>Genesis; Isaiah</i>)	Fallenness; Sin
“An Hymne in Honor of Heavenly Beautie” (HHB)	God the Father	Prophetic	Replaced with ascent (cp. Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i>)	None

(Table 1)

The general argument in favor of the comparison is that, for Spenser as well as Ficino, the four divine frenzies—prophetic, priestly, poetic, and amatory—are related to each other so that any one can be said to be justified—aligned with the Good—by virtue of its place within the economy of divine passions, and that any one in the total absence of the others is incomplete or misaligned with the Good.³³ This economy of divine furies is expressed by Spenser in terms of a four-stage ascent through degrees of love, beginning in amatory frenzy and ending in the prophetic.

³³ See Marsilio Ficino, *Commentaries on Plato, Vol. 1: Phaedrus and Ion*, ed. and trans. Michael J. B. Allen (Florence: I Tatti, 2008), where Ficino declares: “In describing any one frenzy, Socrates in a way recalls any other, and not unjustly so, for they are mutually joined” (117).

In suggesting the influence of Ficino's *Phaedrus* commentaries on the *Fowre Hymnes*, I am gently pushing back against the editors of the Yale edition of Edmund Spenser's shorter poems. In their headnote to the *Hymnes*, Bjorvand and Schell suggest that "[w]hatever unified vision there is in the poem is more likely to be found in the unity of Spenser's artistic creation than any set of Neoplatonic and/or biblical ideas which have been "together linkt" by our eclectic author."³⁴ I agree with this in principle, and I would note that I am not suggesting dogged adherence to the model. Indeed, in the marked hiatus between amatory and poetic frenzies on the one hand, and hieratic and prophetic frenzies on the other, and in the careful counterpoising of one pair against the other, Spenser is charting his own, more dogmatically Protestant, way through the material he draws upon. Yet comparison with *Phaedrus*, and Ficino's commentaries thereon, helps to make sense of why "furies" and "enragements" find distinct expression in each of the hymns, and also clarifies, by comparison and contrast, the global architecture of the work, and what to make of its palinodic structure. Overall, Spenser's vision of the relationship between the four furies suggests that only the latter two are marked with the seal of Christian truths; Ficino's vision is arguably more homogenizing than this, and quicker to see direct analogies between pagan and Christian versions of the priestly and prophetic furies.³⁵ But here I anticipate somewhat the arguments that will follow.

At the beginning of the mythical hymn in *Phaedrus* [243E9-256A7] describing the soul as a chariot pulled by winged steeds, Socrates distinguishes between four types of "frenzy" (Gk. *mania*; L. *furore*), or divinely-inspired madness. The whole mythic hymn is

³⁴ Oram ed., *Shorter Poems*, 683.

³⁵ See Ellrodt, *Neoplatonism*, 213.

steeped in mystery, and scholars debate its precise interpretation. Ficino's commentary on this part of the text gives the four types of mania a somewhat more systematic treatment than what is provided in the dialogue itself. The commentary begins by asking why Socrates seems to devalue poetic frenzy in relation to the other kinds:

Why did Socrates put poetry third in the degrees of frenzy—for he reminded us that prophecy was first, the hieratic art second, poetry third, and love fourth. It's because prophecy pertains mainly to knowing, the hieratic art to affect and volition (so it succeeds prophecy), but poetry already declines to hearing besides. The ancient poets did not compose divine hymns until, admonished by the prophets and priests, they had first thought to celebrate the gods, to pray to them, to intercede and give thanks.³⁶

This passage shows us the four kinds of frenzy, and gives us something like a ranked order of them in terms of priority: the prophetic frenzy is highest, next hieratic (priestly), next poetic (in “the third degree”), and lowest amatory. Poetry is ‘lower’ than the other forms because it “declines to hearing,” influencing us through the sense of hearing; the amatory is in a sense the ‘lowest’ of all because “it is usually excited through sight, which we naturally use after hearing.”³⁷ This passage shows the specific hierarchic arrangement of the furies which Ficino finds in the *Phaedrus*, which distinguishes it from other articulations in the Platonic corpus where the frenzies are discussed.

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates also claims that the madness of love is the best form of divinely-inspired madness, even though viewed hierarchically it is the “lowest.” How can this be? In short, it is because the amatory frenzy, as “lowest,” stands at both the beginning and the end of the progression.³⁸ Ficino's gloss evokes the primacy of love several times.

³⁶ Ficino, *Commentaries*, 51.

³⁷ Ficino, *Commentaries*, 51.

³⁸ For a visual representation of the kinds of circular economy to be found in Neoplatonic thought, see the remarkable mandala-like diagram in Biemann, *Plato Baptized*, 133.

We read, for instance, that in order to be “disposed to the amatory frenzy” at all, we must already “have been purified to the utmost and carried off by the hieratic, by the Dionysian, frenzy.”³⁹ In addition, we have the following:

This amatory frenzy is more outstanding than the other three both because it comes from the best [*fit ex optimis*]—it is excited, that is, by beauty itself and wisdom and goodness, and is filled with our unity—and also because it unites us more effectively and firmly with God.⁴⁰

These observations help to understand why the four distinct furies or manias outlined in the *Phaedrus* are all treated by Spenser under the sign of love.⁴¹ There is evidently a sense in which love animates the whole vatic movement through the series or sequence of divine manias mentioned. The passage also elucidates what is at stake in the consideration of evil in matters of eros: it is of course possible to be possessed of something that looks like this divinely-inspired madness of love, but not to have been “purified to the utmost.” In such cases, apparent love is real evil, and the madness is not divine mania, but rather a destructive fit of passion (destructive, because it is not oriented toward the Good). The theodicy of love that inhabits the *Fowre Hymnes* undertakes a kind of trial of love through successive crises and discernments, an ordeal taking place in subjective consciousness (in the first and fourth *Hymnes* the speaker’s own, in the second and third a subject addressed by the speaker), which undergoes to a sequence of *furores* about which the poem asks

Biemann stipulates that: “The diagram must be set in motion imaginatively to make any sense: perceptions will be adjusted as elements move through any position.”

³⁹ Ficino, *Commentaries*, 151.

⁴⁰ Ficino, *Commentaries*, 151.

⁴¹ I should note that Ficino also outlines the four frenzies in commentaries on *Symposium* and *Ion*. Ficino, *Commentaries*, 52: “In [commenting on] the *Symposium* and *Ion* I arranged the four frenzies in the order pertaining to the soul’s restoration; here I have arranged the order insofar as it looks to the actual origin of frenzy.” The “origin of frenzy” in the amatory, its progression through the prophetic, and the formal possibility—realized in the poem only *in potentia*—of return, appears to me to be the subject matter of the *Hymnes*.

whether they are good or evil. It is this discerning of the four kinds of fury that organizes the problem of evil as presented in the *Hymnes*.⁴²

Turning to the *Hymnes* themselves, we should begin with some words about their overall architecture (schematically suggested in Table 1). There are two pairs hymns; their successive titles are “An Hymne in Honor of Love,” “An Hymne in Honor of Beautie,” “An Hymne of Heavenlie Love,” and “An Hymne of Heavenlie Beautie.” All the poems share some similarities of construction. Each poem is written in honor of either a classical god or a personage of the Christian deity; each contains an inset cosmogony, a story about the creation of the world and the role of love and beauty (worldly or heavenly) play in creation; and each hymn ends with a beatific vision, a description of a *locus amoenus* governed by love.⁴³ As noted in the table, each of these blissful endings leaves some latent tension unresolved, although in the course of reading the poems this may not be totally clear until the whole sequence is understood and reflected upon. These unresolved tensions are all dissolved in the final hymn, in a comprehensive vision of divine Sapience.⁴⁴ In an

⁴² Jon Quitslund, *Spenser's Supreme Fiction: Platonic Natural Philosophy and the Faerie Queene* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 178: “Prophecy, poetry, and the higher form of love all, according to Ficino and other followers of Plato, involve allied forms of *furor*, which is *made good rather than destructive* by the flow of corresponding spirits in the cosmos and microcosm” (emphasis added).

⁴³ *S. Enc.*, “*Fowre Hymnes*.”

⁴⁴ Mary Oates, “*Fowre Hymnes: Spenser's Retractions of Paradise*,” *Spenser Studies* 4 (1984), 148: “Each hymn ends with the hero contemplating an object of worship enshrined in a ‘paradise,’ but his first two objects meet with disappointing reverses, containing the seeds of their own decay. At the same time, however, each contains elements out of which the poet’s ‘high-concepted spright’ can create new objects that will be more adequate [...]. Only the last vision, of God with Sapience enshrined in his bosom, is ‘pretended’ as the most satisfying experience available to human beings on earth [...]. On the way to each new image of completion, a series of confusing and demonic parodies of deity is proposed and partly left behind, although Spenser is slow to claim that any dragon is ever finally crushed by the heel of art.”

introductory epistle to the reader, Spenser crafts a story about the poems, explaining that the profane hymns were written in “greener times of youth,” and the heavenly hymns were written as a conscious reformation of the earlier texts.⁴⁵ Spenserians debate the truth of the claim; for my purposes what is important is that the story prepares the reader to see the deficiencies in each individual part of the overall work, and to understand that the motive of the whole work is a proving or testing of love—an attempt to establish the boundaries of good and evil with respect to love, to set in proportion a vision of love *in bono* and *in malo*—via successive crises on progressively ‘higher’ orders of experience.⁴⁶ In short: the dedicatory epistle discloses a (self-)justificatory intent at work in the poem as a whole.⁴⁷

First in the sequence is “An Hymne in Honor of Love.” Written from the perspective of the lovelorn youth of Petrarchan convention, it is a song in praise of Cupid. The winged god is portrayed as a powerful demiurge, transforming a formless and preexistent chaos into order, dividing the four elements and harmonizing them by arranging their “contrary dislikes and loved meanes.”⁴⁸ In the first poem’s cosmological beginning, the creation of the world is described in the following terms:

The earth, the ayre, the water, and the fyre,
Then gan to raunge them selves in huge array,
And with contrary forces to conspyre,

⁴⁵ Oram ed., *Shorter Poems*, 690.

⁴⁶ See Thomas Hyde, *The Poetic Theology of Love: Cupid in Renaissance Literature* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1986), 132-142.

⁴⁷ Oates, “Retractions,” 143-69 presents an illuminating reading of the poem as a quest for individual psychic wholeness. Along the way, Oates gives an account in which ‘evils’ are integrated in a way that is clearly theodical. Given the isomorphic relationship between microcosm and macrocosm for Spenser, this argument can be transposed into the domain of metaphysics.

⁴⁸ See *S. Enc.*, “Cupid.” The article acknowledges the theodical problems associated with a Cupid who appears sometimes good, and sometimes evil, and doubts the ultimate efficacy of the “two Cupids” solution: “Two opposed and irreconcilable gods of love make sense only iconographically; theologically they imply an unacceptable Manichaeism.”

Each against other, by all meanes they may
Threatning their owne confusion and decay:
Ayre hated earth, and water hated fyre,
Till Love relented their rebellious yre. (HL 78-84)

Note the absence of creation *ex nihilo* in the passage. Being a version of the Ovidian creation myth, the poem presents a preexisting chaos of confused elements at war with one another. The elemental strife of the first matter brought forth nothing but “confusion and decay,” until Cupid “relented” the belligerent stasis of all-pervading conflict. Yet Love does not, in this version of the story, bring all things into concord by mutually agreed-upon peace; rather, the god’s intervention is presented as being heavy handed and tyrannical:

He [Cupid] then them [the elements] tooke, and tempering goodly well
Their contrary dislikes and loved meanes,
Did place them all in order, and compell
To keepe them selves within their sundrie raines,
Together linkt with Adamantine chaines;
Yet so, as that in every living wight
They mixe themselves, and shew their kindly might. (HL 85-92)

Love here captivates and compels the elements, setting the world to right by proscribing fixed bounds to the elements. The rhyme of “raines” and “chaines” evokes submission, servitude, the virtual enslavement of the elements by Love. (This chimes with the attitude of the Petrarchan conceit on which the hymn draws. This theme, as the editors of the Yale edition point out, views “Cupid as a cruel tyrant and the lover as his slave.”)⁴⁹ The phrase “kindly might” deserves special attention, as it reflects the dual nature of Love as blending care and cruelty. The word “kindly” evokes both the now good-natured tendencies of the elements Love has subdued, whereas “might” suggests their potential for violent suasion—a potential borne out by the suffering of the lovelorn youth who is the speaker of the poem.

⁴⁹ Oram ed., *Shorter Poems*, 691n.

“Kind” also evokes nature itself—the “law of kind” and “law of nature” being used somewhat interchangeably in the early modern period. In this context the play on “kind” means that while the “kindly might” may indicate affability or goodness, it can also just mean the power proper to the elements (the “kinds”). The ambiguity makes us wonder how far the order imposed on the elements by Love can be said to be good. Has the imposition of the law of kind, keeping elements within their “sundrie raines” and binding them all together in the great chain of being made the world good? Or has it only set a still fundamentally bad world into temporary good order by the imposition of force? Such questions, concerning the origin and extent of evil in the creation of the world, the etiology of evil relative to the good intentions of a demiurge, have a clear theodical bearing. The answers to these questions remain unresolved here, and it is the business of the later hymns to take them up again.

Throughout the poem, in the exclamations of suffering spoken by the lovelorn poetic subject, we see that to live under the sway of love is to endure suffering that is only given meaning—is only justified—upon attainment of the object of erotic desire.⁵⁰ Before that time, love is a “tyrant,” who “doest laugh and scorne” at the “complaints” of his “thrals,” “making their paine [his] play” (HL 134-135). Importantly, the speaker exclaims that Love “doest triumph in their [his servants’] decay,” suggesting that the good order Love imposed in his cosmogony—when he “relented” their war, stopping their “corruption and decay”—was at best incomplete. The reappearance of “decay” suggests that the war of

⁵⁰ This account tallies with Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 5: “Meaning exerts force by driving a wedge into some part of nature in order to make two opposed things, two ‘others,’ or by yoking together two others.”

elements reemerges at higher levels in the warring passions.⁵¹ Surveying Cupid's tyranny, the speaker complains against the god of Love.

But if thou be indeede, as men the call,
The world's great Parent, the most kind preserver
Of living wights, the soveraine Lord of all,
How falles it then, that with thy furious fervour,
Thou doest afflict as well the not deserver,
As him that doeth thy lovely heasts despize,
And on thy subjects most doest tyrannize? (HL 155-61)

This stanza accords with the poem's theme of Love's tyranny, and raises it to its highest pitch. In this stanza the hymn is preparing the way for a parallel to Christ's suffering, which we will see when we come to in the "Hymn of Heavenly Love." Most important to note here is that the high point of the lovers' complaint comes when he sees the essentially unjust character of Love's tyranny. The pangs of love are *undeserved*, making them unbearable. In Berger's terms, the speaker is undergoing a marginalizing experience not oriented by a compensating *nomos* or order. In the terms of the Renaissance theodicy of Cupid and the amatory frenzy, we are given to wonder whether the power of love over the human soul has its origins in the divine or the diabolical.

The poem ends with a partial theodicy, meant to assign meaning to the seeming cruelties of Cupid's governance of the cosmos, while conspicuously leaving behind some unresolved tensions.⁵² It is a theodicy of the soul-making type, in which evils and

⁵¹ Hyde, *The Poetic Theology of Love*, 109, observes that "the fundamental force of Empedoclean physics" lies beneath the myth of Cupid's subduing the elements in many interpretations. That seems to be Spenser's view here, and the macrocosmic problems emerge again in the microcosm.

⁵² Hyde, *Poetic Theology of Love*, 98-110, makes clear that theodicy is a central issue in the mythographic and philosophical works on Cupid in the Renaissance. The trattatisti—writers of treatises on love like Leone Ebreo and Castiglione—set out to justify eros and show Cupid to be a good god. Natale Conti swerves from this tradition, according to Hyde: "Conti does not offer a theodicy of Cupid, as do the trattatisti; rather he offers a Cupid who

afflictions are justified with reference to the ongoing growth of the spiritual seeker. The afflictions of the “not deserver,” we are told, teach patience and fidelity. Suffering in love produces virtue, because in order to escape from the fits of passion, the lover is lifted up to the contemplation of beauty. In this way, the true lover is ultimately reformed by the prolonged experience of unrequited love. As importantly, this training in virtue is, according to the poem’s speaking subject, not without its compensations: “Through paines of Purgatorie,” the blind God leads those devoted to him eventually “unto [...] blisse, and heavens glory,” a heaven of guiltless amatory play (HL 278-9). Here desire is ennobled and freed from all compulsion, “a Paradize / Of all delight” (280-1) in which lovers “play / Their hurtlesse Sports, without rebuke or blame” (287-8). Yet these compensations are, for now, all in the mind of the speaker, and remain at the level of unrealized and ultimately misguided hope, since they are the products of the very passion that has caused the suffering in the first place. The penultimate stanza reinforces the distance between the poet and this longed-for garden of delight. In it, the “wished scope” of desire remains out of reach (HL 296). The vision of a lovers’ paradise provides hope but no comfort, unable presently to transform the poet’s senseless “woe” into meaningful “penance” (300). Thus the first hymn ends with the poet-speaker still in a crisis of meaningless suffering.⁵³ Its

himself embodies the problem of theodicy” (107). Hyde suggests that Spenser shares Conti’s view of Cupid, “except in the second pair of the *Fowre Hymnes*” (100). This is a big “except,” since it is in the *Hymnes* that the theodicy of love is treated with most seriousness and in the context of the Christian divinity. Hyde discusses the *Hymnes* in detail at 132-42, stressing the essential unity of the sequence despite the recantations in the heavenly hymns and in the dedicatory epistle.

⁵³ On the experience of one’s own suffering and the suffering of others in Spenser, and the theology of suffering in the Reformation, see Joseph Campana, *The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 47-74.

theodicy remains at the level of wished-for compensations in the form of erotic union. The rest is deferred.

The speaker also defers taking up the full mantle of the *vates* or divine poet, promising that when the “happie port” of satisfied desire would be secured, “Then would I sing of thine immortal praise / An heavenly Hymne, such as the Angels sing [...] Till then, dread Lord, vouchsafe to take of me / This simple song, thus fram’d in praise of thee” (HL 301-7). At the conclusion of the first hymn we remain at the level of the amatory fury; the poetic frenzy has not yet been reached.

So when “An Hymne in Honor of Beautie” begins with the question: “Ah whither, Love, wilt thou now carrie me? / What wontlesse fury dost thou now inspire / Into my feeble breast, to full of thee?” we may propose a definite answer. It is the poetic fury that is reached in this hymn, as the poem’s concluding lines confirm. In those lines, the poet looks forward to the reign of Venus coming in a promised triumph:

Then *Iö triumph*, ô great beauties Queene,
Advance the banner of thy conquest hie,
That all this world, the which thy vassals beene,
May draw to thee, and with dew fealtie,
Adore the powre of thy great Majestie,
Singing this Hymne in honor of thy name,
Compyld by me, which thy poore liegeman am. (HB 267-73)

Though not yet able to sing the hymn of triumph, the speaker here has “compyld” it in advance of time, being more fully and confidently inspired than he was in the midst of the amatory frenzy. Throughout this hymn the speaker takes a poetic approach to beauty, using the hymn as a way of inspiring virtue in its audience (especially the two “noble ladies” to whom the sequence of hymns is dedicated, whom it addresses more or less directly). The exhortation to virtue in the poem marks it as consistent with Spenser’s stated poetic aims

in *The Faerie Queene*, described in the letter to Raleigh, “to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline.”⁵⁴ We may note in passing that this stanza also shows the differences between Cupid’s governance of the world and Venus’s. The goddess is still defined by “powre,” but her reign is adored rather than endured, as seemed to be the case with Cupid’s enslavement of the elements above.

The cosmology in this poem reads as a reflection of Platonic themes, specifically the account in the *Timaeus*, which describes the Demiurge (Spenser’s “workmaister”) shaping a preexisting matter in an act of cosmic mimesis intended to copy off a pattern of ideal beauty into the order of things. In this account, the Demiurge’s activity is offset by the resistance of *ananke* or necessity, and Spenser includes a hint of this in his cosmogony as well:

What time this world’s great workmaister did cast
To make al things, such as we now behold,
It seems that he before his eyes had plast
A goodly Paterne, to whose perfect mould
He fashiond them as comely as he could
That now so faire and seemely they appeare,
As nought may be amended any wheare. (HB 29-35).

The key phrase for us in what follows is “as comely as he could.” This suggests a certain amount of distance between this cosmogony and the Christian account, which will appear in the “Hymne of Heavenly Love,” since it implies a possible limit to the creator’s potency.⁵⁵ This crucial, subtle qualification of Venus’s power will lead us to question

⁵⁴ For a bravura analysis of the moral function of the poet in Spenser viewed from the perspective of Platonism, see Quitslund, *Spenser’s Supreme Fiction*, 78-102.

⁵⁵ See Enid Welsford, *Fowre Hymnes and Epithalamion: A Study of Spenser’s Doctrine of Love* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), 7: “When Spenser opened the *Timaeus* or some commentary on it, he found there an account of the origin of the universe very different from that given in the first chapter of the Bible [...] where evil results not from the defects of matter, which is divinely created, but from the disobedience of created wills who have

precisely whether the things of the created world ought not indeed “be amended any where.” That is, it will raise the problem of theodicy anew.

Whereas the theodical problem in the last hymn was partly *ontological* (having to do with the “decay” of the lover and the beloved, a symptom of the initial nature of Cupid’s ordering of things) and partly *ethical* (having to do with the speaker’s response to apparently meaningless suffering and the derangement of the amatory frenzy), the theodical issue this hymn takes in hand is *moral*. When the world is viewed as being governed by the “goodly Paterne” of Beauty, we expect that the beauty of beings and their goodness will coincide. The hymn expresses this certitude as follows:

Therefore where ever that thou doest behold
A comely corpse, with beautie faire endowed,
Know this for certaine, that the same doth hold
A beauteous soule, with faire conditions thewed,
Fit to receive the seede of virtue strewed. (HB 134-8)

The speaker emphasizes the certainty and universality of the phenomenon he describes. And yet there are two related problems that arise, when experience of the world fails to conform with an expectation of consonance between the beautiful and the good:

Yet oft it falles, that many a gentle mynd
Dwels in deformed tabernacle drownd,
Either by chaunce, against the course of kynd,
Or through unaptnesse in the substance fownd,
Which it assumed of some stubborne grownd,
That will not yield unto her formes direction
But is perform’d with some foule imperfection.

been given the power of choice. [...] [T]he image [Plato] employs is that of a craftsman, who shapes his not wholly satisfactory material into as perfect a likeness as possible of a model which exists in his mind or before his eyes. So the divine Demiurge [...] shapes what would otherwise be mere chaos into as close a likeness as possible of that ‘perfect living creature’ who exists eternally as a mental Form discernible by the Divine Reason. The product of his activities is the cosmos.”

And oft it falles (ay me the more to rew)
That goodly beautie, albe heavenly borne,
Is foule abusd, and that celestially hew,
Which doth the world with her delight adorne,
Made but the bait of sinne, and sinners scorne;
Whilest every one doth seeke and sew to have it,
But every one doth seeke, but to deprave it. (HB 141-54)

Note here the reappearance of the word “falles,” which was used in the “Hymne in Honor of Love” at the same crucial point, the point at which the problem of evil emerges within the structural limits set by hymn’s cosmic vision (“But if thou be indeede, as men thee call, / The world’s great Parent, the most kind preserver / [...] How *falles* it then, that with thy furious fervour, / Thou doest afflict as well the not deserver” (HL 155-61)). The harkening back to the previous hymn indicates that we are once again witnessing the shortcomings of HB’s partial vision of good order, its theodical shortcomings.

The theodical problems sketched out in “An Hymne in Honor of Beauty” are essentially a matter of unjust distribution: beauty is often granted to those who are inwardly corrupt; conversely, the virtuous, possessed of “a gentle mynd,” are often not given an outward shape that reflects this inner worth.⁵⁶ Wondering about the reasons for this unjust distribution provoke reflection on the cosmology presented above, since the “unaptnesse in the substance,” or material body, which in turn is “assumed of some stubborne grownd” namely the material substrate of all creation, show that there was after all a limit to the

⁵⁶ This emphasis on distribution pervades the Neoplatonic philosophy of how souls come into bodies, and how social order depends upon this metaphysical / planetary distributional *nomos*. See Welsford, *Fowre Hymnes*, 155-8n. Welsford quotes Pico to the effect that the “qualities of capacities” are distributed this way: “God first contains the capacity for these gifts in Himself. Then to the seven gods who move the seven planets and whom we call Angels, He distributes the power of these gifts so that each of the gods takes one in preference to the other.” Later in the same note, Welsford also cites Ficino, *De Amore*, a passage praising love because “he leads us back to heaven and there he arranges us in our places and makes us all content with that distribution.”

demiurgic power of creation. The situation of outwardly ugly beings inwardly good is only an apparent problem, according to the poem, since the soul, the source of beauty, still maintains the unity of the beautiful and the good. The material body alone, in these cases, is froward and recalcitrant. This suggests a problem for belief in an omnipotent creator, but in this hymn celebrating the “workmaister,” omnipotence is not really at issue, since the world is admittedly only patterned “as comely as he could” make it. So this part of the theodicy, which may trouble a reader attuned to expect a Christian account of creation, is deferred until the pair of “heavenly” hymns.

The second problem, of beautiful people whose souls are deformed, presents a more serious challenge. But the hymn shifts the burden of the justification away from the creator and toward the creature; that is, it converts what might appear to be an ontological problem of evil into a moral problem:

Yet nathemore is that faire beauties blame,
But theirs that do abuse it unto ill:
Nothing so good, but that through guilty shame
May be corrupt, and wrested unto will.
Natheless the soule is faire and beauteous still,
How ever fleshes fault it filthy make:
For things immortall no corruption take. (HB 155-61)

The “blame” for the apparent evil in the case of deceptive beauty lands squarely on the beautiful deceivers themselves. The poet speaker insists that no matter how far gone in vice a person is, the soul remains patterned after beauty: its immortality ensures its resistance to corruption. Here again, a reader expecting a theodicy in keeping with dogmatic Christianity may be surprised, since the Christian vision of the world is filled with beings both immortal and corrupted, namely, the fallen angels (who will first appear in the

cosmology of HHL). Yet within the bounds of this cosmic vision, the conversion of the ontological problem of evil into a moral problem remains consistent.

“An Hymne of Heavenly Love” begins with a palinode retracting the previous two hymns’ subject matter and approach. In it the speaker regrets his previous “lewd layes [...] / In praise of that mad fit, which fooles call love” (HHL 8-9). Unlike “An Hymne in Honor of Beautie,” then, it does not begin by declaring its movement from one of the four divine frenzies (mentioned in the *Phaedrus* and commented on by Ficino) to another. Indeed, it seems to reject the notion of divine mania altogether. The priestly or hieratic intentions of this hymn are clear however, as the speaker sets out a form of Christian doctrine, and exhorts his reader to the *imitatio Christi* with priestly injunctions (“With all thy hart, with all thy soule and mind, / Thou must him love [...] / All other loves, with which the world doth blind / Weake fancies [...] / Thou must renounce” (HHL 660-4)). But is ascribing this to priestly *frenzy*, of the kind outlined in Ficino’s *Phaedrus* commentary, warranted? The final stanza suggests that it is. Once the reader is moved to true love of Christ,

Then shall thy ravisht soule inspired bee
With heavenly thoughts, farre above humane skill,
And thy bright radiant eyes shall plainly see
Th’Idee of his pure glorie present still,
Before thy face, that all thy spirits fill
With sweete enragement of celestiaall love,
Kindled through sight of those faire things above. (HHL 281-7).

The “sweet enragement of celestiaall love” guaranteed at the close of the hymn secures the connection to the fourfold divine manias I have been charting.⁵⁷ Structurally, holding off the mention of “enragement” until the poem’s end beguiles the reader, who begins by taking in a forceful statement about the hiatus between the two sets of hymns, and ends up

⁵⁷ Kaske, “Hallmarks of Platonism,” 37.

seeing here a very deliberate echo. Another structurally important feature arises from the fact that this mania is promised to someone else, not undergone by the hieratic speaker himself. The poem's speaking subject here is not himself undergoing the motion of the fury, but exhorts as one giving advice to another: he acts as priest overseeing an initiation into the divine *furor* of the love of Christ. This mirrors the poetic stance of "An Hymne in Honor of Beautie" (second in the sequence of four) in which the (masculine) poet moralizes about Love to his (feminine) audience. In the *Hymnes*' final part, though, the "Hymne of Heavenly Beautie," the speaker will return to the position of the one "[r]apt with the rage of mine owne ravist thought," when he comes to the contemplation of divinity in the prophetic frenzy. Here then we have a clever inversion: in the first two hymns, the speaker moves from the one undergoing the frenzy to the one dispensing advice about it; in the second pair of hymns, the order is reversed, as the priestly speaker enjoining love is lifted at last to the heights of divinely inspired *mania* and takes up the mantle of the prophet as one directly experiencing a mystically infused vision.⁵⁸

At the end of "An Hymne in Honor of Beautie," we saw that there were several theodical problems left unresolved. First, there was the ontological problem of matter's recalcitrance, suggesting a limit to the ability of the world's creator to order things according to his will. This poses a problem insofar as the creator of the world is considered omnipotent. Second, there was the moral problem of outwardly beautiful creatures who act in ugly ways. This was explained away in HB, the explanation rested on the fact that the soul, being immortal, can in no way be corrupted, and such an account seems not to

⁵⁸ The dialogic nature of HB and HHL complicates the reading entirely in terms of "the consciousness of a first-person narrator," given in Oates, "Retractations of Paradise," 146.

comprehend fallenness or the propensity to sin. Finally, there remained the problem of compulsion, which ultimately re-raises the issue of suffering undergone while under purely arbitrary or illegitimate authority. Already present in “An Hymne in Honor of Love,” this problem returns at the end of the second hymn. I mentioned above that the poet-speaker of the second hymn has “compyld” a poem in honor of Venus. In return for that, he asks compensation from Venus:

In lieu whereof graunt, ô great Soveraine,
That she whose conquering beautie doth captive
My trembling hart in her eternall chaine,
One drop of grace at length will to me give,
That I her bounded thrall by her may live,
And this same life, which first fro me she reaved,
May owe to her, of whom I it received. (HB 274-80)

Throughout the first two hymns, then, the language of compulsion and bondage returns; though softened in the second poem by the adoration of Venusian beauty, it remains present. Ultimately the situation of the speaker in both poems makes no room for freedom, for a willing and conscious giving-over of all compulsive desire. This is the problem with all Neoplatonic manias: they profoundly alienate one from oneself; seen in one way, squaring freedom with the account of divinely inspired furors is the chief theodical task of the *Fowre Hymnes*. In the orthodox account of creation and of Christ’s love that fills “An Hymne of Heavenly Love,” Spenser sets out to rectify all three of these theodical remainders, and in that way the poem will attempt to demonstrate the advantages Christian ways of reckoning with the problem of evil, as manifested in the anomic experience of amatory, poetic, priestly and prophetic furies, have over their pagan (Platonic and Neoplatonic) counterparts.

“An Hymne of Heavenly Love” solves the problem of compulsion—of suffering under illegitimate authority—by setting up, in place of the authority of Venus, the perfectly just authority of Christ. This authority is justified, and in turn justifies the suffering of those serving under it, not because of arbitrary power (as with Cupid) or because of affective compulsion (as with Venus), but because of shared suffering, the ability of the god-man to speak from within the experience of human pain. Whereas Cupid enthralls the lover and forces him to suffer while the aloof god takes delight in the proceedings, Christ suffers the utmost torment so as to spare those who serve him from the same. The hymn exhorts its readers to contemplate these aspects of the incarnate divinity:

Beginne from first, where he encradled was
In simple cratch, wrapt in a wad of hay,
Betweene the toylefull Oxe and humble Asse,
And in what rags, and in how base aray,
The glory of our heavenly riches lay,
When him the silly Shepheardes came to see,
Whom greatest Princes sought on lowest knee.

From thence reade on the storie of his life,
His humble carriage, his unfaulty wayes,
His cancred foes, his fights, his toyle, his strife,
His paines, his povertie, his sharp assayes,
Through which he past his miserable dayes,
Offending none, and doing good to all,
Yet being malist both of great and small. (HHL 225-38)

A stanza on the Passion follows, securing the idea that in this poem it is Christ who takes on the role of the “not deserver” claimed in the “Hymne in Honor of Love” by the lovelorn youth suffering under Cupid. The meditation on Christ crucified leads, in the hymn, to the idea that human subjects do not suffer *too much*, but rather *not enough*:

Then let thy flinty hart that feeles no paine,
Empierced be with pitifull remorse,
And let thy bowels bleede in every vaine,
At sight of his most sacred heavenly corse,

So torne and mangled with malicious forse,
And let thy soule, whose sins his sorrows wrought,
Melt into teares, and grone in grieved thought. (HHL 246-52)

The masochistic dimension of Christian theodicy comes here to the forefront, as meditation on the cross leads to an affective piety of tears and groans, not for one's own suffering, but for the suffering one's sin has wrought on the divine body. At the end of the "Hymne in Honor of Love," the lovelorn speaker says that if he was to achieve erotic union with the object of desire, "Then would I thinke these paines no paines at all, / And all my woes to be but penance small." In this hymn, the wished-for unifying event has already occurred, although it must be revived by recollection and meditation, so that meaningful penance may take the place of mere arbitrary woe.

So much for the theodical remainder of suffering / compulsion. The other two theodical problems left outstanding by the first pair of hymns—that of mismatched souls and bodies, and the recalcitrance of matter—are solved by the creation myth inset in this hymn. Spenser's version follows the account in the book of Genesis for the most part, though he includes some language about the emanative origins of the Trinity which appear to be out of step with Christian orthodoxy, and to veer into Neoplatonic ideas.⁵⁹ His account includes the rebellion of the angels, led by Lucifer, and the subsequent creation of mankind. The story of war in heaven is brought to bear on the problem of matter's recalcitrance, as the speaker, having recounted the tale, puts the question: "How then can sinfull flesh it

⁵⁹ But see Welsford ed., *Fowre Hymnes*, 50: "It has been maintained that the account of the creation is Platonic rather than Christian because it suggests, heretically, that the Son and the Holy Spirit and the Cosmos all emanate from the Primal Deity. I do not think that Spenser's words need be construed in this way; but, in any case, a poet can hardly be expected to speak with the precision of a trained theologian, and our knowledge of Spenser should be sufficient to assure us that any lapse from orthodoxy was quite inadvertent and a matter of style rather than of meaning."

selfe assure, / Sith purest Angels fell to be impure?" The answer in the poem, as in the biblical story it follows, is of course: it cannot. The fall of mankind is treated in a general way, with no mention given to Adam and Eve, or of Satan acting as tempter. Rather, the fall is seen as consequent in an indefinite way on the fall of the angels, and it is immediately followed in the poem by Christ's redeeming intention:

Such he [mankind] him [God] made, that he resemble might
Himselfe, as mortall thing immortall could;
Him to be Lord of every living wight,
He made by love out of his owne like mould,
In whom he might his mightie selfe behould:
For love doth love the thing belov'd to see,
That like it selfe in lovely shape may bee.

But man forgetfull of his makers grace,
No lesse then Angels, whom he did ensew,
Fell from the hope of promist heavenly place,
Into the mouth of death to sinners dew,
And all his off-spring into thralldome threw:
Where they for ever should in bonds remaine,
Of never dead, yet ever living paine

Till that great Lord of Love, which him at first
Made of mere love, and after liked well,
Seeing him lie like creature long accurst,
In that deepe horror of despeyered hell,
Him wretch in doole would let no longer dwell,
But cast out of that bondage to redeeme,
And pay the price, all were his debt extreme. (HHL 113-33)

The generality of this story seems to turn the Biblical creation account into spiritual reality. Though the unique creation of the heavens and subsequent fall occurred but once in the cosmic pattern of divine history, the pattern of the event repeats itself within the psyches of individuals, in keeping with the isometric relationship of macrocosm to microcosm. The stanzas on Biblical cosmogony are richly folded into the hymns that have come before: note that we have here an origination of "thralldom" not in the act of a conquering god (as

with Cupid and Venus), but as a result of original sin, passed down generationally. Cupid's act of creation began with his enthralling and enchaining the elements; here the creation begins in freedom, and only ends with thralldom as a perversion of the created order. Note also the reappearance of the word "could," which I highlighted in the cosmogony of HB. In subtle contrast to that hymn, here the limitation of the creature is not due to the limitations of the creator, but those of the creatureliness of the creature himself. The problem is not the stubbornness of matter, but has something to do with the innate contrast between "mortall" and "immortall" being. The word "mortall" here needs to be probed, because it is clear from the following stanza that the fall of the unnamed primogenitor "threw" his posterity "[i]nto the mouth of death to sinners dew." "Mortall" here must not, then, mean oriented toward that kind of death, since at the creation the horizon of death due to sin was not drawn around the life of humankind. In my reading, "mortall" here (and as we will see later, in the *Cantos*) means something like: created in such a way that the will and the body may become misaligned. Support for this lies in the line about "the hope of promist heavenly place," which suggests that human beings would pass from the embodied state of existence into a heavenly state without the kind of "death to sinners dew" which came into the world at the fall. Moments like this make a psychological interpretation of the poem especially attractive, since the mortality of any individual precedes the individual's fall into sin.⁶⁰ Another way of looking at the same phenomenon theologically is that this hymn leaves the question of what original sin meant in a state of suspension; this is one reason why the theodical remainder at the end of the hymn has to do with the nature, origin, and etiology of sin itself. Finally the line brings to mind Milton's

⁶⁰ See e.g., Oakes, "Retractations."

Adam and Eve, who in *Paradise Lost* look forward to a similar transformation or evolution of their state. The limitation of human beings' resemblance to the divine, and their "mortall" being at their creation, is both temporary and probationary, a limit to be overcome through obedience. Unlike the limitation implied by "could" in "An Hymne in Honor of Beautie," it is not a permanent state of things suggesting lack of skill in the world's "workmaister," but rather an intentional design feature. Material embodiment and all its problems, including the misalignment of divine spirit with the "base, vile" stuff of physical creation and the metaphysical constraint of being time-bound, having a beginning and an end, are not the cause or the result of imperfection. The hymn asserts that material embodiment is fully intentional, perfectly realized, and deliberate. In furtherance of this view, the fact that human beings "ensew" (i.e., follow) the angels into the rebellion suggests that materiality or immateriality is of no account when asking whether one is prone to fall.

Crucially and curiously, the freedom of the will before the fall does not enter into Spenser's account. The focus here is not so much upon the *cause* of the fall as on its consequences: the subjugation of humanity by death, and its (in the hymn, practically immediate) liberation through Christ's sacrifice. The theodical framework here is compensatory rather than explanatory, so that *explanation* of the fall is not felt to be an imperative with respect to the origin of evil. (Here the distance between Spenser and Milton is keenly felt). The appearance of evil is described, it is lamented, and it is given its place within the cosmic pageant of redemptive history. But—unlike *Paradise Lost*—we find no attempts to explain the relationship between human freedom of will and divine foreknowledge, and the ultimate etiology of sin is left unclear.

The compensatory promise is fully made good in the beatific vision of “An Hymne of Heavenly Beautie,” the final hymn of the sequence. I have already noted how this hymn maps onto the background schema of the four divine furies, being an exploration of the prophetic fury, that species of *mania* that brings direct communication with the godhead. The theodical remainder left over from the previous hymn is fallenness or sin itself; and the previous hymn prepares for a final compensation for sin, rather than a satisfactory explanation of it. The vision of divine beauty compensates for the ugliness of sin in this hymn, which sweeps the reader along through contemplation of the earth, up through the heavens, to the empyreal heavens bedecked with angels and archangels, and finally to the mysterious heart of the hymn: its vision of Sapience, God’s “owne Beloved,” a veiled female figure seated in the “bosome” of divinity. The ascent from lowest to highest, originating (as Elizabeth Biemann notes) at the poem’s twenty-second line (“Beginning then below”) is essential to the theodical motive of this hymn, since it secures the connection between the absolute beauty of heavenly things and the earth.⁶¹ Yet at the same time, the affective movement of the hymn’s speaker manifests as a revaluation of all values, in which all worldly good seems vile in comparison to the true goodness beheld in this moment of rapture.

Also like the *Cantos of Mutabilitie*, to which I will presently turn, the ultimate desire is not so much for satisfaction of the theodical demand as for *rest* and the cessation of all desire, including the desire to probe the mystery of iniquity.⁶² *Rest* is the last word of

⁶¹ *S. Enc.*, “Fowre Hymnes.”

⁶² Perhaps in the *Fowre Hymnes* the desire for rest is directly related to the succession of vatic manias which animate it. On the kinds of thinking in the *Hymnes*, see Jon Quitslund, “Thinking about Thinking in the *Fowre Hymnes*,” *Spenser Studies* 24 (2009), 499-515.

the hymn, and the last word of the sequence, and markedly resembles the “Sabbaoth’s sight” wished for at the end of the *Cantos*.⁶³ Working toward this desired end, we read of the blessed visionaries, overwhelmed with the radiant vision of Sapience, that:

[...] they see such admirable things,
As carries them into an extasy,
And heare such heavenly notes, and carolings
Of Gods high praise, that filles the brasen sky,
And feele such joy and pleasure inwardly,
That maketh them all worldly cares forget,
And onely thinke on that before them set

Ne from thenceforth doth any fleshly sense,
Or idle thought of earthly things remains,
But all that earst seemd sweet, seems now offense,
And all that pleased earst, now seems to paine.
Their joy, their comfort, their desire, their gaine,
Is fixed all on that which now they see,
All other sights but fayned shadowes bee.

[...]

So full their eyes are of that glorious sight,
And senses fraught with such satietie,
That in nought else on earth they can delight,
But in th’aspect of that felicitie,
Which they have written in their inward ey;
On which they feed, and in their fastened mynd
All happie joy and full contentment fynd. (HHB 260-287)

The vision of Sapience brings with it a radical uncertainty about the goodness of the goods previously thought of as compensations, as all compensation is brought together into pure

Quitslund reads the end of the *Hymnes* and the *Cantos* less in terms of sabbatarian rest, and more in terms of an active renunciation.

⁶³ Biemann, *Plato Baptized*, 162: “Heavenly Beautie figures forth in universal rather than personal terms the vision invoked in the ‘sabbaoth’ prayer. [...] In the overall structures, then, both of *Fowre Hymnes* and of the Spenserian canon as a whole, we find a sabbatarian vision in a final hymn. Both hymn and *Cantos* play the mind retrospectively over what has gone before, and point in contemplative wisdom beyond the poetic language that has served its anagogic purpose to that state where tongues cease.”

unity. This means an end to desire itself, as no earthly thing at all can offer delight. Only that singular source of beauty which is “written in” the “inward ey” of the contemplative seer can any longer be seen as good; the effect of this is to “fasten” the “mynd” upon the single object.⁶⁴ In the final stanza of the poem, the speaker admonishes himself:

And looke at last up to that souveraine light,
From whose pure beams al perfect beauty springs,
That kindleth love in every godly spright,
Even the love of God, which loathing brings
Of this vile world, and these gay seeming things;
With whose sweete pleasures being so possest,
Thy straying thoughts henceforth for ever rest. (HHB 295-301)

I would reiterate the importance of this last word, which signifies the cessation of all desire and all struggle, even the struggle for (poetic) expression of truth, or the desire to understand goodness, or justify evil. In this state the desire for theodical satisfaction also fades away, as “worldly cares” are not so much made meaningful, but forgotten entirely by being exposed to the source of all meaning itself. In the pastoral/priestly theodicy occupying HHL, as we saw, suffering still required orientation, which it got by being aligned with the *imitatio Christi*. Yet here this need is no longer apparent, as there is no question of the relationship between good and evil as they appear within the world: even the goods of the world are in fact seen to be evils relative to the ultimate source of Good in divine Sapience.

What is this Sapience? Scholars have pointed to Cabbalistic influences, and have also noted the invocation of Pseudo-Dionysian notions in the poem as a whole. Others have

⁶⁴ Judith Anderson, *Light and Death: Figuration in Spenser, Kepler, Donne, Milton* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), notes the importance of fixity and the stilled mind in the *Cantos*, and goes on to emphasize how total are the stakes: “*Mens*, the intellective mind—not just *ratio* [...] but including this—is the object of [Mutabilitie’s] challenge” (48).

shied away from what they see as esoteric or out-of-the-way sources, in an effort to make a case for an orthodox Elizabethan, perhaps even Puritan, spirituality in Spenser's work as a whole.⁶⁵ An equally direct, though somewhat less orthodox, source for Spenser's Sapience is the scriptural Wisdom of Solomon, which was included among the apocryphal books of the 1560 version of the Geneva Bible. From this source, we learn that Sapience, or Wisdom, is not a piece of understanding among others, but includes all possible knowledge within it, including "the course of the yere, the situacion of the starres, The nature of liuing things, and the furiousnes beasts, the power of ye windes, and the imaginacions of men [...] And all things bothe secret and knowen."⁶⁶ Sapience stands in relation to knowledge as Dame Nature stands to Mutabilitie in the *Cantos*: as a stable, unified, permanent original source and end. Not even the light of god, the very source of divine illumination itself, can be compared with this Sapience: For night cometh upon it [the light], but wickedness can not ouercome wisdom." This verse situates wisdom—Spenser's Sapience—beyond the chiaroscuro of light and darkness, beyond the conflict between good and evil in the world. The "Hymne of Heavenly Beautie" does much the

⁶⁵ The notion that Sapience represents Christ as Logos is proposed in Ellrodt, *Neoplatonism*, 178-192, and supported by Lewis, *English Literature*, 367ff, as well as Merritt Hughes, "Milton and the Symbol of Light," *Studies in English Literature* 4, no. 1 (1964), 14-18. Although Welsford, *Fowre Hymnes*, follows Ellrodt in many respects, she concludes: "In spite of Ellrodt's ingenious arguments, I find it [...] impossible to identify Sapience with Logos" (54). Instead, "Sapience is, there fore [sic], a personification of a Divine attribute, but an attribute particularly associated with the Second Person of the Trinity, and an attribute that tends to lose its distinctness for us, as we catch a partial transient glimpse of the beautiful and mysteriously rich simplicity of God" (56). For a contrasting view, and one that takes account of the wide difference of approaches to the question of Sapience, see Jon Quitslund, "Spenser's Image of Sapience," *Studies in the Renaissance* 16 (1969), 181-4.

⁶⁶ Wis. 7:20-1 KJV.

same, and suggests, in its description of an ascent “[b]eginning here below,” that access to such a place of rest beyond the problem of evil is attainable by means of contemplation.

Finally, both Sapience and Dame Nature act in a lawgiving capacity. As Edith Welsford has noted, the vision of sapience bears a striking resemblance to the First Eternal Law described in Hooker’s *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1594). “Hooker’s fundamental premise is that law is essentially not a sovereign decree but a rule made by which actions are framed so that a desired end may be achieved; that God Himself is not an Arbitrary Will; His Will and His Reason work together and the first Eternal Law is ‘that order which God before all ages hath set down with himself, for himself to do all⁶⁷ things by.’” Theodicy in Spenser’s late verse flows from the justificatory potentials of this First Eternal Law, bodied forth poetically in the images of Sapience and Nature. It is in these images that we can perceive the Goodness of things, and it is an utterly all-encompassing and all-consuming Goodness. Crucially, though, the images of both Sapience and Nature are hidden behind veils, accessible only through various trials, and fleeting and impermanent when they do manage to appear.

I have claimed that the *Fowre Hymnes* and the *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie* are linked together by certain common theodical motifs, and have pointed already to the similarity between the “rest” that concludes the *Hymnes*, and the “Sabaoth sight” proposed at the end of the *Cantos*. More may be added. Both poems concern themselves with meaning: with the meaning of individual suffering in the *Hymnes*, and with the meaningfulness of the natural world in the *Cantos*. The *Hymnes* take rise from the ethical problem of love—its disorienting, or (in Berger’s terms) ‘denomizing’ force—seeking to put it into order by

⁶⁷ Welsford, *Fowre Hymnes*, 57.

moving readers from the diversity of experience to the unified origin of experience; in a similar way, the *Cantos* move from the bewildering diversity of natural forms and changes, to the changeless and unified source of all forms. The poetic characterization of these two sources is quite similar to one another: Sapience and Dame Nature are predominantly portrayed as feminine (the latter is also, paradoxically, androgynous), they are both mediating figures between divinity and the world, and they are both utterly ineffable.

Perhaps the most salient and surprising similarity between them is the way that both poems both signal to, and yet resist, ultimate closure.⁶⁸ Both poems end in the presence of an absolute Truth, with either the imminent promise of or the elusive experience of a total and unified significance bestowed on all things, they both destabilize the very permanence they project. If what is being sought in the *Hymnes* is *rest*, we are given to understand that such rest is only achieved by fully undergoing the restless textual energies directing the sequence from the passion of erotic love to the vision of divine beauty. We saw above that Ficino comments on the *Phaedrus* to say that the amatory frenzy is both the lowest and the highest of the four divine furies—it is the elemental point of origin, and this sense primary. The fact that the *Hymnes* are structured as they are—as a palinode, and as a sequence in which divine and worldly forms of love and beauty echo one another across the formal sequence-divisions of the text—may cause us to reopen all the questions of significance “An Hymne of Heavenly Beautie” sets out to answer. In other words, when we contemplate the whole work retrospectively, rather than experiencing it as a sequence, what becomes most meaningful are the dependencies linking the four individual hymns together, their

⁶⁸ On the ‘openness’ of the *Fowre Hymnes*, see Biemann, *Plato Baptized*, 152-6, and Hyde, *Poetic Theology*, 141. On the lack of expected closure in the *Cantos*, and the poem’s failure to fulfill this expectation, see Teskey, *Allegory and Violence*, 168-88.

mutual enfolding into one another and circling back upon each other.⁶⁹ And it is precisely this kind of vision—taking in the cosmic totality of things, stilling through recollection the headlong rush of time—that the experience of Sapience in the *Hymnes*, as of Dame Nature in the *Cantos*—encourages us to adopt. Finally, these poems seem to teach us, nothing is final; in plumbing the depths of meaningless suffering, we may find meaning; but in seeking to proscribe that meaning and give it closure—perhaps to reify it as the basis of a political program, a social order, a church—we err and so fall away from the elusive point of fixity.

3. *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie*: The Dilation of Being

The *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie* as a whole register the late-fifteenth century's epistemological experience of "losing touch with nature," as Mary Thomas Crane has conclusively shown. No longer available as an aggregate of self-evident propositions, the domain of nature came to be defined by secrecy; from the world of hermeticism and natural magic, the idea of a nature who loves to hide behind glyphs and veils moved into the mainstream of empirical natural philosophy. And as Sarah Powrie notes, the issues raised in the *Cantos* pertain especially to the foundational assumptions of astronomy:

Mutabilitie tells us that Spenser [...] was attuned to the debates shaping sixteenth-century scientific discourse and, indeed, sensitively appreciative of their implications. Through the voice of [the character] *Mutabilitie*, he considers the ways in which early modern astronomy challenged Aristotelian hierarchies and opened up a homogenous universe of measureless space. He enters the ambiguity of an indeterminate, post-Copernican, post-Brunian universe, where empty spaces defuse transcendent aspirations and elude closure.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ For these structural reasons it is possible to do as Gordon Teskey has recently done, and propose a coherent and vital reading of the sequence of *Hymnes* in reverse order. See Teskey, "A Retrograde Reading of Spenser's *Fowre Hymnes*," *Spenser Studies* 24 (2009), 481-96.

⁷⁰ Powrie, "Spenser's *Mutabilitie*," 85.

These observations lay before us the theodical situation—the crisis in the *nomos* of natural law, the erosion of fundamental explanatory frameworks—to which the *Cantos* form a response. If the irruption of evil in the *Hymnes* was conceived as an ethical crisis, the destabilization of the subject in the passion of disorienting and disoriented eros, then here in the *Cantos* the denomizing force appears as a metaphysical problem, personified in the Titan *Mutabilitie* who embodies the deranging force of temporal becoming untethered from eternal being. The poem is motivated by a theodical desire to recouple time and eternity, immanence and transcendence, and in this way to mount a defense of the physical ordering of the heavens and the metaphysical underpinnings of that order—a quite literal manifestation of the sacred canopy.

The poem's first lines announce the theme of the *Cantos*, which will inform all that is to follow:

What man that sees the euer-whirling wheele
Of *Change*, the which all mortall things doth sway,
But that thereby doth find, and plainly feele,
How *MVTABILITIE* in them doth play
Her cruell sports, to many mens decay?
Which that to all may better yet appeare,
I will rehearse that whylome I heard say,
How she at first her selfe began to reare,
Gainst all the Gods, and th'empire sought from them to beare. (VII.vi.1)

Several points should be raised here at the outset. At her first appearance in the poem, we perceive certain points of comparison between *Mutabilitie* and Cupid in the *Hymnes*: both are presented as “cruell” tyrants, whose force is felt in every life, and whose “sports” lead inevitably to “decay” and loss. We also see the word “mortall” used again here, as it was in “An Hymne of Heavenly Love,” to mean changeful or inconstant. This special sense of “mortall,” which we saw in HHL was already part of the prelapsarian human condition,

suggests a metaphysical problem of evil inhering in worldly creation as such even in the absence of death. The condition of being in time and the potential disordering force of change present a problem for creatures whether or not death is their horizon, and it is this anomalous tendency of things that the *Cantos* seek, in their way, to justify. Finally, this stanza introduces the idea that the poem's speaker is not inventing but repeating an old story, a passing point here that deepens when Spenser later names the specific precursors to whom he is responding: Chaucer and Alanus de Insulis. I will argue below that Spenser is consciously revising earlier conceptions of the Goddess of Nature in response to the theodical pressures outlined above; for now, I wish only to call attention to the gesture.

After this introduction of Dame Mutabilitie, there follows a description of her lineage. We read that she is “a daughter by descent / Of those old *Titans*,” the old gods who ruled the world before the establishment of the Jovian order. In referring to this genealogy, the poem sets out the terms of the allegorical trial that occupies the plot of the *Cantos*: Mutabilitie will assert her claim to sovereignty over the entire universe, including the supposedly unchanging sphere of ‘fixed’ stars. She contests the rule of the established gods on two bases: first, her genealogical inheritance; and second, her *de facto* (if not *de jure*) governance of things, manifested in the fact that (as Nature later admits) “all things stedfastnes doe hate / And changed be.” Mutabilitie presses her claim of sovereignty through more and more capacious levels of order, and the poem figures this progress as an ascent up from earth through the heavens.

The first figure the Titan challenges is Cynthia, who reigns over all the earth from the position of the moon:

Thence to the Circle of the Moone she clambe,
Where Cynthia raignes in euerlasting glory

To whose bright shining palace straight she came,
All fairely deckt with heauens goodly story;
Whose siluer gates (by which there sate an hory
Old aged Sire, with hower-glasse in hand,
Hight Tyme) she entred, were he lief or sory:
Ne staide till she the highest stage had scand,
Where Cynthia did sit, that never still did stand. (VII.vi.8)

At one level, the palace of Cynthia figures forth the political state of Elizabeth I, construed as an Imperial sovereign ruling over the entire world. In the natural-philosophical register, this stanza refers to the sphere of the moon as the way station between the changing sublunar, and the changeless supralunar realms demarcated in what has been called Aristotle's "two-story Universe." Since it is a midway point between the eternal heavens and the "mortal" earth, the allegorical figure of "Tyme" is appropriately stationed here in this state of constant and uniform motion, where he can oversee all temporal things below but not yet be fixed in eternity. Cynthia, enthroned upon the moon, is attended by "tenne-thousand starres" and also by her Page "Vesper," called the "Euening-starre." This celestial court orients itself around Cynthia who, though represented as being always in motion, is nevertheless the fixed center organizing the stars and other heavenly bodies around her.

When Mutabilitie has taken in the lustrous surroundings of Cynthia's palace, she proceeds to confront the lunar goddess:

Yet nathemore the Giantesse forbare:
But boldly preacing-on, raught forth her hand
To pluck her downe perforce from off her chaire;
And there-with lifting up her golden wand,
Threatned to strike her if she did with-stand.
Where-at the starres, which round about her blazed,
And eke the Moones bright wagon, still did stand,
All beeing with so bold attempt amazed,
And on her vncouth habit and sterne look still gazed.

Mean-while the lower World, which nothing knew
Of all that chaunced here, was darkned quite;

And eke the heauens, and all the heauenly crew
Of happy wights, now vnpurvaide of light,
Were much afraid, and wondred at that sight;
Fearing lest Chaos broken had his chaine,
And brought againe on them eternall night:
But chiefly Mercury, that next doth raigne,
Ran forth in haste, vnto the king of Gods to plaine. (VII.vi.13-14)

Mutabilitie's "attempt" on Cynthia's throne proceeds by force and violence rather than by law. The clash results in absolute stasis in the heavens, and a stilling of the perpetual, circular motion that is the hallmark of celestial perfection and a legitimating seal of Cynthia's rule. The violent stasis of the moon in the sky manifests on earth as a lunar eclipse, in a passage that seems to describe a real celestial event taking place on 14 April 1595. Such details confirm that part of what is at stake in the allegory of the *Cantos* are questions of a natural-philosophical kind, and lend credence to the notion that when Dame Nature engages in her act of jurisdiction over Mutabilitie's case, the *Cantos* are through her judgment grappling with a set of questions that threaten the very fabric of the unchanging heavens, a symbol of natural order which could no longer, by the late sixteenth century, be taken as self-evident or unchanging in its essential meaning.

Mutabilitie's violent, headlong challenge to Cynthia's sedate rule produces confusion in the heavens, and the Titan resolves to take advantage of the moment to move up the chain of celestial command, to the demense of Jove, King of the Gods:

Eftsoones she thus resolv'd; that whil'st the Gods
(After returne of *Hermes* Embassie)
Were troubled, and amongst themselues at ods,
Before they could new counsels re-allie,
To set vpon them in that extasie;
And take what fortune time and place would lend:
So, forth she rose, and through the purest sky
To *Ioues* high Palace straight cast to ascend,
To prosecute her plot: Good on-set boads good end. (VII.vi.23)

Mutabilitie seems to be attuned to the vicissitudes of fortune on account of her affinity with all change; but the irony of the last lines, together with the fact that the reader already knows (from the second stanza of the *Cantos*) that Nature will eventually rule against Mutabilitie, suggests otherwise. The final line may intimate that providence is already at work, a depth-dimension of “fortune time and place” to which Mutabilite cannot but be blind, especially because she is so confident of her ability to perceive it. In any case, this stanza contains further details of astronomical significance: the “purest sky” through which Mutabilitie journeys is the empyrean heaven, and the lines where this phrase appears indicate that she has left behind the sphere of the moon, penetrating into the highest heaven. It was the supposedly unchanging essence of this sphere above the moon, traditionally believed exempt from change, which recent astronomical observations had challenged. Mutabilitie’s ascent through the heavens looks forward to the astral surveys of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, the subject of my last chapter.

When Mutabilitie reaches Jove’s palace, she puts forward her legal claim to power, based on her lineage as the last of the original (Saturnine, Titanic) rulers of the world, whose sovereignty predates the ascendancy of the new (Jovian) gods. Jove responds to the complaint by exhorting Mutabilitie to be content with her sway over the chthonic forces of the earth, remain within the rightful scope of her authority, and submit to his authority. But Mutabilitie is characteristically discontent with this answer, so she makes a formal appeal based on Jove’s conflict of interest:

But thee, ô Ioue, no equall Iudge I deeme
Of my desert, or of my dewfull Right;
That in thine owne behalf maist partiall seeme:
But to the highest him, that is behight
Father of Gods and men by equall might;
To weet, the God of Nature, I appeale.

There-at *Ioue* wexed wroth, and in his spright
Did inly grudge, yet did it well conceale;
And bade *Dan Phoebus* Scribe her Appellation seale.

Eftsoones the time and place appointed were,
Where all, both heauenly Powers, and earthly wights,
Before great Natures presence should appeare,
For triall of their Titles and best Rights:
That was, to weet, vpon the highest hights
Of *Arlo-hill* (Who knows not *Arlo-hill*?)
That is the highest head (in all mens sights)
Of my old father *Mole*, whom Shepheards quill
Renowmed hath with hymnes fit for a rural skill. (VII.vi.35-36)

Of interest in these two stanzas is the specificity of the juridical language used, and the place to be taken by Dame Nature within these cosmic proceedings. The use of legal language encodes the warrantability of Mutabilitie's suit against Jove—it signals that what Mutabilitie is bringing to light by dredging up her genealogical claim is a real problem within the justitial framework of the Jovian order. The case strikes at the root of Jove's sovereignty, contesting its legitimacy by bringing to light his usurpation of proper laws of succession. What is this moment allegorizing? One of its referents would seem to be the Elizabethan succession and the fate of the Tudor line. At a more general level, the poem seems to me to be contrasting pagan/polytheistic and Christian/monotheistic dispensations of cosmic justice—much as did the *Fowre Hymnes*. When Mutabilitie appeals to the Goddess Natura (here styled the God of Nature), she is appealing to a power that superintends the whole play of powers characterizing the Jovian order. While Jove may lay claim to being the King of the Gods, this kingship originates in “Conquest of our soueraine might” (i.e., Jove's parricidal defeat of his father Saturn) and the “eternall doome of Fates decree” (i.e., the prophecy foretelling of said defeat) (VII.vi.33.5-6). Mutabilitie's suit brings to light the problems with both these bases of legitimacy. As for conquest, the

problem is that Jove's victory was not complete—it must be renewed, as the examples he lists of other Titanic uprisings (of Typhon, Ixion, Procrustes, and Bellona) show. As for the fatal prophecy, this is precisely what Mutabilitie brings forth for interpretation, and she makes an effective claim that Jove ought not to be the final arbiter of meaning concerning a prophecy about himself. What is needful here is a higher authority with jurisdiction over matters of contested sovereignty, and for that Mutabilitie appeals to Nature, who is not the “king” of the gods, but rather (here) the “Father” of all gods, and all things. Transcending the whole history of gigantomachy that Mutabilitie represents, Nature as source and origin can alone rule over all things. Much like Sapience in the *Hymnes*, Nature's power flows from its ultimate unification of all things.

After the appeal, the time and place are set for the hearing of the suit Mutabilitie has brought against the Jovian order. The trial is to be conducted on Arlo hill, and after a description of Arlo's history and downfall, all the creatures of the earth and all the gods are gathered at the spot. Once all the creatures and Powers have gathered, and Nature's sergeant Order has established them in their proper places, Nature appears on the scene:

Then forth issewed (great goddess) great dame Nature,
With goodly port and gracious Maiesty;
Being far greater and more tall of stature
Then any of the gods or Powers on hie:
Yet certes by her face and physnomy,
Whether she man or woman inly were,
That could not any creature well descry:
For, with a veile that wimpled euery where,
Her head and face was hid, that mote to none appeare.

Nature is hidden, and is hermaphroditic here: as the origin of all natural kinds, Nature's own inward kind—its gender—is concealed from view. At once god and goddess, the allegorical figure of Nature asserts power by embodied unification, as well as by ambiguity

and hiddenness. Here we recall the fact that this poem speaks to the late-sixteenth century's crisis in natural philosophy, a process of "losing touch with nature" which intensified the sense of hiddenness, secrecy, and cyphers concealed beneath the appearance of phenomena. Spenser goes on to project this hiddenness backward through poetic history:

So hard is it for any liuing wight,
All her array and vestiments to tell,
That old *Dan Geffrey* (in whose gentle spright
The pure well head of Poesie did dwell_
In his *Foules parley* durst not with it mel,
But it transferd to *Alane*, who he thought
Had in his *Plaint of kindes* describ'd it well:
Which who will read set forth so as it ought,
Go seek he out that *Alane* where he may be sought.

The two references here are to Chaucer's *Parlement of Foules*, and to Alanus de Insulis's *De planctu naturae*. As Maureen Quilligan points out, Alanus's description of Dame Nature's garment is indeed fulsome, "representing all of physical creation."⁷¹ By figuring Alanus's description as a kind of lost wisdom, the *Cantos* emphasize the remoteness of Nature, and amplify a nostalgic sense of lost immediacy. But Spenser here is also signaling the differences between his text and these two precursor texts, most importantly the lack of attention given to eroticism and sexual union in this book, as compared to Chaucer, Alanus, and other allegorical works featuring the Goddess Natura. Spenser's Nature is by comparison aloof and chaste. What is at issue for Spenser's Dame Nature is not (as in Alanus) the proper ordering of love-matches and metaphysically charged condemnations of sodomy as a wrenching of the grammar of creation; the scope of Nature's authority has expanded beyond the domain of kind. Here I would argue the *Cantos* reach toward a sense of "natural law" or "laws of nature" more capaciously natural-philosophical than those

⁷¹ *S. Enc.*, "Alanus de Insulis."

reflected in Alanus and Chaucer. Indeed, the ordering of erotic desires under the sign of divine Love was, as we saw, given a full treatment in the *Fowre Hymnes*, as it is in other places in *The Faerie Queene*, notably in the description of the Garden of Adonis. Nor is erotic desire wholly absent in the *Cantos*, but it is shunted away into the digressive art-myth of Faunus, Molanna, and Diana, and regarded as a sort of farce or anti-masque. Its inclusion there makes the lack of sexual motifs in Spenser's treatment of Dame Nature all the more noticeable. I would argue that this lack gives us a clue as to what the problem of evil or anomy in the *Cantos* is, and what it is not: it is to do with the erosion of a metaphysical grounding for reading the book of nature, and it is not to do with the denomizing potential of illicit desire as treated in the *Hymnes*.

Thus when Mutabilitie makes her case before Dame Nature, she brings forth evidence that the heavens themselves do change, asserting against the metaphysical pieties of Aristotle and Ptolemy that even the sphere of fixed stars is swayed by the force of change:

Then are ye mortall borne, and thrall to me,
Vnlesse the kingdome of the sky yee make
Immortall, and vnchangeable to be;
Besides, that power and virtue which ye spake,
That ye here worke, doth many changes take,
And your owne natures change: for, each of you
That vertue haue, or this, or that to make,
Is checkt and changed from his nature trew,
By other opposition or obliquid view.

Besides, the sundry motions of your Spheares
So sundry waies and fashions as clerkes faine,
Some in short space, and some in longer yeares;
What is the same but alteration plaine?
Only the starrie skie doth still remaine:
Yet do the Starres and Signes therein still moue,
And even it self is mov'd, as wizards saine.

But all that moueth doth mutation loue:
Therefore both you and them to me I subiect proue.

Then since with this wide great Vniuerse
Nothing doth firme and permanent appeare,
But all things tost and turned by transuerse:
What then should let, but I aloft should reare
My Trophee, and from all, the triumph beare?
Now iudge then (ô thou greatest goddesse trew!)
According as thy selfe doest see and heare,
And vnto mee addoom that is my dew;
That is the rule of all, all being rul'd by you. (VII.vii.54-56)

Mutabilitie's claims here reach their most daring pitch, as she asserts that even the seemingly stable heavens are subject to her sway. In the whole material world, Mutabilitie contends, even in the region of the fifth element, there is no fixity, no identity, no stability of mind: all things are turned inside-out, all things become other by "tranuerse" and "obliquid" forces wrenching them from themselves, so that nothing remains. Mutabilitie rests her case here, with the theodical problem fully articulated. In this version of the problem of evil, meaninglessness is imputed at the level of metaphysics itself, as time and change are seen to destroy Being. For a sacred canopy so thoroughly dependent upon transcendence as was that of Spenser's England, such a destruction would result in nothing shy of a pervasive cosmic pessimism. And poetically, it would suggest that the vicissitudes and trials that make up the allegorical fabric of *The Faerie Queene* do not terminate in fixity. Allegory, as Gordon Teskey has noted, seems to mandate that the polysemic elements be corralled under the sign of one sure meaning, that transcendence be reinscribed; in the *Cantos* this problem is itself given allegorical expression, to the extent

that the final two books of *The Faerie Queene* may be read as a coda to or retrospective commentary upon the work.⁷²

Nature's final judgment—her “doome”—follows immediately on Mutabilitie's presentation of her evidence regarding the changefulness of the heavens. In it, the Goddess is not dismissive of Mutabilitie's basic charges, but seeks to inscribe them within a wider circle of meaningfulness:

I well consider all that ye haue sayd,
And find that all things steadfastnes doe hate
And changed be: yet being rightly wayd
They are not changed from their first estate;
But by their change their being doe dilate:
And turning to themselves at length againe,
Doe worke their owne perfection so by fate:
Then ouer them Change doth not rule and raigne;
But they raigne over change, and doe their states maintaine.

Cease therefore daughter further to aspire,
And thee content thus to be rul'd by me:
For thy decay thou seekst by thy desire;
But time shall come that all shall changed bee,
And from thenceforth, none no more change shall see.
So was the Titaness put downe and whist,
An Ioue confirm'd in his imperiall see,
Then was that whole assembly quite dismiss,
And Natur's selfe did vanish, whither no man wist. (VII.vii.57-59)

What, exactly, is being asserted here? Note that Nature's judgment on Mutabilitie is not quite cognate with Jove's earlier admonition that she “seeke by grace and goodnesse to obtaine / That place from which by folly *Titan* fell” (VII.vi.34.2-3). Instead, Nature goes further, claiming that *all* of Mutabilitie's power is in some sense illusory, that even in those

⁷² Teskey, *Allegory and Violence*, 168-88. Teskey sees in this poem the final failure of stable, metaphysically guaranteed meaning to claim its supposed position of superiority: the *Cantos* are not “the culmination of Spenser's metaphysics,” but rather the “undoing” of an “illusion [of] the priority of metaphysics to all other concerns, including politics” (174).

things that “stedfastnes doe hate,” there is a return to being and instead of erosion of being and identity a dilation, or productive expansion, of same.⁷³ Thus what appears as change is actually the working of perfection. In the *Hymnes*, the vision of Sapience also revealed earthly goods and ills to be all one, all in a sense derivative or illusory; and here again in the *Cantos* the presence of a primary, orienting axis of truth seems to suggest that the theodical problems Mutabilitie brings to bear are all illusory of themselves. There is no problem with the sacred canopy, Nature’s judgment intimates: what looks like disorder is order; what appears to be anomy is just the persistence of an elusive nomos. Again, this is not so much what one might think of as explanation or rationalization of the metaphysical problem of evil; instead the defense of goodness proceeds by an appeal to transcendent principles cloaked in mystery—to Sapience resting in the bosom of the Godhead, to Nature hiding her visage behind the appearance of all that is. In this way we can see the patterns of theodicy in Spenser’s late verse.

Yet at the same time there persists a poetic reopening of all that the appeal to transcendent nomos seeks to draw finally to a close. For Nature’s judgment is not the last word of the *Cantos*. Instead, the poet reflects, in the “unperfite” (imperfect, unfinished, fragmentary) eighth canto, upon the whole drama of the allegorical trial:

⁷³ The language of “dilation” here echoes Psalm 119:32 KJV: “I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.” The verb for “thou shalt enlarge” is *dilatasti*. For a reading of this in terms of militant Protestantism, see Anthea Hume, *Edmund Spenser: Protestant Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 184: “The Protestant poet’s profound and unselfconscious assumptions give an underlying certainty of direction to a work [*The Faerie Queene*] of extraordinary scale and variety. [...] [*The Cantos*] finally reveals that Change, for all ‘her cruell sports,’ is to be understood as the necessary condition of the process by which creatures move towards their perfection.” For a contrasting account, approached from the standpoint of Neoplatonism, of the relationship between *The Faerie Queene* and the ending of the *Cantos*, see Valery Rees, “Ficinian Ideas in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser,” *Spenser Studies* 24 (2009), 82.

When I bethink me on that speech whyleare,
Of *Mutability*, and well it way:
Me seems, that though she all vnworthy were
Of the Heav'ns Rule; yet very sooth to say,
In all things else she beares the greatest sway.
Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,
And loue of things so vaine to cast away;
Whose flowring pride, so fading and so fickle,
Short *Time* shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle.

Then gin I thinke on that which Nature sayd,
Of that same time when no more *Change* shall be,
But stedfast rest of all things firmly stayd
Vpon the pillours of Eternity,
That is contrayr to *Mutabilitie*:
For, all that moueth, doth in *Change* delight:
But thence-forth all shall rest eternally
With Him that is the God of Sabbaoth hight:
O that great Sabbaoth God, graunt me that Sabaoths sight. (VII.viii.1-2)

Even more clearly than in the *Hymnes*, we see that the watchword for compensation in Spenser's theodicy is rest: the problem of evil produces in these poems a desire for fixity as the guarantor of good governance. Yet the very gesture of retrospection seems to resist closure, and the resistance is amplified by the fragmentary nature of this poetic coda (a decision that was out of Spenser's hands, but still impresses one as profoundly fitting). Though Nature's judgment suggested that in "turning to themselves at length againe," creatures demonstrate their mastery over change, their tendency to grow more perfect through all the dilations of soul and changes of mind and vicissitudes of body that characterize life. Yet here, when the poet turns back to himself again, he does so in an "vnperfite" Canto, which gives equal space again to rehearsing *Mutabilitie's* claim and Nature's counter-claim. The two articulations stand there side by side; the resolution is once more hoped-for rather than reached, here in the tenor of an apocalyptic wish. This gesture of being-toward-openness seems to run athwart the tendency of theodicy to reach

for the ultimate security of closure—to put evil to rest once and for all—and yet to hold out such a state of being as the only one in which theodical satisfaction becomes possible. The poem as poem breathes with an awareness of itself, and is permanently fraught with its own potential to reopen the questions to which it seeks answers. The *Cantos* and the *Hymns* do not conceive of evil, senselessness, and meaning-loss as something that can be explained away via appeals to orthodoxy; nor do they conceive of the desire for the good, the meaningful, and the true as able to be satisfied by the attainment of the objects proper to them. In both poems *rest*, the cessation of desire, even the cessation of the desire for knowledge of the good, is the only solution to the conundrum of anomy. And the attainment of this rest is complicated by the fact of being “mortal” in the special sense discussed above—subject to change including and beyond death itself.

Spenserians have rightly drawn attention to the poet’s *worldmaking* qualities; by focusing attention on theodicy, I hope to have shown what is involved in Spenserian *world-maintenance*, that is, the acts of *poesis* within Spenser’s worlds meant to preserve their goodness while still attending to evils.⁷⁴ I would argue, in closing, that Spenserian theodicy remains relevant in the world of late modernity. What both the *Hymnes* and the *Cantos* help us to understand, and where they find commonality especially with the poetic theodicy of *Paradise Lost*, is the extent to which the early modern period understood evil and good to be twins rather than opposites, or rather to be intensified in their opposition through their

⁷⁴ Roland Greene, “A Primer of Spenser’s Worldmaking: Alterity in the Bower of Bliss,” in *Worldmaking Spenser: Explorations in the Early Modern Age*, eds. Patrick Cheney and Laren Silberman (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2015), 16, outlines an approach to “Spenser’s disposition of worlds and his recoverable theory of worldmaking,” and suggests that “what we call Spenserian poetics is in some measure the visible result” of this the poet’s worldmaking impulse.

similitude with one another. Familiar images of good and evil suggest patent and palpable difference: darkness and light, life and death, order and chaos. This dichotomized way of looking at good and evil is especially useful in service of ideologies—political, religious, and cultural—which solicit partisan participation. (In my third chapter, I will show precisely this way of making theodicy a matter of partisanship at work in Lucy Hutchinson’s biblical epic *Order and Disorder*). A far more vexing vision appears in the works of Spenser above, and in *Paradise Lost*. These poems seem to say that evil and good are as close to one another as Mutabilitie is to Nature: so near that their operations and manifestations may hardly be differentiable upon superficial inspection. The deeper inspection requires experience—precisely the experience of evil.

CHAPTER 3: *MEASURE FOR MEASURE* AND THE MYSTERIES OF STATE

1. Prologue

In some respects this chapter, which was developed as an article for publication before the rest of the project had taken shape, may appear to be an outlier. It is the only drama; it is not explicitly cosmological as are the other literary texts considered; it is more clearly tied to a determinate topical reference point in the newly crowned King James I. But in fact this chapter is of central importance, is the seed from which much else in this dissertation grew, and it bears directly on the question of theodicy. In this brief foreward I will outline several ways in which the argument I advance here about *Measure for Measure* relates to the other chapters in this project, and to early modern literary theodicy in general.

In the first place, *Measure for Measure* deals directly with questions of providence and governance, it inquires into the political-theological patterning of good and evil—"the strong and swelling evil / Of my conception," as Angelo puts it. Louise Schneider has called *Measure for Measure* "Shakespeare's most theological play;" Debora Shuger used the play as a starting point for a wide-ranging investigation into early modern political theology. Not only is the play in a sense about the relationship between good and evil, it is also a play that puts goodness to the test, one that tribunalizes the good, in the manner of other theodicies discussed here. This is true both of Isabella, whose virtue is tested and tried by Angelo's indecent proposal, and of the Duke, whose actions in service of (what he takes to be) the greater good are put on display for an audience who may judge for themselves whether his application of "craft against vice" is licit or not. Given that at the heart of the play is the metaphor connecting God's governance with political sovereignty, when the play seeks to justify the Duke, it cannot but raise questions about the justice of a

providential God by inference.

Second, like the other works presented here, the occasion for this instance of Shakespearean theodicy is a crisis of legitimacy. In the first chapter on Spenser and the last on Milton, the crisis was to do with the legitimating discourses of natural philosophy; in the chapter on Hutchinson, the crisis was to do with the political fortunes of the English revolution after the restoration. Here, the crisis involves the end of the Tudor line and the beginning of the Stuart regime, and with that the introduction of a ‘foreign’ ruler with a governmental style markedly different from that of Elizabeth. That crisis put into question the legitimating discourse of political theology, and it is this discourse the play probes.

In probing that discourse, the play repeatedly raises the problem of intelligibility, which is the third point of connection between my reading of *Measure* and the other chapters here. While the other texts, being cosmological in scope, take up intelligibility at the macro level, *Measure for Measure* works out the small-scale political and forensic implications of a restless search for intelligibility. For example, in the dialogue between the wise counselor Escalus and the bumbling sheriff Elbow (discussed in the body of this chapter), a series of catachrestic errors in the latter’s speech make the enacting of justice impossible. Similarly, when Angelo tells Isabella “your sense pursues not mine,” the line is playing on a series of puns around the word sense that highlights and amplifies the meditation on meaning and intelligibility: of subject to subject, of subject to self, and of subject to sovereign.

Related to this is the fourth and final point of connection, epitomized in the keyword of this chapter: “mystery.” The substance of my argument in what follows is that in this play the word mystery is poised semantically between two denotations: a numinous

substance, and a secreted but mundane technique. When applied to the sovereign, the semantic difference brought to light by the hangman Abhorson opens up the whole question of the fundamental metaphor connecting divine providence to the sovereign's governance. The most salient point of connection between this play and the other texts considered, what makes it a key example of an early modern literary theodicy and so demand inclusion here, and what marks it as perhaps the most 'modern' of all the texts under examination, is that in it "mystery" is explicitly an occasion for doubt. The play details how the Duke—aided in crucially important ways by his apparatchiks, principally the Provost—plots and schemes to produce a mystery-effect at the level of plot. Spying, mumming, head tricks and bed tricks blend together in what appears to be a mockery of providential ordering. But the presumed strength of credence in the idea that the whole business of providence is to bring good from evident evil, the hermetic qualities of the Duke as a character whose intentions remain obscure, and the generic bent of the tragicomic mode, work to counterbalance the parody, make plausible an interpretation of the Duke as a figure sacred rather than profane, and create the sense of double-vision for which this play is famous. Now to the show.

2. Introduction

In this chapter I hope to contribute to the ongoing discussion of political theology in *Measure for Measure* by reconsidering the play's representation of the 'mysteries of state'—a phrase that translates into English the Latin *arcana imperii*, and which served as a centerpiece of King James VI/I's royalist religion.⁷⁵ I will show that in its language and

⁷⁵ The phrase *arcana imperii* is frequently traced back to Tacitus. At *Annals* 1.6.3 Sallustius Crispus is said to be "partner in the imperial secrets [*arcana imperii*]" on account of his minor role as messenger in the death of Agrippa Posthumus. At *Ann.* 2.36.1, we read that

structure, *Measure for Measure* reflects an essential, constitutive ambiguity in the concept of ‘mysteries of state’, one that has gone generally unremarked in discussions of the play’s theologico-political significance.⁷⁶ The constitutive ambiguity depends upon the semantic plasticity of the word mystery itself, and can be stated as follows: at times ‘mysteries of state’ means the substance of sovereignty, an attribute or power directly and inalienably invested in the person of the sovereign through the mystical fusion of body politic with body natural. At other times, the phrase seems to refer to a set of administrative skills and techniques acquired through experience and education, and distributed among an administrative body containing the sovereign, but including also a political class of secretaries, councilors, officers and magistrates.

Measure for Measure dramatizes the constitutive ambiguity in the mysteries of state idea, and at a crucial point interrogates the meaning of the keyword ‘mystery’. The continuing fascination of the play is due in no small part to its deft handling of this and other ambiguities, and its refusal to decide finally between sacred or secular interpretations of the mystery it invokes. Thus by the end of the play there is good reason for Angelo to feel that the Duke, reassuming his sovereign position, appears somewhat mystical, “like

a certain proposal “trespassed upon the arcana of sovereignty [*arcana imperii*],” but that Tiberius Nero cleverly “replied by treating it as an extension of his own prerogative.” For a survey of the concept in the Machiavellian literature of the northern Renaissance, see Peter Donaldson, *Machiavelli and the Mystery of State* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988).⁷⁶ My sense of what ‘political theology’ means in the early modern context is guided by Graham Hammill and Julia Reinhard Lupton eds., *Political Theology and Early Modernity* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2012), especially the introduction to that volume. The editors point out that political theology is not reducible to religious politics or politicized religion; rather, political theology names a complex ideological and historical situation arising in conditions of partial secularization.

power Divine” (5.1.367);⁷⁷ and there is also good reason to feel the comparison absurd, as many modern interpreters have done.⁷⁸ In order to tease out the full range of possibilities active in *Measure*’s handling of the mysteries of state idea, my argument will turn away from the characters that usually occupy theologico-political criticism of the play—the Duke, Angelo, and Isabella—and toward its large cast of government functionaries.⁷⁹ Though characters like the Provost, Abhorson, and Elbow may not seem crucially important to the play, it is only by attending to them that we can fully grasp the interplay of sovereign substance and administrative technique that structures the play’s depiction of a confrontation between practical governance and theological principle. In other words, the theologico-political questions at the heart of the play are not solely focused on the nature or essence of sovereignty. *Measure for Measure* no doubt confronts questions about the

⁷⁷ Parenthetical references to *Measure for Measure* correspond to the Arden edition, edited by J. W. Lever (London: Bloomsbury, 2008). References to other of Shakespeare’s plays correspond to the information at Open Source Shakespeare (www.opensourceshakespeare.org), which is in turn based upon the 1864 Globe Edition.

⁷⁸ Many critics have commented on the pronounced double vision at work in *Measure for Measure*, especially concerning the figure of the Duke, which allows for such contrasting interpretations as those of William Empson and G. Wilson Knight. Empson famously remarked that the Duke cruelly “treat[s] his subjects like puppets for the fun of making them twitch.” See *The Structure of Complex Words* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989), 285. Knight rather viewed the Duke’s control as benign and even divine, his acts suffused by an “enigmatic, otherworldly mystery.” See *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Routledge, 1989), 80. Empson and Knight’s books are by now more than 50 years old; for a more recent, and less tendentious approach to similar subject matter, see Louise Schleiner, “Providential Improvisation in *Measure for Measure*,” *PMLA* 97.2 (1982), 227-236.

⁷⁹ The first major study of political theology in the play is Debora Kuller Shuger, *Political Theologies in Shakespeare’s England: The Sacred and the State in Measure for Measure* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001). Shuger’s approach focuses on the Duke and the law, and borrows from Carl Schmitt the notion that sovereignty is primarily marked by the ability to decide upon exceptions to the legal order (Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Theses on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1985)). On Isabella’s theologico-political significance, see Julia Reinhardt Lupton, *Citizen Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2005), 127 ff.

‘what’ of sovereignty: Is the sovereign above or within the law? Can she or he be resisted? Is sovereignty structured hierarchically, or has it a contractual, communal dimension? But equally important are questions about the ‘how’ of sovereignty: How can the sovereign sway recalcitrant subjects? By what techniques can a threatened sovereign regain legitimacy? How can governmental techniques be morally evaluated? Within the ideology of divine right, it is somewhat important to separate the substance of sovereignty from the techniques of governance—the sovereign is supposed to be sovereign by divine fiat and regardless of the techniques employed. But in practice, the two are always intertwined, not only in matters of practical governance, but also with regard to the perceived legitimacy of the sovereign substance itself. The ‘mysteries of state’ denotes precisely the intersection of the sovereign ‘what’ and the sovereign ‘how’, and it is at this intersection that I find *Measure for Measure*’s theologico-political significance.

3. Between Substance and Technique

Let us begin with two intellectual frameworks for understanding the mysteries of state in early modern England, the first drawn by J. G. A. Pocock, and the second by Ernst Kantorowicz. The opening chapter of Pocock’s influential *The Machiavellian Moment* aligns the mysteries of state with practical political prudence:

In matters of policy, the king and his counselors must proceed with nothing but their own prudence and experience to guide them. It was their profession to do so; their lives were one long training in it; God, who had laid this task on them, might of his grace assist them to perform it; and they might develop a marvelous skill in the exercise of what was essentially a professional “mystery” or art. It was on their expertise in statecraft, in the *arcana imperii* or secrets of power, in judging the fluctuations of times and seasons, events, circumstances, and human wills, that outstandingly successful rulers, like

Philip II of Spain—*El Prudente*—or Elizabeth I of England, based their claim to a mysterious and quasi-divine authority.⁸⁰

The passage relies heavily on the sense of mystery as a professional secret, a trick of the trade known only to its duly initiated practitioners—an appropriately Machiavellian sense, given the book’s aims. Pocock perceives the connection between the exercise of a seemingly preternatural sagacity, one gained through experience and training, and the substantive claims to a divinely authored sovereignty. It is important to note, however, that the mysteriousness of the sovereign’s power, in Pocock’s reading of the historical record, arises from the fact that the techniques by which that authority is demonstrated are not communicable in terms of general principles. The judge at common law makes decisions based on precedent and principle, together with a set of established rules for how precedent is to be applied to new cases. The king, on the other hand, decides when and how to act based on intuition, insight, or the possession of some specific and closely guarded information.⁸¹ The common law’s techniques are rational in the sense of being generalizable; the king’s techniques remain firmly within the domain of the particular, the accidental, the personal and circumstantial. The sovereign’s techniques, idiosyncratically acquired and in principle available only to those whose lives have been a long education in

⁸⁰ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975), 28.

⁸¹ As the passage quoted above goes on to explain, “the [kingly] statecraft of pure policy [...] had nothing to do with the establishment and maintenance of rules of law. It was a mysterious, in a sense an irrational, art of coping with the unique, the contingent, and the unforeseen, at the point where all hope must be abandoned of bringing things under legal control. But where experience could be mobilized in the form of custom or consent, and general rules could be established and interpreted, government became much less an arcane and mysterious art and [...] much more a rational method or science” (Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 28). The latter conditions pertain to the common law. Note also Pocock’s telling phrase, “arcane and mysterious art.”

rulership, may thus be passed off as pure charism. In order for Pocock's comparative logic between sovereign power and legal authority to hold, it is important that the king's 'mysteries of state' and the common law's 'artificial reason' both be understood as skills or arts, that 'mystery' not be elevated to a spiritual plane above the reach of artifice. Thus for Pocock, the mysteries of state may be non-rational, but they are not therefore mystical, even—so it is claimed—for early modern theorists of sovereignty as fervently committed to the idea of divine right as Jean Bodin.⁸²

In contrast to this predominantly secular-technical portrayal, Ernst Kantorowicz seeks to show how the mysteries of state came to denote or describe the theologically infused, mystical substance of sovereignty itself. In a 1956 essay called "Mysteries of State: An Absolutist Concept and its Late Medieval Origins," Kantorowicz locates the origins of the concept not in Machiavelli's vision of the prince, but in the domain of the law itself—not the common law, but rather the "brackish waters" in which ecclesial and civil jurists of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries mingled metaphors of throne and altar.⁸³ In course of

⁸² Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 30: "As the roaring of a lion, the king spoke with the authority that descended to him from God; his authority therefore became inscrutable, mysterious, and not to be resisted. But the gift of authority added nothing to the faculties of his time-bound intelligence; it was a hierocratic rather than a secular phenomenon; and this is why Jean Bodin, like many another theorist of 'absolute monarchy', is to be found saying both that as a matter of authority, the king may set aside custom whenever he so wills, and that as a matter of prudence and even wisdom, he should will to do so only on the rarest occasions." But as Ernst Kantorowicz demonstrates decisively in *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), the demarcation between 'hierocratic' and 'secular' aspects of sovereignty was blurry by design, and a great deal of political theology indeed suggests that sovereignty supplements and strengthens the king's "time-bound intelligence" with preternatural abilities and/or knowledges. King James was especially fond of emphasizing the special intellectual competencies of the sovereign.

⁸³ Ernst Kantorowicz's "Mysteries of State: An Absolutist Concept and Its Late Mediaeval Origins," *Harvard Theological Review* 48.1 (1955), 56-91. Some of the same points are made in the final chapters of *The King's Two Bodies*.

time what emerged from this metaphoric soup was a new and caesaropapistic view of political sovereignty, a “Royal Pontificalism” of which James I—often seen as the inspiration for *Measure for Measure*’s Duke-cum-Friar Vincentio—stands as paragon. For Kantorowicz, Jacobean royal theology and the Royal Pontificalism of divine right monarchy in general “seems to be resting in the legally settled belief that government is a *mysterium* administered alone by the king-highpriest and his indisputable officers, and that all actions committed in the name of those ‘Mysteries of State’ are valid *ipso facto* or *ex opera operato*, regardless even of the personal worthiness of the king and his henchmen.” Kantorowicz goes so far as to equate ‘Mysteries of State’ with ‘Political Theology’ in general, suggesting that the former is a regional variety of the latter.⁸⁴

Note two differences between this intellectual framework and Pocock’s above. Most obviously, Kantorowicz does not shy away from acknowledging that those invested in the ideology of divine right had occasion to speak of the mysteries of state as patently *mystical*—even (or perhaps especially) the lawyers.⁸⁵ More subtly, there is a shift in emphasis from a technical interpretation of mysteries as trade secrets, to a substantive understanding of mysteries of state as pertaining to the core of sovereign power. It is not that the mysteries of state simply are the prudent techniques of governance; rather, in the

⁸⁴ Kantorowicz, “Mysteries,” 67: “Under the impact of those exchanges between canon and civilian glossators and commentators—all but non-existent in the earlier Middle Ages—something came into being which then was called ‘Mysteries of State,’ and which today in a more generalizing sense is often termed ‘Political Theology.’”

⁸⁵ Kantorowicz recognizes, but does not emphasize, that King James used the word ‘mysteries’ ambiguously: “It should be noted, however, that the king says also: ‘For though the Common Law be a mystery and skill best knowen vnto your selues ...’ Here the word ‘mystery’ certainly has the meaning of handicraft or trade—in the sense of ‘arts and mysteries’ [...] which perhaps would allow the suggestion that ‘mysteries of state’ are the handicraft or trade of kings” (“Mysteries” 68n.10). What Kantorowicz regards as an outlying usage and relegates to a footnote I have taken as a primary point of departure.

heart of the state, lodged in turn in the breast of the sovereign, there lies a *mysterium* that then needs to be attended by a set of techniques appropriate to it, i.e., an administration. The techniques, no matter how secreted they may be, are not the mystery itself; it is rather the mystery itself that gives shape, impetus, and legitimacy to the administrative techniques of the king and the governors. This mystery is the mystery of state, which is to say the mystical core of divinely authored sovereignty.

Holding these two intellectual frameworks side by side we can more clearly see what I have called the constitutive ambiguity in the mysteries of state concept, and how it is rooted in the semantic plasticity of the keyword ‘mystery’. It is ambiguous, because it refers at once to substance and technique; it is constitutive, because both substance and technique are needful, even though the secular or even amoral nature of the latter potentially threatens perceptions of the former’s divine significance. This point about ‘mystery’ is clearly evident in the OED, which gives two separate entries for the word, with one skewing toward the secular sphere, and the other toward the religious. In the religious sense, the word mystery most frequently pertains to substance and/or body: the mystery of Incarnation, the mystery of the Eucharist, the mystical body of the church (L. *corpus mysticum*), and so on.⁸⁶ In the secular sense the word most frequently applies to the technical know-how of guilds, the skills that an apprentice gleans from a master craftsman.⁸⁷ Thus we can identify for the lexeme ‘mystery’ a religious-substantive semantic axis as well as a secular-technical semantic axis. Relatively pure examples of

⁸⁶ “mystery, n.1,” *OED Online*, June 2016. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com> (accessed July 21, 2016).

⁸⁷ “mystery, n.2,” *OED Online*, June 2016. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com> (accessed July 21, 2016). See also the Statue of Artificers (1561), which uses the language of mystery to describe professional knowledge.

each sense are given in the OED from ca. 1600, so we can conclude that in Elizabethan and Jacobean England the distinction between the two senses was recognizable—while hastening to add that this does not preclude and may positively invite various shadings, amalgams, and overlaps in actual usage—and that both were available to Shakespeare. It will therefore be helpful to survey briefly the Jacobean political discourse of mystery, as well as how the word is used in the Shakespearean corpus, before turning to *Measure for Measure*'s political theology.

4. The Mysteries of State in Jacobean Political Discourse

King James I took a pronounced interest in the mysteries of state, understood both as the arts of statecraft and as the theological grounds of divinely authored sovereignty. A king from his nonage and a scholar by inclination, James's speculations about the nature of sovereignty, and his unprecedented willingness to print those opinions and quarrel over them publicly, earned him the sobriquet "the wisest fool in Christendom." Even before his English coronation, James announced this ponderous aspect of his personality and style of rule by reprinting and circulating his two treatises of divine kingship, *A Trew Lawe of Free Monarchies* and the *Basilikon Doron*. Throughout these two books, and especially in a preface addressing his new English subjects, James hints at his abiding concern with the play of secrecy and transparency that would characterize his entire reign:

Charitable Reader; it is one of the golden Sentences, which Christ our Saviour vttered to his Apostles, that there is nothing so couered that shal not be reuealed, neither so hidde, that shall not be knowen; and whatsoeuer they have spoken in darknesse, should be heard in the light: and that which they had spoken in the care in secret place, should, be publikely preached on the tops of the houses [...] But as this is generally trew in the actions of all men, so is it more specially trew in the affaires of Kings: for Kings being publike persons, by reason of their office and authority, are as it were set (as it was said of old) vpon a publike stage, in the sight of all the people; where all the

beholders eyes are attentively bent to looke and pry in the least circumstance of their secretest drifts.⁸⁸

James goes on to portray the publication of his book as creating a window into his own heart, by means of which his “secretest drifts” could be known—a knowledge dispensed, of course, on his own terms, without the unseemly voyeurism of “the beholders eyes.” Here and throughout the *Basilikon Doron* we see connections between England’s new monarch and Vienna’s Duke: both are deeply concerned with secrecy and transparency, both are emphatically moralistic about wielding political power, both present themselves as rulers whose knowledge outstrips the common run of men and even of other kings. We know that *Measure for Measure* was very likely the first of Shakespeare’s works to be played before James, at Whitehall in 1604.⁸⁹ It is no surprise, then, that Shakespeare would have read and absorbed passages of the *Basilikon Doron* while preparing the play, and that parts of *Measure* would echo the *Doron*.⁹⁰ While the above passage’s concern with secret things coming to light may be thought most closely related to Angelo, it is equally applicable to *Measure*’s “fantastical Duke of dark corners,” whose stratagems and applications of “craft against vice” are never fully revealed to the characters most affected by them. Although the phrase “mysteries of state” does not appear in the *Basilikon Doron* or in *Trew Lawe of Free Monarchies*, all the major elements of the idea are present—rumination on the

⁸⁸ King James VI/I, *Basilikon Doron*, in Johann Sommerville ed., *King James VI and I: The Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 3-4.

⁸⁹ See J. W. Lever’s introduction to the Arden edition of *Measure for Measure*.

⁹⁰ On the close connections between James’s personality, the *Basilikon Doron*, and *Measure for Measure*, see Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne and Their Contemporaries* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989) 115-131; 210-239.

theological basis of sovereignty, learned interest in the *arcana imperii*, and a willingness to employ secrecy and the theatrics of revelation for political ends.⁹¹

James's concern with secrecy and transparency, his abiding interest in theological theories of kingship, and his lifelong apprenticeship in governmental arcana, led him to emphasize the transcendent inviolability of his mysteries of state more and more as his reign continued. In a 1616 speech before the Star Chamber, for instance, James warned the assembled justices:

First, Incroach not vpon the Prerogatiue of the Crowne: If there fall out a question that concernes my Prerogatiue or mystery of State, deale not with it, till you consult with the King or his Councell, or both: for they are transcendent matters, and must not be sliberely caried with ouer-rash wilfulnesse; for so you may wound the King through the sides of a priuate person [...] That which concernes the mysterie of the Kings power, is not lawfull to be disputed; for that is to wade into the weaknesse of Princes, and to take away the mysticall reuerence, that belongs vnto them that sit in the Throne of God.⁹²

This is James sounding maximally hieratical; when he invokes the 'mysteries of state' here it seems clear that we're dealing with authentically mystical mysteries of a substantial and theological kind. Kantorowicz relies heavily on this passage when he assesses James as the most "genuinely pontifical" king of the 16th and 17th centuries, surpassing "even Louis XIV."⁹³ Yet just before this high-flown discussion of sovereign mystery we find the king referring to the Common Law also as a "mystery," one "best known" by the members of

⁹¹ On James's ambivalent appropriation of the *arcana imperii*, see Curtis Perry, *The Making of Jacobean Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 93-94: "It is undoubtedly true that the inscrutability of state secrets is an important element of James's absolutist rhetoric, [but] a few caveats are in order. First, there is a difference between claiming inscrutability and actually being inscrutable. There is a paradoxical quality to James's own discourse on the subject: it clarifies and describes its own supposed opacity."

⁹² King James VI/I, "A Speech in the Starre Chamber," in *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge, UK, Cambridge UP: 1994), 212-213

⁹³ Kantorowicz, "Mysteries of State," 67.

the Star Chamber, with no obvious allusion to a theological basis.⁹⁴ Or consider this passage, from a speech before Parliament in 1604:

For albeit trew, that at the first Session of my first Parliament, which was not long after mine Entrie into this Kingdome, It could not become me to informe you of any thing belonging to Law or State heere: (for all knowledge must either bee infused or acquired, and seeing the former sort thereof is now with Prophecie ceased in the world, it could not be possible for me at my first Entry here, before Experience had taught it me, to be able to vnderstand the particular mysteries of this State.⁹⁵

Here again we are far removed from the ‘mysteries of state’ as a substantial and divine attribute of the sovereign body, and directly in the domain of state mystery as the intricacies and particularities of governance, knowledge of which is gained not by special dispensation but solely by on-the-job experience. Such examples do not necessarily contravene Kantorowicz’s point about James being a pontifical ruler; but they do indicate something peculiar in the way James invokes the mysteries of state, a peculiarity we will see echoed in *Measure for Measure*.

In my view, James’s ambivalent use of the mysteries of state concept is partly unconscious or temperamental, and partly tactical. We have already seen evidence of an ongoing interest—not to say obsession—with the interplay of opacity and transparency belonging especially to kings, and a proclivity for theorizing about sovereignty and statecraft. These go to the temperamental aspects of James’s ‘mysteries of state’ discourse. The tactics come from elsewhere. Over the course of his reign, James came more and more to clash with his magistrates over questions of jurisdiction. The 1616 Star Chamber speech responds specifically to this conflict, in which judges at common law wrangled with the

⁹⁴ James VI/I, “A Speech in the Starre Chamber,” *Political Writings*, 210-211; see note 9 above.

⁹⁵ James VI/I, “A Speech in the Parliament Hovse,” *Political Writings*, 154.

king over the extent of sovereign prerogative, and the inviolability of the common law's jurisdictional claims. To put the matter somewhat simply: James wanted to exert some control over the common law courts and magistrates, even though he lacked any training in the labyrinthine complexities of the English legal system. He claimed that his sovereign intelligence, being a form of universal reason perfected by both divine dispensation and long experience as monarch, made his lack of empirical knowledge practically irrelevant. The magistracy, however, resisted these claims in order to preserve the integrity of their jurisdictional power.

Most famous among the resisting lawyers was Sir Edward Coke, who put forward the notion that the common law was a kind of “artificial reason” that could only be got by a very particular sort of education—namely, the kind dispensed at the Inns of Court. For Coke, no amount of sovereign intelligence, no number of years spent on the throne, could compensate for a lack of specific training in the rules and precedents of English common law, so that the king had no competence to judge in such matters. One of the most celebrated passages of Coke's *Reports*—itself one of the most famous legal documents of early modern England—articulates this idea quite clearly:

For reason is the life of the Law, nay the common law it selfe is nothing else but reason, which is to be understood of an Artificial perfection of reason, gotten by long study, observation, and experience, and not of every mans natural reason, for *Nemo nascitur artifex* [no one is born skilfull]. This legal reason *est summa ratio* [is the highest reason].

The law is identified with rationality itself; the study of the law raises reason to its highest form. How different from the idea that the intelligence of kings surpasses that of other men by dint of the mystical fusion of body natural and body politic!

Considered as a conscious tactic, then, evidence suggests that James came more and more to rely upon a rhetoric of mystery precisely because it bridged the divide between legal skill and sovereign substance. One could read the 1616 Star Chamber Speech as saying something like: “You lawyers have your mysteries and I have my own. Since mine are of an incontrovertibly higher order, they must govern yours.” Against this concatenation of technical-legal dexterity and sovereign power, one could read Coke’s insistence upon the common law as “artificial reason” as driving a wedge between the king’s divine authority and the lawyer’s mundane—albeit intricate and closely guarded—skill. It is in this context that James’s rhetoric about the mysteries of state reaches its full complexity, being deployed tactically in support of a specific rhetorical and political goal. But the development of the notion was only possible because the ‘mysteries of state’ idea already contained within it the constitutive ambiguity which James came to exploit, and which *Measure for Measure* presciently illuminated.

5. The Sense of ‘Mystery’ in Shakespeare

The word ‘mystery’ does not appear to have been a particular favorite of Shakespeare, occurring only 15 times in the dramas; when it does appear it is very frequently suspended between the substantive-religious and technical-secular senses indicated above.⁹⁶ Perhaps the most familiar example is Hamlet’s sardonic rebuke to Guildenstern: “Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would

⁹⁶ Results obtained from *Open Source Shakespeare*, opensource-shakespeare.org, accessed July 18th 2016. The plural form, ‘mysteries’, occurs 4 times—in *Coriolanus*, *Henry VIII*, *King Lear*, and *Timon*. It splits between secular and sacred senses in the same way as the singular: in *Timon* it is clearly associated with craft and trade (4.1.1582); in *Coriolanus* the mysteries are heavenly and unknowable (4.2.2637); in *Lear* they are diabolical, belonging to “Hecate and the night” (1.1.114).

play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; *you would pluck out the heart of my mystery*; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass: and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ; yet cannot you make it speak.”⁹⁷ It might seem that we are dealing with a substantive and even quasi-religious instance of the word—“heart of my mystery” scans readily as the innermost kernel of the inward self, as it were the soul of the soul. Further, the mystery invoked here is described as massy enough to be grasped and substantial enough to be “plucked out.” But the context raises questions.

Hamlet is at this point wielding a recorder as a prop, which he has snatched from a band of musicians, and bidding Guildenstern play it; to which Guildenstern protests, “But these [instruments] cannot I command to any utterance of harmony; I have not the skill.” This statement occasions the lines from Hamlet about the heart of his mystery. The propinquity of “skill” and “mystery” in this dialogue seems more than accidental given the lexical situation we have been investigating, and may color one’s interpretation of Hamlet’s line. To wit: perhaps the sense of Hamlet’s remark is about pitting his own psycholinguistic dexterity (his ‘mystery’ in the sense of skill) against Guildenstern’s lack thereof. (At stake in the exchange is whether Rosencrantz and Guildenstern can wrench a confession from the prince as to what is bothering him). In the antic metaphor comparing the prince with a musical instrument, it isn’t after all that the ‘mystery’ will be ‘plucked out’, but rather that the string will be plucked upon, thereby sounding out the music within—the metaphor’s vehicle having slid from flute to lute. The exchange is obscure, but what can be said with a measure of certainty is that it points in the direction of a reciprocal, interdependent relationship between the skill (‘mystery’) required to play an instrument or

⁹⁷ *Hamlet*, 3.2.2242ff.

get into someone's head, and the numinous, insubstantial-yet-present substance ('mystery')—the instrument's music, the self's subtle psycholinguistic manifestations and modulations of identity—thus produced.

Let us take another example, this time from *Othello*. When the Moor orders Emilia to stand guard at the door of the room wherein he will interrogate Desdemona, he concludes with the command: "Your mystery, your mystery: nay, dispatch."⁹⁸ A first reading might interpret 'mystery' here as solidly secular, merely synonymous with duty or occupation: "Go, fulfill the task you're trained for," would be a suitable gloss. Numinous or religious overtones seem far from Othello's mind. Yet when the exchange with Desdemona is concluded, Othello beckons Emilia back with the lines:

You, mistress,
That have the office opposite to Saint Peter,
And keep the gate of hell!
You, you, ay, you!
We have done our course; there's money for your pains:
I pray you, turn the key and keep our counsel.⁹⁹

Evidently Emilia's occupation or duty was not—or at least is not as these lines are spoken—as entirely mundane in Othello's mind as it first appeared. Othello seems to have shifted from intending mystery as a secular but secretive task, to seeing Desdemona's mundane office as suffused with spiritual import, in this case diabolical rather than holy. And there is also the hint, reinforced by Othello's calling her 'mistress' ('mastery' and 'mystery' are closely related words and concepts, as the OED instructs us) as well as by

⁹⁸ *Othello*, 4.2.2773.

⁹⁹ *Othello*, 4.4.2844-2849.

the emphatic repetition of the second person pronoun, that Emilia's occupation or task has seeped into her essence, become part of her person.¹⁰⁰

Two other instances of the word mystery in the Shakespearean corpus should be brought especially to bear on a discussion of *Measure for Measure*; one appears in *Timon of Athens*, the other in *Troilus and Cressida*. In the former play, the word appears in the mouth of one of the bandits whom a distempered Timon exhorts as follows:

[...] Love not yourselves: away,
Rob one another. There's more gold. Cut throats:
All that you meet are thieves: to Athens go,
Break open shops, nothing can you steal,
But thieves do lose it: steal no less for this
I give you; and gold confound you howsoe'er! Amen.¹⁰¹

Trying to understand Timon's mad pronouncement, one of the bandits remarks: "Tis in the malice of mankind that he thus advises us; *not to have us thrive in our mystery*."¹⁰² This is an accurate assessment: Timon could not care less about the bandits' welfare; he wants to watch the world burn. The bandit uses mystery in its secular-technical sense, but the usage is ironic, applying a term used for legitimate occupations to the unsavory and illicit activity of robbers. The usage here is solidly secular-technical, but does the irony not become more impressive if behind the secular sense of the word we hear the faint religious resonance? In any case, as we will see shortly, this ironical usage of bears a strong resemblance to the banter of Abhorson and Pompey Bum in *Measure for Measure*, where similarly ignoble professions (executioner and bawd, respectively) are mock-ennobled by the epithet 'mystery'.

¹⁰⁰ On the semantics of mystery, mastery, and ministry see both entries in *OED*, "mystery," cited above.

¹⁰¹ *Timon*, 4.3.2157-2162.

¹⁰² *Timon*, 4.3.2165-2166.

Troilus and Cressida presents an even more interesting example, because in that play as in *Measure for Measure* the word mystery appears in a context that is immediately to do with statecraft, sovereignty, and the divine, so that a strong case can be made that the mystery invoked is precisely the mystery of state. Quickly, here is the context of the passage in which our word appears: Achilles harbors a love for the Trojan King Priam's youngest daughter Polyxena, and naturally wishes to keep the fact a secret. The wily Ulysses, however, has discovered all. When Ulysses reveals this knowledge to Achilles, the hero registers shock: how could his hidden love have come to light? Ulysses then explains to Achilles that:

The providence that's in a watchful state
Knows almost every grain of Plutus' gold,
Finds bottom in the uncomprehensive deeps,
Keeps place with thought and almost, like the gods,
Does thoughts unveil in their dumb cradles.
There is a mystery—with whom relation
Durst never meddle—in the soul of state;
Which hath an operation more divine
Than breath or pen can give expressure to:
All the commerce that you have had with Troy
As perfectly is ours as yours, my lord.¹⁰³

The passage invites close attention, because here the “mystery [...] in the soul of state” is presented in a deeply ambiguous way pertaining directly to the divine nature of sovereignty and secret administrative techniques. The mystery of state as Ulysses presents it here cannot be communicated; its “divine” machinery is beyond comprehension and expression—it is a mystical mystery in the genuine sense. Or is it? In a seemingly casual aside Ulysses raises the possibility that this ineffability is due less to any “divine” operation

¹⁰³ *Troilus and Cressida*, 3.3.2076-2086.

than to the fact that “relation durst never meddle” with the secret stratagems of governors. (If no one dares to inquire about the status of the mystery, then we are left to take the word of its custodians concerning its nature.) Further, the state is possessed of providence, giving it a preternatural knowledge of events and the inner lives of its subjects. And yet the knowledge is not total: whereas God has (or here, given the pagan setting, ‘the gods’ have) a knowledge that is total and perfect from the start, with no need to ‘gather intelligence’, the state can manage only an approximate and partial comprehension (“almost every grain”), and must presumably exercise prudence and cunning to gain it. One may reasonably assume that Ulysses’ knowledge is the result of some stratagem—he is after all characterized by his cunning, wiles, and *techne*, rather than any vatic or oracular status—yet his speech works to erase any evidence of *how* he came to know. Ulysses understands that he must hide his tactics if he wants to impress Achilles with the notion that the “mystery [...] in the soul of state” is providential and divine and that he (Ulysses) is in possession of it, thus instilling a reverence and fear in the warrior, perhaps enough to persuade Achilles to join the fight. In short, the passage highlights the constitutive ambiguity in the mysteries of state idea—above and beyond the ambiguity of the word mystery in general—and how that ambiguity can be exploited to advance a particular agenda. As we will see presently, the same set of ideas is at work in *Measure for Measure*.

6. The Mysteries of State in *Measure for Measure*

The word ‘mystery’ appears only fleetingly in *Measure for Measure*, in the midst of a comic dialogue between Vienna’s resident executioner Abhorson and his ersatz apprentice Pompey Bum. Leading up to the exchange, the Provost of Vienna’s prison has given Pompey—a self-described “unlawful bawd” and current inmate of the prison—an

opportunity for early release, on condition that Pompey will help Abhorson work through a backlog of executions. Ever the opportunist, Pompey agrees. But Abhorson is nonplussed about the arrangement. Following is the passage in full:

Prov. Sirrah, here's a fellow will help you tomorrow in your execution. If you think it meet, compound with him by the year, and let him abide here with you; if not, use him for the present, and dismiss him. He cannot plead his estimation with you: he hath been a bawd.

Abhor. A bawd sir? Fie upon him, he will discredit our mystery.

Prov. Go to, sir, you weigh equally: a feather will turn the scale.

Pom. Pray, sir, by your good favour—for surely, sir, a good favour you have, but that you have a hanging look—do you call, sir, your occupation a mystery?

Abhor. Ay, sir, a mystery.

Pom. Painting, sir, I have heard say, is a mystery; and your whores, sir, being members of my occupation, using painting, do prove my occupation a mystery. But what mystery there should be in hanging, if I should be hanged, I cannot imagine.

Abhor. Sir, it is a mystery.

Pom. Proof?

Abhor. Every true man's apparel fits your thief. If it be too little for your thief, your true man thinks it big enough. If it be too big for your thief, your thief thinks it little enough. So every true man's apparel fits your thief. (4.2.20-45)

Some brief observations will connect this moment to the other examples of 'mystery' in the Shakespearean dramatic corpus. First there is the resemblance between Abhorson's invocation of mystery and that of the bandits in *Timon*: in both cases an ignoble profession is described in terms usually reserved for nobler ones. The irony only deepens when one considers the religious overtones of the word mystery and the diabolic associations of murderous bandits and masked executioners. Second, as was the case with Ulysses' claim to mystery in *Troilus and Cressida*, Abhorson's mystery is an extension of sovereign power, and thus makes a claim to being a 'mystery of state'. Finally, one point of difference: unlike any other appearance of the word mystery in the dramas, here there is a sustained—though bawdy and deeply ironic—interrogation of what the term means and

how it ought to be applied: Pompey demands “proof” that Abhorson’s usage is justified, and Abhorson provides one, albeit a riddling one.

In the Arden edition of *Measure*, editor J. W. Lever glosses the word mystery in this exchange simply as “skilled trade.” Undoubtedly this is the primary meaning invoked, but it will be my contention that we ought to consider also the religious-substantive resonance of the word, and before continuing on I shall try to justify this claim. Consider first the general context of the play: it is saturated in theological themes, contains a host of direct references and allusions to the New Testament, and generally meditates from start to finish on the connections between theological principles and the exercise of political authority. Add to this the fact that elsewhere in the Shakespearean dramatic corpus, when mystery is invoked it tends to be poised between the secular and religious senses, as we have seen. This is circumstantial evidence, but is nevertheless highly suggestive. Further, on the heels of this exchange, the Provost returns and asks Pompey whether he and Abhorson have come to terms with the arrangement: “Are you agreed?” To which Pompey responds, “Sir, I will serve him; for I do find your hangman is a more penitent trade than your bawd; he doth oftener ask forgiveness.” So after the question of whether Abhorson’s trade is “a mystery” has been debated, Pompey relates the executioner’s role directly to the religious sphere of sin, repentance, and forgiveness. Finally and most importantly, we should bear in mind is that Abhorson’s occupation is a direct extension of the sovereign’s power over the lives and deaths of his subjects; it is the material manifestation of the “sword of heaven” to which the Duke has just rather high-mindedly referred at the end of Act 3.

In that speech, the Duke sets out the view that “He who the sword of heaven will bear / Must be as holy as severe.” When Abhorson claims that inducting Pompey into his

trade would “discredit” his “mystery,” he is voicing a similar idea. (The falsity and comic pomposity of Abhorson’s claim is highlighted by the Provost’s assessment that “a feather will turn the scale” in which the relative virtues of hangman and bawd are weighed). Recall what Ernst Kantorowicz had to say about the substance of the mysteries of state idea: it is based in a belief “that government is a *mysterium* administered alone by the king-highpriest and his indisputable officers, and that all actions committed in the name of those ‘Mysteries of State’ are valid *ipso facto* or *ex opera operato*, regardless even of the personal worthiness of the king and his henchmen.” In *Measure for Measure*, the question of the personal worthiness of the sovereign and his officers is most fully explored in the character of Angelo, but this very same question animates the exchange between Abhorson and Pompey regarding the ‘mysteries’ of the executioner. Issues of personal worthiness and sovereign prerogative are at the heart of the play’s meditation on the relationship between politics and theology, and it would appear that this brief exchange between hangman and bawd is an iteration of the theme.

Such considerations return us to the broader argument about *Measure for Measure* and political theology, which we notice when we shift attention away from the play’s major characters and toward its seemingly minor ones. The play is not so much about the sovereign’s ability to decide upon exceptions to the law—as many critics have thought—as it is about the relationship between charismatic sovereignty and administrative technique.¹⁰⁴ The notion that the mark of true sovereignty is the ability to decide upon

¹⁰⁴ On the subject of charisma, see Raphael Falco, *Charismatic Authority in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). Falco’s observation that “charisma brings into sharp relief a fragile balance between individual identity and normative structures, and between autonomy and collective identity,” resonates with many of the themes of this essay.

exceptions to the law has long been associated with the work of Carl Schmitt, and since Debora Kuller Shuger's *Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England: The Sacred and the State in Measure for Measure* (2001), Schmitt's ideas have been a major influence on how the play, and especially the character of the Duke, has been interpreted. More recent studies of political theology in *Measure* have, it is true, moved away from Schmitt's understanding of sovereignty and toward philosophers (Walter Benjamin, Giorgio Agamben, and Henri de Lubac) and characters (notably Isabella) who represent more radical, communal, and/or emancipatory versions of political theology.¹⁰⁵ Such studies contribute a great deal to our collective understanding of the play's complex approach to the uneasy marriage of politics and theology in conditions of partial secularization, yet they tend to overlook the problem of administration, which is judged to be less important than the relationship between sovereignty and citizenship, or sovereignty and community, or sovereignty and economy. This is true even when the concept of 'mystery' is foregrounded: the play's mysteries are conceived along substantialist, theological, and/or corporational lines, while the secular-technical aspects of mystery are left to one side. The constitutive ambiguity of the mysteries of state concept means that if we wish to understand the political theology of sovereignty, we cannot look solely at the transcendent sovereign making personalistic decisions about the enforcement or suspension of law, but must look also at the techniques—the 'mysteries' in the sense of state secrets and bureaucratic dexterity—

¹⁰⁵ I have already mentioned Julia Reinhart Lupton's excellent *Citizen Saints*. To this I would add Daniel Juan Gil, *Shakespeare's Anti-Politics: Sovereign Power and the Life of the Flesh* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 42-67; Philip Lorenz, *The Tears of Sovereignty: Perspectives of Power in Renaissance Drama* (New York: Fordham UP, 2013); Jennifer Rust, *The Body in Mystery: The Political Theology of the Corpus Mysticum in the Literature of Reformation England* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2014), 103-138.

that allow the charismatic body-of-sovereignty to appear maximally authoritative, maximally sovereign. And here again we find the usefulness of a concept like the ‘mysteries of state’, with all its ambiguity: it comprehends both a theologico-political sovereignty that legitimates morally questionable, and the tactical exercise of such techniques as reinforce the notion that sovereignty is something with which, in Ulysses’ words, “relation durst never meddle.”

Because the mysteries of state in *Measure for Measure* are both a substance inhering in the breast of the sovereign body, and a set of techniques distributed throughout a series of officers and ministers, characters in the play are consistently unsure about where sovereignty is located. The uncertainty begins in Act 1, with Angelo’s deputization, and is only resolved in Act 5, when the Duke’s ministers and officers work alongside him work to dramatize the reconsolidation of sovereign power in his person. According to the Duke there is no power in Vienna outside of his own sovereignty, and anyone who governs in any degree partakes of and participates in an authority that is and remains essentially his, whether he is present in his office or not. As the Duke remarks when he deputizes Angelo: “[...] we have with special soul / Elected him *our* absence to supply, / Lent him *our* terror, dress'd him with *our* love, / And given his deputation all the organs / Of *our own power*” (1.1.16-21, emphasis added). And when the deputization is done, both Angelo and the more experienced Escalus register bewilderment about the situation: “A power I have,” says Escalus, “but of what strength and nature / I am not yet instructed.” And Angelo concurs: “‘Tis so with me” (1.1.79-81).

If we judge from the ensuing action, we notice that Angelo is full of high sentence when it comes to government, but quickly grows bored with the actual work of

governing—he damningly lacks both the personal worthiness that is the sign and seal of divinely authored sovereignty, and the administrative skill that recommends the good governor. In the first scene of Act 2, Escalus and Angelo debate the relative merits of mercy and strictness in the exercise of law, with Angelo enthusiastically endorsing merciless application of statutes, regardless of mitigating circumstances or the moral standing of persons (2.1.1ff). (Angelo is at least consistent on this point: when his own “faults” are “open made to justice” (2.1.21) in Act 5, he asks to be killed rather than pardoned; it is a matter of debate whether this consistency should not be accounted as merely a further demerit). But once the philosophical—more precisely, the theological-political—debate concludes, and Elbow actually brings a case of law before the court, Angelo shows impatience: “This will last out a night in Russia / When nights are longest there. I’ll take my leave, and leave you to the hearing of the cause; / Hoping you’ll find good cause to whip them all” (2.1.133-136). Angelo seems to be so enamored of the law’s perfections as to have become allergic to the messiness of the actual cases the law is meant to guide and govern. Escalus, however, attends to the case, exercising patience and mercy, showing himself to be the abler governor, and a far more scrupulous representative of the Duke’s sense of justice than Angelo.

Ultimately, though, the Duke excludes even Escalus from knowledge of his plans, perhaps because the elder statesman is too visible and well-known a figure to be entrusted with the Duke’s “secretest drifts.” In fact, we cannot be sure that any one character has knowledge of all that the Duke has in mind going in to Act 5. One character, however, comes close to knowing all: the Provost. It may seem an odd assertion to make, but the character of the Provost is utterly essential to *Measure for Measure*: only through his timely

intercessions does the play's comic plot advance. One might expect that the wise magistrate Escalus would help the Duke restore justice to Vienna, but not so; Escalus is as caught up as everyone else in the Duke's fifth act coup de theatre. Instead, a low-level administrator becomes the Duke's right hand, even occasionally seeming to surpass the sovereign in prudence and resourcefulness. Inconspicuous by design and praised in the Duke's closing speech for his "care and secrecy" (5.1.527), the relationship between the Duke and the Provost best exemplifies the workings of the mysteries of state in *Measure for Measure*.

First, a word or two about his name. *Measure for Measure* is the only play in which the word 'provost' appears in any capacity, and the Provost is the only speaking character other than the Duke who is identified by his official title. The title of Provost has its theological as well as its secular meaning, and its use may intend to suggest a parallel between himself and the Duke, who governs from under the friar's cowl. Whether or not that is so, the action of the play makes it conspicuously clear that at several crucial turns of the plot, the Provost is there to assist the Duke, proving at least an indispensable and prudent officer, and at times appearing more sagacious than even the Duke himself. Though he inevitably seems a minor, even a faceless character beside the self-dramatizing and charismatic Duke, it is difficult to imagine the Duke pulling off his complex applications of "craft against vice" (3.2.270) without the Provost's ongoing help.

In the first scene of Act 3, the Duke confers with Claudio, trying to convince the recently condemned man to accept his fate, "[b]e absolute for death," repent his wrong and die with the peace of a clear conscience. The Duke commits himself to governing by means of direct pastoral injunction, and the strategy evidently works, with Claudio echoing a saying of Christ: "To sue to live, I find I seek to die, / And seeking death, find life. Let it

come on” (3.1.43-44). At this moment, though, Isabella appears, seeking audience with Claudio. The Duke—perhaps sensing something amiss or perhaps feeling the first prickings of the “dribbling dart of love” (1.3.2) after having glimpsed Isabella—says to the Provost: “Bring me to hear them speak, where I may be conceal’d” (3.1.52). The Provost complies, and through this stratagem is made aware of Angelo’s indecent proposal to Isabella, that she forfeit her chastity to save her brother’s life. At first the Duke seems to deny that Angelo means what he has said, interpreting his surrogate’s words as rather a test of virtue than a vicious proposal. (Perhaps the Duke inclines to such an interpretation because, as Louise Schleiner has persuasively showed, he is himself a type of the testing master familiar from several New Testament parables, and hopes that Angelo follows the pattern he has set out).¹⁰⁶ After further conferring with Isabella, though, he is disabused of his hope that Angelo is only feigning vice, and it is at this juncture that he arrives at the idea of the bed-trick, one of two major substitution devices that work to produce the play’s comic ending. Though the Provost has effectively dropped out of the scene, the fact remains that it is only through his intercession that the Duke gains the critical insight into what has transpired between Isabella and Angelo.

In Act 4, when the Duke’s plans run into serious trouble, it is once again the Provost who prudently steps in with some saving advice. Vincentio has already concocted the idea to replace Claudio’s head with a surrogate in order to heighten the dramatic revelations of the play’s comic climax, but there is one problem: no substitute heads seem ready to hand. In an attempt at direct pastoral persuasion, the Duke in his Friar’s guise attempts to convince the reprobate Barnadine to lay down his life, so that his head might serve the turn.

¹⁰⁶ See note 3 above.

But Barnadine flatly refuses: “I have been drinking hard all night, / and I will have more time to prepare me, or they / shall beat my brains out with billets: I will not / consent to die this day, that’s certain” (4.3.46-9). After the Duke’s attempt at persuasion fails, the Provost reenters the scene and asks about the status of the Duke’s plans. The Duke reports his failure. Just then, however, the Provost senses an opportunity: he informs the Duke of “[o]ne Ragozine, a most notorious pirate, / A man of Claudio’s years; his beard and head / Just of his colour,” who has died that very morning of a “cruel fever” (4.3.62-65). The provost then suggests an elegant solution to the Duke’s problem: “What if we do omit / This reprobate [Barnadine] till he were all inclined; / And satisfy the deputy with the visage / Of Ragozine, more like to Claudio” (4.3.65-68). Here the Provost at least matches, if he does not surpass, the Duke’s sagacity; and it is the Provost’s intercession here that allows Barnadine to be pardoned at the end of Act V, rounding out the play’s all-embracing comic resolution.

Thus the Provost plays a pivotal role in both the bed-trick and head-trick episodes of *Measure for Measure*, complementing and even perhaps outdoing the Duke at these two most critical junctures. Nor is he absent from the grand spectacle of reconciliation that makes up Act 5; indeed, he is there attending the Duke bodily, carefully managing the Duke’s costume-changes, tending to the timed revelations and concealments, and taking a speaking role in the benign deceptions that make up the Duke’s majestic return to sovereignty. If the Duke in Act 5 appears, as Angelo has it, “like power divine” (5.1.367) this must be attributed to the Provost more than any other single character in the play. It is finally unsurprising that in the Duke’s closing speech he promises the Provost a promotion, saying: “We shall employ thee in a worthier place” (5.1.528).

At every stage of the Duke's machinations, then, and at every crucial turn of *Measure for Measure's* plot, the Provost is there, unassuming and obedient, exercising secrecy and care. The relationship between the Provost and the Duke dramatizes and emblemizes the constitutive ambiguity in the mysteries of state—a phrase which names the occluded nexus wherein which charismatic authority and technical mastery fuse to create a simulacrum of divine power in the person of the sovereign. Discouraging about 'mysteries of state' reveals as much as it conceals about this conjunction of authority and technique, as we saw in James I's political speeches above. But dramatizing the operations of state mystery as *Measure for Measure* does has an inherent tendency to demystify, insofar as the emphasis on clever plotting and forensics counteracts the audience's sense of wonder at a sovereign's mystical power to sway subjects and enact justice.

7. Conclusion

When we train our vision upon the minor characters of *Measure for Measure*—and especially upon the relationship between the Provost and the Duke—it becomes clear that the political theology of *Measure for Measure* cannot be reduced to a meditation on the divine substance of sovereignty, any more than it can be reduced to a critique of Machiavellianism in religious disguise. Instead, what we see is a consistent interest in the mysteries of state, understood as ideological nexus where sovereign substance joins governmental technique, with each producing and reinforcing the other. The paradox made evident in *Measure for Measure's* representation of the mysteries of state may be understood as follows: in order for the Duke's sovereignty to be acknowledged in all its fullness and splendor, its techniques must remain unknown; yet in order to produce and maintain this appearance of mystical power (the political equivalent of what physicists call

action at a distance) dexterous ministers must step in to supplement the sovereign's power, in which process they come into possession of some uncomfortable and potentially compromising information, not least the memo that the sovereign's preternatural power is not all it's cracked up to be.

Beyond the play, an enriched understanding of the mysteries of state also sheds light on the complexities of secularization. Evidently the 'mysteries of state' (and their Tacitean / Machievellian precursor, '*arcana imperii*') were from the outset ambiguously poised between techniques which were mundane but secreted on the one hand, and powers whose origins were indeed from God (or 'the gods') on the other. However, when we look closely at the development of Jacobean mysteries of state discourse, the evidence suggests that it was only in the midst of a contest between King James I and his English magistracy—who insisted on a distinction between the "artificial reason" of the law and the supra-rational authority of the sovereign—that the "mysteries of state" came to be understood as transcendental, genuinely mystical mysteries. Far from a linear progression from sacred kingship to statist technocracy, then, we see a sort of retrograde motion in the concept of divine kingship as the component parts of the secular-sacred dichotomy become distinguished from each other. If Kantorowicz is right in saying that what the seventeenth century understood as 'mysteries of state' is now known by more general name of 'political theology', then *Measure for Measure* and its Jacobean context illuminates an important episode in the genesis of political theology itself, which remains an important component of contemporary political life.

CHAPTER 4: LUCY HUTCHINSON'S CRITIQUE OF LUCRETIAN ETHICS

1. Introduction: Texts and Contexts

In this chapter I examine the motif of shipwreck in the works of Lucy Hutchinson, principally the biblical epic *Order and Disorder*. Hutchinson's scenes of shipwreck reconfigure the signature Lucretian image of "shipwreck with spectator," instead offering an image of "shipwreck with *salvator*"—a maritime emergency supervised by a personal, providential divinity.¹⁰⁷ I will show that in *Order and Disorder* and other works, Hutchinson mounts a critique of the Lucretian ethical ideal of *ataraxia* through such reconfigured scenes of shipwreck, revising the Lucretian image in conformity with a militant and politicized Puritan ethic of affective and existential engagement in worldly affairs. By "existential" here I mean that Hutchinson's ethic, and the theodical project of *Order and Disorder* more generally, emphasize the importance of lived engagement with the play of good and evil, and the self-inspection and scrutiny born of such experience, as the way to resolve theodical questions. The interpretation of lived experience is held in more esteem than a justification or rationalization of the existence of evil in the abstract, though both are wanted and there is a connection between them as concerns ontology. Where the Epicurean sage envisions *ataraxia* as a happy condition born of refusal to enter into the play of fortune, Hutchinson's credo asserts that no refusal is in fact available either in the world or in the mind, since both mind and world are fallen, hence already, as it were,

¹⁰⁷ On Hutchinson's intense and searching engagement with Providentialism, see Patricia Patrick, "'All That Appears Most Casuall to Us': Fortune, Compassion, and Reason in Lucy Hutchinson's Exploratory Providentialism," *Studies in Philology* 112, no. 2 (2015), 327-52.

at sea.¹⁰⁸ Given this circumstance, the active choice to take up existential seafaring appears, in Hutchinson, not as the foolish enterprise of those too much enamored of the world, but rather an acceptance of the truth of the human condition and the *sine qua non* of salvation. The image of “shipwreck with spectator,” in which the sage observes the troubles of the foolhardy seafarers swallowed up by the fate they have courted, provides Lucretius with a metaphor expressing how the wholeness and integrity of the philosophically trained mind makes possible a pleasant spectatorship of the world’s ills, and how the serenity born of this aesthetic distance amplifies the sage’s sense of wholeness and integrity. In Hutchinson’s writing, scenes of shipwreck are not contemplative object-lessons about what is bad and so to be avoided through the training of the will, but rather expressions of one’s inevitable involvement in the play of good and evil. Involvement with evil, in the affective depths of one’s subjectivity and in the ongoing political, cultural, and religious struggles of Restoration-era Dissenters, makes possible the conviction of sin and the conversion

¹⁰⁸ I quote the Lucretius passage in question below, but for ease of reference it is worth including here as well, in Hutchinson’s translation.

Pleasant it is, when rough winds seas deforme,
 On shore to see men labour in the storme;
 Not that our pleasure springs from their distresse,
 But from the safetie we our selues possesse.
 Pleasant, when without danger tis beheld,
 To see two engag’d armies in the feild;
 But nothing a more pleasant prospect yields,
 Than that high tower which wise mens learning builds,
 Where well secur’d we wandring troopes survey,
 Who in a maze of error search their way,
 For witt and glorie earnestly contend,
 Both day and night in vaine endeavors spend,
 To hord vp wealth, and swim in full delights.
 O wretched soules whom ignorance benights! (*DRN* 2.1-14)

Quotations from Lucretius in this chapter are all drawn from Reid Barbour and David Norbrook, eds., *The Works of Lucy Hutchinson, Vol 1: Translation of Lucretius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

experience which were central to the spiritual self-fashioning of the godly.¹⁰⁹

The act of an early modern poet offering a critique of Lucretius's moral philosophy is not unique to Hutchinson—Milton undertakes something similar, as I discuss below—but such an undertaking is particularly interesting in Hutchinson's case. For one thing, Hutchinson's relationship to the seventeenth-century public sphere was arguably even more convoluted than Milton's: writing in various shades of anonymity and from within a 'private sphere' that can be construed as contributing to the counterpublic discourse of dissent in the Restoration, the relationship between Hutchinson's writing and the dominant Restoration culture is extremely complex.¹¹⁰ As an early translator of the entirety of *De*

¹⁰⁹ On the affective dimensions of Puritan life see Owen Watkins, *The Puritan Experience: Studies in Spiritual Autobiography* (New York: Schocken, 1972), 5-10 and *passim*. On the political and cultural contributions of Dissenters, see N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987). Keeble's account stresses that the defeat of the Good Old Cause and the repression of Dissenting political energies served to enliven the cultural contributions of figures like Bunyan and Milton. Yet this account may go too far in stressing the withdrawal of Dissenters from public life. More may be found in Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). "This book," Achinstein writes, "understands radical action not simply as overt or covert political intention [...] but also through the social settings in which Dissenters produced their resistance; in the theologies that underscored the role of God in human action; and in the imaginative resources from which they build schemes of apocalyptic revenge" (9). Lucy Hutchinson's own biography during the restoration demonstrates that dissenting cultural production and political rebellion were never far apart: John's death came after an arrest for alleged involvement in political subversion; and Lucy was influenced by the dissenting divine John Owen, whose post-Restoration career mixed radical preaching with direct insurrection, and who even at the end of his life was involved in the Rye House Plot to assassinate the King. See Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 212-17; 234-62 esp. 260ff. On the widely varied ways revolutionaries dealt with the disappointment of Restoration, see Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (London: Faber, 1984).

¹¹⁰ On women's writing and the relationship between public spheres, private spheres, and counterpublics in an early modern transatlantic context, see Catharine Gray, *Women Writers and Public Debate in 17th Century Britain* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 1-36.

rerum natura into English, too, Hutchinson had a closer relationship with Lucretius than most of her contemporaries, and scholars continue to wrestle with the extent of the pagan poet's influence upon the Puritan poet's thought and work.

De rerum natura itself has lately been held up as a text whose recovery and dissemination throughout the Renaissance helped to propel Europe into the modern age, and recent studies have been keen to point out Lucretian moments in Milton and Spenser, locating within such moments the emergence of a newly invigorated materialism across the seventeenth century.¹¹¹ The majority of such scholarship takes up Lucretius's materialist-atomist ontology and cosmology enthusiastically, but pays less attention to the

¹¹¹ The popularizing account in Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011) remains influential despite shortcomings. About which, in brief: in a quest to see connections between Lucretius and the modern, Greenblatt reads *De rerum natura* in a markedly modern fashion (i.e., as a piece of cosmological theory rather than a piece of moral philosophy). Above all, Greenblatt is fascinated by “the sense, driven home by every page of *On the Nature of Things*, that the scientific vision of the world—a vision of atoms randomly moving in an infinite universe—was in its origins imbued with a poet's sense of wonder” (8). The work of Reid Barbour, *English Epicures and Stoics: Ancient Legacies in Early Stuart Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998); Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and David Butterfield, “Lucretius in the Early Modern Period: Texts and Contexts,” in *Lucretius and the Early Modern*, eds. David Norbrook, Stephen Harrison, and Philip Hardie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) essentially hobbles Greenblatt's central conceit of *De rerum* as a lost text whose rediscovery launched the modern age. Barbour attends to the complexities involved in the early modern reception of apathy, stemming from the variety of Stoic sources: “[T]here is a Stoicism that emphasizes will and the self; there is a Stoicism that emphasizes fate and the whole; and there is a Stoicism that works to bridge the gap between extremes” (16). For Lucretius in Spenser see, ex., Ayesha Ramachandran, “Edmund Spenser, Lucretian Neoplatonist: Cosmology in the *Fowre Hymnes*,” *Spenser Studies* 26 (2009), 373-412. For a recent investigation of Lucretius in Milton—an account which stands out among literary studies by centering attention squarely on *ataraxia*—see Jesse Hock, “‘The Mind Is Its Own Place’: Lucretian Moral Philosophy in *Paradise Lost*,” in Feisal Mohamed and Patrick Fadely eds., *Milton's Modernities: Poetry, Philosophy, and History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 67-84.

ideal of *ataraxia* in moral philosophy which, I argue here, is the intended fruit of speculation on an atomic and stochastic cosmos. Hutchinson's thoroughgoing critique of Lucretian/Epicurean moral philosophy might seem difficult to square with discussions of modernity in terms of human autonomy and the rise of materialism, yet the critique is no less a part of the modern constitution than, for example, Milton's materialist turn. The core insight of Weber, who suggests a supportive analogy between the affective structures of Protestantism and the social structures of capitalism, make this evident.¹¹² By staging a critique of *ataraxia* and promoting a turn toward affective and existential engagement, Hutchinson gives us a new way of configuring the relationship between Lucretius and the modern age, one in which theodicy, that tangle of questions at the intersection of ethics and ontology, takes center stage.

Although my tendency in this chapter is to read the theodical positions in Hutchinson and Lucretius as philosophically valuable independent of their cultural contexts, it is nevertheless helpful to situate the critique of *ataraxia* in the context of the Restoration, and the culture of religious dissent in 1660s England. The Restoration of the

¹¹² For a classic formulation, see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2001), 67: "That worldly activity should be considered capable of this achievement, that it could, so to speak, be considered the most suitable means of counteracting feelings of religious anxiety, finds its explanation in the fundamental peculiarities of religious feeling in the Reformed Church, which come most clearly to light in its differences from Lutheranism in the doctrine of justification by faith." Weber emphasizes religious anxiety as a stimulus to worldly engagement and socially productive activity, taking this as the hallmark of the Protestant spirit. My account of Hutchinson's affective moral philosophy emphasizes grief and compassion, and takes up the problems of social disharmony and of theodicy (the latter of which, for Weber, Calvinist dogma had practically eliminated). Still, Weber's core insight remains important: affect-structures associated with the interiorities of the Protestant subject help to constitute the modern. To which I add that these affect-structures simultaneously support individuation (as Weber argues) and challenge the autonomy of the eudaimonistic self.

Stuart monarchy in 1660 entailed an attempt to stamp out sectarian religious difference. A series of laws sought to force conformity. N. H. Keeble notes that “[t]he penal religious legislation of the 1660s left no doubt that the Restoration settlement intended not the toleration and perpetuation of an alternative religious tradition but the extirpation, once and for all, of all sentiments about the Reformation not in accord with those of the re-established Episcopalian church.”¹¹³ According to Sharon Achinstein the effect of these laws—an effect which was to last over one hundred and fifty years—was that religious nonconformists were “excluded from office and university, denied legitimate burial in parish churchyards and marriage in their own meeting houses.”¹¹⁴ Although repressed in all these ways and more, the culture of dissent persisted throughout the Restoration period.

Lucy Hutchinson was among the excluded: raised in a household sympathetic to the “Geneva discipline” and married to John Hutchinson (who later served as an officer in the Parliamentary army and signed the death warrant of Charles I) from 1638, Hutchinson’s personal, political, spiritual, and intellectual life was tied to the fortunes of English Puritanism.¹¹⁵ In the 1650s, Hutchinson undertook the full translation of *De rerum natura*, her first major literary effort, and the first recorded attempt of a full translation into English

¹¹³ N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987), 18. But see also Keeble’s more recent work, *Settling the Peace of the Church: 1662 Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), esp. 57-85, where Keeble considers the nuances and complexities in the writings of Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, for whom the suite of laws defining the church settlement is popularly named. Here Keeble shows that for all the imposition of uniformity, there was much bending and adjusting of rules and making of concessions. Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent*, 10, makes a similar point.

¹¹⁴ Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent*, 8.

¹¹⁵ David Norbrook, "Hutchinson [née Apsley], Lucy (1620–1681), poet and biographer." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 7 Jul. 2018. <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-14285>.

of that poem. After the Restoration, John's activities during the Republican period endangered the Hutchinsons greatly.¹¹⁶ He managed to avoid punishment until 1663, when he was arrested on suspicion of being involved in insurrectionary political activity and imprisoned at Sandown Castle in Kent, where he subsequently died in 1664. In all likelihood *Order and Disorder* was written after his death; an anonymous edition of the first five books of the poem appeared in print in 1679.¹¹⁷ Thus the Lucretius translation and the later Biblical epic must be seen as bound up with the political fortunes of English Puritanism and dissent. Her vociferous denunciation of Lucretius, and of her own earlier work as a translator of him, can be read in part as a rejection of the Augustan tendencies of Restoration culture, "the values of the ancients, rewritten as imperial order, balance, openness, cosmopolitanism, and publicity."¹¹⁸

As I will show in this chapter, Hutchinson's theodical project centers on the right experience of grief, an affect dismissed as inappropriate by Stoic and Epicurean moral philosophy, but rehabilitated in the early Christian context by Augustine. The grief in Hutchinson's own biography took shape around profound personal and political loss: the experience of defeat as the Good Old Cause crumbled and gave way to the Restoration monarchy and, bound up with this, the death of her husband.¹¹⁹ Perhaps these experiences

¹¹⁶ Katharine Gillespie, *Women Writing the English Republic, 1625-1681* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 283-6, gives a good, brief account of Hutchinson's life after 1660. Gillespie's reading of *Order and Disorder* as a "Tractatus Theologico-Politico Feminist Alchemicus," drawing together Hutchinson's Biblical epic and several hermetic, Neoplatonic, and alchemical sources, stands out as one of the more exotic interpretations of the poem.

¹¹⁷ Norbrook, "Hutchinson, Lucy," *ODNB*.

¹¹⁸ Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent*, 11.

¹¹⁹ Ross, "Lucy Hutchinson's 'Elegies' and *Order and Disorder*," notes that in the elegies especially "John Hutchinson is a figure who encapsulates personal and political loss, as

are part of what led Hutchinson toward an experiential and, as I have called it, an existential theodical poetics in *Order and Disorder*, so markedly different from those of her contemporary Milton. Be that as it may, it is clear that whereas Milton's project aims at a rationalization and justification of evil, Hutchinson explicitly rejects this kind of theodical approach, and instead focuses squarely on the existential and affective dimension of evil, on how rightly to respond when one encounters the world's ills in lived experience. Rather than mounting a poetic-philosophical exegesis of scripture presenting an etiology of evil, Hutchinson renders stories from Genesis as educative emblems for the rectification of the affects.¹²⁰ Working through a previous sympathetic engagement with the *ataraxia* at the heart of Lucretian ethics, Hutchinson's theodical project revolved around a defense of God's own affective comportment toward the world, His anger and His compassion, His mercy and His grief.¹²¹ This approach shapes Hutchinson's self-presentation and practice

Lucy mourns deeply and personally the loss of a beloved husband and the end of the Good Old Cause" (175).

¹²⁰ Sarah C. E. Ross, *Women, Poetry, and Politics in Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 198: "Hutchinson's propensity to carve an emblem out of the biblical narrative draws on a culture of emblem poetry that flourished in England in the 1630s [in which] the emblem [...] encouraged and codified the typological reading of the Bible as bearing directly on the seventeenth-century world." In the description of the world flood in *Order and Disorder* discussed below, Hutchinson explicitly invokes the emblem tradition. On the kinds of typological reading encouraged by this emblemizing tendency, see Kevin Killeen, *The Political Bible in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹²¹ See Reid Barbour and David Norbrook, "Introduction," in *The Works of Lucy Hutchinson Vol. 1: Translation of Lucretius, Pt. 1: Introduction and Text*, eds. Reid Barbour and David Norbrook, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), lxxxix-lxxxix. Norbrook and Barbour note that Hutchinson's translation shows sensitivity to the Lucretian ethics surrounding pleasure—that it distinguishes carefully between hedonistic pursuit of satisfaction often ascribed to Epicurean philosophy, and the rational detachment it really promotes. They further point to evidence (in Hutchinson's biography of her husband John) of sympathy with an "Epicurean withdrawal from public life" (lxxxix). Yet the same body of evidence demonstrates the impossibility of such withdrawal: for John and Lucy were continually pulled back into public life in dramatic ways. The question for Hutchinson by

as an author of poetry and interpreter of scripture, which is the subject of the next section. Before turning to Hutchinson, though, it will be helpful to lay out the relationship between Epicurean philosophy and the problem of evil, and the role of *De rerum natura* in this relationship in early modernity.

2. Epicurus's Old Questions

In Part 10 of Hume's *Dialogue Concerning Natural Religion* (1779), the character Philo mounts an attack on the anthropomorphic conception of God as in some sense a (or three) Person(s), and on the world as in some sense designed with human happiness in mind: "Is it possible ... that after all these reflections, and countless others that might be suggested, you *still* stick to your anthropomorphism, and assert that the moral attributes of God—his justice, benevolence, mercy, and uprightness—are of the same nature as these virtues in human creatures?" The passage continues:

We grant that his power is infinite: whatever he wills to happen does happen. But neither man nor any other animal is happy; therefore God doesn't will their happiness. His knowledge is infinite: he is never mistaken in his choice of means to any end. But the course of nature doesn't lead to human or animal happiness; therefore nature isn't established for that purpose. Through the whole range of human knowledge, there are no inferences more certain and infallible than these. Well, then, in what respect *do* his benevolence and mercy resemble the benevolence and mercy of men?¹²²

the time of writing *Order and Disorder* had become how to understand being thrown into the play of political fortune, how to respond when engaged in the active struggle between good and evil. *Ataraxia* provides one ethical means, but I will argue here that Hutchinson found it wanting in its inability to deal with evil. Hugh de Quehen [ADD CITE] notes that Lucretius provides some eudaimonistic ways of dealing with that contingency, too, but the gist of my argument is that eudaimonism's promotion of self-management does not allow for the kind of resonant affective response which, for Hutchinson, promotes union between God and human beings.

¹²² David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Dorothy Coleman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 73-4.

Philo then moves on to a classic statement in early modern philosophy of what is called the logical problem of evil: “Epicurus’s old questions have still not been answered. Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”¹²³ The tradition of tracing these questions back to Epicurus—or attributing them to him in the form of quotation, as do many present-day Christians and atheists in the heat of debate—goes back to Lactantius’s (ca. 250 - ca. 325) *De ira dei*.¹²⁴ The thirteenth chapter of that work attributes to Epicurus the following ideas:

God, he says, either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? or why does He not remove them?

And Lactantius adds, perhaps with the Stoics in mind, “I know that many of the philosophers, who defend providence, are accustomed to be disturbed by this argument, and are almost driven against their will to admit that God takes no interest in anything, which Epicurus especially aims at.” For both Lactantius and Hume, and for generations of philosophers and theologians in between, the name of Epicurus was associated with this version of the problem of evil.

¹²³ Hume, *Dialogues*, 74.

¹²⁴ Hutchinson seems to have been more than passingly familiar with Lactantius, an important theologian and rhetorician dubbed the “Christian Cicero” by early humanists. Lucy Hutchinson, *On The Principles of Christian Religion* (London, 1817), cites Lactantius several times, and in one notable passage includes him in a list of authors who summarize “[t]he purer theologie of the heathen, which they either acknowledgd against their wills, or when they intended something else, or when they purposely searcht to trace it out” (286).

As much or more than any other purported feature of the Epicurean philosophy—its valuation of pleasure, its materialism, its mortalism, its theory of human origins—the attribution of this question contributed to early modern perceptions of Epicurus and his mouthpiece and disciple Lucretius as atheistic.¹²⁵ In a compelling recent article, Nicholas Hardy has made the case the *De rerum natura* can be read as a work of natural theology, and that many early modern readers of Lucretius read the poem as a defense of natural law and evidence of a rational (though not intelligent) design in nature, rather than as a celebration of the stochastic dance of atoms.¹²⁶ According to Hardy, readers as diverse as Thomas Creech, Robert Boyle, and Pierre Gassendi read Lucretius’s poem “as a natural theology *manqué*, a hymn to the harmonious cooperation of nature and human reason that happened to draw unusually anti-theistic conclusions.”¹²⁷ In a similar vein, Sarah Hutton and Lynn Sumida Joy have described a process, spearheaded in France by Pierre Gassendi and in England by Walter Charleton, of Christianizing Epicurean philosophy; these philosophers held that Epicurus’s ideas were more compatible with Christian faith than

¹²⁵ On these features of *De rerum natura* and their contribution to perceptions of atheism, see Reid Barbour and David Norbrook, “Introduction,” in *The Works of Lucy Hutchinson Vol. 1: Translation of Lucretius, Pt. 1: Introduction and Text*, eds. Reid Barbour and David Norbrook, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), lxv-lxxxix; lxxxix-xci. The word “atheism” was used in the period to cover a range of beliefs that in some measure denied God’s providential involvement in world affairs; this kind of early modern “atheism” can be seen as a product of renewed attention to the problem of evil. On the term, see Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, trans. Beatrice Gottlieb (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) and David Wootton, “Lucien Febvre and the Problem of Unbelief in the Early Modern Period,” *Journal of Modern History*, 60 (1988), 695-730.

¹²⁶ Nicholas Hardy, “Is the *De rerum natura* a Work of Natural Theology? Some Ancient, Modern, and Early Modern Perspectives,” in *Lucretius and the Early Modern*, eds. David Norbrook, Stephen Harrison, and Philip Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 201-21.

¹²⁷ Hardy, “Is the *De rerum natura* a Work of Natural Theology?,” 221.

those of Aristotle.¹²⁸ Hutchinson's near-contemporary Robert Boyle shared something of this view, although he criticized both Epicurus and Gassendi on other grounds.¹²⁹ Although in this chapter I do emphasize the ethical function of *De rerum natura's* ultimately stochastic ontology, it is important to note that the poem also registers the evident rationality of natural phenomena, and that holding together atomism, natural law, and Christian belief was far from impossible.

Yet as Hume knew, proponents of natural theology run into difficulty when confronting the problem of evil. The demand for "harmonious cooperation of nature and human reason" had been strengthened as a necessary condition for the construction of theistic proofs, but mere rationality in the order of things is not in itself sufficient to demonstrate a Providence working to ensure goodness or happiness where individual human beings are concerned.¹³⁰ The crux of Hume's attack, and what Lactantius most has in mind in critiquing Epicurus, is the idea that there is no accommodating thread that might

¹²⁸ Sarah Hutton, *British Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 61: "Epicurus had a reputation as an atheist, and his materialism was problematic for his early modern readers. However, like other ancient philosophies, Epicureanism was 'Christianized' for seventeenth-century consumption, opening the way for the adoption of Epicurean ideas in natural and moral philosophy. The 'baptism' of Epicurus was the achievement of the French philosopher Pierre Gassendi. Walter Charleton was the most significant disseminator of Epicureanism in England, drawing on him in both his moral and natural philosophy." See also David Norbrook, "Atheists and Republicans: Interpreting Lucretius in Revolutionary England," in *Lucretius and the Early Modern*, eds., David Norbrook, Stephen Harrison, and Philip Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 225-8; Lynn Sumida Joy, *Gassendi the Atomist: Advocate of History in an Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹²⁹ See Hardy, "Is the *De rerum natura* a Work of Natural Theology?," 217-9; Hutton, *British Philosophy in the Seventeenth-Century*, 63.

¹³⁰ The Copernican turn was a watershed moment in the history of the human demand that for the world to be good, it ought to be intelligible. See Hans Blumenberg, *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, trans. Robert Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). I discuss Blumenberg's analysis at some length in the following chapter.

connect human justice with divine justice, human wisdom with divine wisdom, and, crucially for this chapter, human affect with divine affect (hence Lactantius's title, 'On the anger of God'). Even supposing we read *De rerum natura* as a work of natural theology, the universe it portrays, and the kind of reason that governs this universe, is marked by indifference. We can say that regular laws of nature govern both good harvests and plague outbreaks, but if we regard Providence as in some sense the work of an agent with a sense of justice and goodness intelligibly related to the human sense of justice and goodness, then further explanation will be necessary as to why one rather than the other occurs. Lactantius claims that Epicureans reject Providence altogether; Hume, taking what he regards as an Epicurean position, reduces it to an affordance of the bare means of survival for the species, and not a guarantor of individual human (or animal) happiness. Early modern Christianizers of Lucretius might apologize for "unusually anti-theistic conclusions," but there remained a strong tendency to view *De rerum natura* as a text that struggled to make sense of evil, or to offer any practical moral guidance of how to deal with natural evil. Quite famously the poem ends with a long description of the plague at Athens, an unremitting spectacle of suffering similar to the Flood episode in *Order and Disorder* discussed below, but absent any sense that the providential reasons for the plague should guide one toward fear, hope, grief, or any other affective comportment toward the divine. It is unclear whether the seemingly truncated ending of *De rerum natura* is intentional or not; in either case, it heightens the sense that this is a poem working through questions of how to deal with the problem of evil at the levels of theory and of lived experience.¹³¹

¹³¹ Much has been written on the problematic end of *De rerum natura*. For an evaluation that grants intentionality to the poem's end, and refers to some of the scholarly debate about it, see Charles Segall, *Lucretius on Death and Anxiety* (Princeton: Princeton University

Perhaps the two most important open literary-historical questions regarding Hutchinson's relationship to Lucretius is why a Puritan writer found *De rerum natura* so compelling in the first place, and how we are to understand the *volte-face* recorded in the dedicatory epistle of Hutchinson's translation of *De rerum*, and the similarly phrased expressions of repugnance toward Lucretius in the preface to *Order and Disorder*. David Norbrook and others have argued that one major attraction of Lucretius for early modern Protestant and Puritan writers was his sustained attack on *religio*, which fit with the anticlerical agenda of Revolutionary writers who would go on to become Dissenters.¹³² I agree with Norbrook that such anticlericalism appealed to Hutchinson in particular.¹³³ But why the turn away from Lucretius? The evidence assembled in this chapter suggests that the reason centers on what Hume would call in the century after Hutchinson wrote, "Epicurus's old questions," i.e., the problem of evil.¹³⁴ Christianize Epicurus and Lucretius

Press, 1990) 228-37. See also David F. Bright, "The Plague and the Structure of *De rerum natura*," *Laotmus* 30, no. 3 (1971), 607-32.

¹³² David Norbrook, "Atheists and Republicans," 227.

¹³³ Norbrook, "Atheists and Republicans," 243-6.

¹³⁴ Another reason for the turn was likely that Hutchinson came to see how much the proto-natural theology of Lucretius had in common with Socinianism. John Owen, whose theology influenced Hutchinson, had vociferously denounced the Racovian Catechism—the constitutional text of the Socinian movement—in several works. See Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 205-35. "[Owen] thought that Socinus' writing not only attacked Reformed views of justification [as did Arminius]—it also undermined those principles on which religious unity in England was to be based. Socinus had insisted that Christianity was an ethical religion, which demanded good works from all its adherents, and he had also denied that men had any natural knowledge of the deity, emphasising [sic] instead the role of the historical Christ in revealing the will of God. Owen quickly came to see that this aspect of Socinus' writing—his sharp separation between Christianity and the natural ideas of humans—was potentially the most damaging of all to his own plans for the English Church. It implied that religion was an individual and voluntary matter which need not concern the magistrate and it suggested that humans could live quite independently of God or religion" (207). This quotation shows how complicated

as one might, the critique articulated by Lactantius still obtains when reading *De rerum natura*, for in that poem there is no affordance of a theodical solution. The plague scene at the poem's end reinforces the sense that however an individual responds to suffering, the providential order is void of affective content—it is governed by the (metaphorical) retired Epicurean Gods, enjoying the pleasure of perfected detachment and *ataraxia*. Hutchinson may have even read *De rerum natura* as a work of nascent natural theology;¹³⁵ yet the kind of theodical satisfaction she sought was only available from revealed religion over and above the rational evidences of providential order. The emphasis on affect in Hutchinson depends for its spiritual efficacy on the underlying claim that there is indeed a thread of accommodation connecting human grief with divine grief, and that by coming to a right experience of grief in the face of ills, human beings are drawn nearer to a personal deity involved in the lives of individuals.

3. Universal Rack

The preface of *Order and Disorder* declares an intention to anchor the biblical epic in the revealed word of God, eschewing philosophical speculation and poetic flights of fancy. Hutchinson acknowledges that by setting the Genesis narrative to verse she leaves the poem open to censure from two sorts of critics. The first are those who “understand and love the elegancies of poems.” Such readers will find little to like in *Order and Disorder*,

ideas of ‘natural theology’ could become, depending on what conceptions of the divine were thought to be natural or reasonable.

¹³⁵ Although several of Hutchinson's marginal comments register her sense of Lucretius as an atheistic thinker. See Hardy, “Is the *De rerum natura* a Work of Natural Theology?,” 210: “When Lucretius admits that humans seem to have an innate (but nonetheless erroneous) conviction that there is life after death, Hutchinson writes in her margin: ‘How much this poore deluded bewicht mad wretch strives to put out the dimme light of nature which while he contends against he acknowledges.’”

for there is “nothing of fancy in it; no elevation of style, no charms of language.” Hutchinson claims to have no “gift” for such poetic fancy and no desire to employ it in any case:¹³⁶

Had I a fancy, I durst not have exercised it here; for I tremble to think of turning Scripture into a romance; and shall not be troubled at their dislike who dislike on that account, and profess they think no poem can be good that shuts out drunkenness, and lasciviousness, and libelling satire, the themes of all their celebrated songs. (*OD*, 5)¹³⁷

What exactly is meant by the idea of turning scripture “into a romance,” and why Hutchinson is so adamant about avoiding it?¹³⁸ In the first place, Hutchinson likely has in mind here other Biblical epics of the period, such as the Royalist Abraham Cowley’s *Davideis*.¹³⁹ More broadly, Hutchinson intends here is that her work will not be a speculative interpretation of scripture, but will maintain fidelity to the biblical source material. Yet such fidelity is a complicated matter, since every choice involved in turning scripture into verse, from selection of episodes to the widest possible range of formal considerations, bespeaks interpretation. Further, forms of some forms of interpretation deemed ‘natural’ within the horizon of seventeenth-century Biblical hermeneutics might

¹³⁶ The claim reflects Hutchinson’s characteristic caution about characterizing herself as an author. However, as Elizabeth Scott-Baumann points out, Hutchinson’s engagement with the title of poet is complicated, and at times her modesty seems to mask ambition and justified pride in poetic accomplishments. See *Forms of Engagement: Women, Poetry, and Culture 1640-1680* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 203-204.

¹³⁷ Citations are from Lucy Hutchinson, *Order and Disorder*, ed. David Norbrook (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), *OD* in parenthetical citations. Line numbers are cited for all lineated material; for the preface and other unlineated material, page numbers have been used.

¹³⁸ Emily Griffiths Jones, “‘My Victorious Triumphs Are All Thine’: Romance and Elect Community in *Order and Disorder*,” *Studies in Philology* 112, no. 1 (2015), 162-93, notably reads this statement against the grain, and sees in *Order and Disorder* many of the generic elements of romance.

¹³⁹ See Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, “Lucy Hutchinson,” in *The Intellectual Culture of Puritan Women*, Elizabeth Scott-Baumann and Johanna Harris, eds. (New York: Palgrave, 2010), 181ff.

not seem so to those outside.¹⁴⁰ One way Hutchinson’s poem makes good on the promise of faithfulness to the text is by not explicitly bringing in material from outside: consider the marginal glosses of *Order and Disorder*, which refer scripture always back to scripture, suggesting that the Bible is a complete and completely self-interpreting text. As both Elizabeth Scott-Baumann and David Norbrook note, however, the marginal glosses complicate the matter of the verse as or more often than they simply amplify it or resolve problems; Norbrook points out that in Hutchinson’s discussion of human rebellion at the poem’s beginning, “[t]he annotations form a series of counterpoints,” giving “sharp political resonance to the more abstract generalizations of the verse.”¹⁴¹ Further, if the marginal glosses still do not move the reader beyond the text of the bible itself, throughout the poem are allusions to other works including those of pagan philosophy, even of the ‘atheistic’ pagan poet Lucretius. When Hutchinson explicitly rejects “fancy” as a guide to scriptural poetics, then, she is not rejecting interpretation outright, nor is she conflating faithfulness with refusing all extra-biblical knowledge, but only rebuking a specific mode of going beyond scripture itself into the domain of philosophical and historical speculation about scripture.¹⁴²

Hutchinson’s biblical poetics exercise faithfulness toward the scripture by interpreting it in and as a series of devout meditations; authorship and readership work together to perceive and experience the truth of events outlined in Genesis. As Norbrook

¹⁴⁰ For instance, typological reading of scriptural events—particularly those of the Old Testament—was considered to be in a way “natural,” in opposition to allegorical interpretation. See Kevin Killeen, *The Political Bible in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 33-42.

¹⁴¹ Norbrook, “Introduction,” xxvii.

¹⁴² See Scott-Baumann, “Lucy Hutchinson,” 181; and Norbrook, “Introduction,” xv-xxi.

points out in the introduction to *Order and Disorder*, “Hutchinson subtitled the first cantos of her poem ‘Meditations upon the Creation and Fall, as it is recorded in the beginning of Genesis,’” a title which “implies a secondary form of writing, one whose main aim is not to tell a story but to summarize it and suspend the action to discourse on its meaning.”¹⁴³ Yet this description does not quite fit the mode of, for example, the Noah episode, which I claim below is exemplary of Hutchinson’s biblical poetics. There the story is not suspended so that the meaning-making can be taken up as a “secondary” activity; rather, the story itself is extended, specifically in its affective dimensions, as details are imagined and added to the story itself which guide the meditation deeper into a vivid, mournful compassion. The details so added encode Hutchinson’s political and ethical aims for the poem.

Despite Hutchinson’s own disavowals, then, it is precisely because *Order and Disorder* does in fact take certain liberties in converting the scriptural text into poetry, that the preface records an anxiety about other critics, those who would “think Scripture profaned by being descanted on in numbers.” Against these critics Hutchinson offers a twofold defense: on the one hand, “a great part of the Scripture was originally written in verse;” on the other, believers “are commanded to exercise our spiritual mirth in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (*OD*, 5). Yet Hutchinson’s departures from the scriptural account in Genesis veer, as often as not, toward a mournful, dark, even grotesque imagination of the events presented in Genesis rather than toward spiritual mirth.

This observation about the affective charge of *Order and Disorder* links the biblical epic with the set of Hutchinson’s elegies uncovered and published by David Norbrook in

¹⁴³ Norbrook, “Introduction,” xxv.

the 1990s.¹⁴⁴ Sharon Achinstein, who discusses the post-Restoration elegies under the rubric of a “poetics of darkness,” observes in them “an interlacing of a grief over civil war atrocity that she would rather keep private, and protest against the relentless theatre that has become the public sphere.”¹⁴⁵ This same admixture of grief and political protest infuses the passages in *Order and Disorder* where Hutchinson’s poetics of darkness enjoins “spiritual mirth” and praise for God’s providential guidance. In such passages, political and affective concerns blend together, linked inextricably with each other, with both militating against the *ataraxic* suspicion of political engagement characteristic of the Epicureanism of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*. It is precisely when Hutchinson’s imagination turns toward this poetics of darkness with its mournful contemplation of suffering, that the specific critique of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura* comes most clearly to the fore.

In Hutchinson’s portrayal of the events surrounding the life of Noah and the world-destroying flood in *Order and Disorder*’s seventh canto, we can see these aspects of the text’s biblical poetics in action. In order to understand how and why Hutchinson departs from the Genesis text, and how these departures critique Lucretian ethics, we can begin with the apocalyptic description of the flood in Genesis:

Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man: All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died. And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and

¹⁴⁴ David Norbrook, “Lucy Hutchinson’s ‘Elegies’ and the Situation of the Republican Woman Writer,” *English Literary Renaissance* 27.3 (1997): 468-521.

¹⁴⁵ Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton’s England*

Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark. And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days.¹⁴⁶

Striking here is the compression of time and space—one hundred and fifty days worth of suffering, in an event encompassing the entire world—into a few trenchant verses. The passage calls to mind Erich Auerbach’s discussion of the representational strategies at work in the story of Abraham and Isaac in *Mimesis*. Auerbach is particularly taken with the “blank duration” of the journey to the place—itsself suspended in a kind of void—appointed for the sacrifice. By contrasting the Elohist’s representational strategy to that of Homeric epic, Auerbach tries to captures the grave reticence of the Biblical material that provides the basis for Hutchinson’s poem. The scriptural style is marked by:

the externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else left in obscurity; the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feelings remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence [...]¹⁴⁷

But the three-days journey of Abraham is dwarfed by the sheer magnitude of “blank duration” implicit in the Flood story. Five months worth of gradual, continual suffering and death are given the space of four sentences stripped down to bare factual reportage. The repetition in the Genesis passage lends its account an emphatic air; the calamitous event is rendered in bold outline, stripped of detail. As I will shortly demonstrate, Hutchinson’s “Meditation” upon this passage takes up the task of rendering those hundred and fifty days sensible through filling out its details, letting imagination play over the events described, amplifying the biblical account yet not speculating into causes and

¹⁴⁶ Gn. 7:19-23 KJV.

¹⁴⁷ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Thought*, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 11.

reasons. Entering into the “silence” of the scriptural account, the biblical poetics of *Order and Disorder* conjecture at what must have been the “thoughts and feelings” of those involved. By doing so Hutchinson’s poetics turn the event of cosmic maritime disaster into an emblem (“The Holy Spirit drew the old world thus / To be our emblem” (OD 7.193)) for contemplation, a form of contemplation meant to evoke precisely the affects of grief and compassion which Lucretius’s shipwreck scenes tacitly reject.

Before turning directly to the description of the flood, we may read in the lead-up to that event some clues that Lucretius is on Hutchinson’s mind. *Order and Disorder’s* seventh canto begins by picking up the patriarchal descent from Adam through Seth and Enoch down to Noah. The history is marked by a continual turning away from God and toward brutish pleasures—pleasures reminiscent of the Restoration society. Hutchinson specifically targets the sins of sexual license and adultery, sensual indulgence in food and drink, and flaunting of wealth in grand clothing and estates—all three of which, as N. H. Keeble has written, were frequently attacked in sermons and satires, and all three of which had a basis in fact.¹⁴⁸ The poem reports of Adam’s descendants:

They thought themselves from pupillage now free;
Their guardian gone, joyed in their liberty,
Through which their sure and swift destruction came.
Yet triumph they in their obdurate frame
As if their stout sins had caused God to yield
And leave them masters of the quitted field.
As madmen who their friendly chains had broke,
So raged they, gotten out of that safe yoke
Which was a curb to their licentious will
While waking conscience checked them in their ill.
While heaven shined and rich fruits crowned the earth
They wholly gave themselves to feasts and mirth,
Ate, drunk, built piles, got children and new wives,

¹⁴⁸ See N. H. Keeble, *The Restoration: England in the 1660s* (Malden: Blackwell, 2002), 171-182.

As if no danger threatened their lewd lives
And their first natural impressions were
Vain superstitions and a childish fear;
Boasting they had attained to be wise
When they with manly courage could despise
Fictions of God and Hell that did control
A vulgar, weak, deluded, pious soul. (*OD* 7.117-36)

If it was not abundantly clear that through this depiction of a world run riot, Hutchinson is taking aim at the “licentious” skeptics and atheists of the Restoration court, the next line clarifies: “So run the old world then, so do they now” (*OD* 7.137).¹⁴⁹ Norbrook’s notes point out the connection here to the courtly culture of ‘atheism,’ with its interest in materialist philosophy and specifically atomism.¹⁵⁰ Biographically interesting is the fact that the Earl of Rochester, scion of the libertinism, atheism, and materialism of the Restoration court, was related to Lucy Hutchinson by marriage, and so may have been a specific topical reference for passages critical of these features of courtly culture in *Order and Disorder*.¹⁵¹ Lucretius’s *De rerum* itself, and Hutchinson’s complex feelings about her

¹⁴⁹ For Hutchinson, the “old world” remains present alongside the new, just as Adam (the “old man”) and Christ (the “new man”) are copresent forces in the historical period between Incarnation and Apocalypse, and in the lives of individual believers. The passage demonstrates Hutchinson making use of a typological hermeneutic of Biblical interpretation described by Kevin Killeen, *The Political Bible in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 35: “The typological shifts by which figures of the Old Testament could be prefigurative of both the New and of contemporary events were discerned in a reading practice that insisted on a constant negotiation of meaning between text and event-in-history and a perpetual modulation between the divine political presence in the Bible and the providential ‘evidence’ of God’s action in the present [...] Typology purported to discover the conjoined nature of historically disparate events or figures.” See also Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 129-137.

¹⁵⁰ The most notorious of the Royalist materialist natural philosophers was Hobbes, who was part of the intellectual circle around Charles II in France during the Republican experiments in England. Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651) advances an unwavering materialist natural philosophy, as well as a strong defense of monarchical government.

¹⁵¹ See David Norbrook, “Hutchinson [née Apsley], Lucy (1620–1681), poet and biographer.” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 5 Jul. 2018: “In the new political

work translating that poem, are partly formed in response to the fact that Epicurean / Lucretian ideas originally thought to support Puritan spiritual and intellectual culture by confronting superstition were being conscripted to the service of the Augustan Restoration culture.

Back to Noah's world: God continues to care providentially for the denizens of the old world, despite their willful rejection of Him:

His watchful providence for them employed,
Nor left the wretched world without a guide,
But wisely led and turned their violent streams
To ends that were not in their thoughts nor aims;
Wrought their deliverance, danger did prevent,
When they miscalled his high help accident,
Nor owned nor blessed that unseen powerful hand
By whose support Nature's loose frame did stand. (*OD* 7.149-56)

The mistaken vision of those who imagine the world as utterly stochastic, created and ruled by the accident of the atomic swerve ("this Casuall, Irrationall dance of Attomes" (*DRN* D.68), echoes language Hutchinson used to decry Lucretian materialism in the dedicatory epistle of her translation of *De rerum*. Writing of the plight of heathen philosophers, who were endowed with consciousness of sin but lacked revelation of its remedy, Hutchinson explains:

they set up their vaine imaginations in the roome of God, and devize superstitious foolish services to avert his wrath, & propitiate his favour, suitable to their devized God, inventing such fables of their Elizium & Hell, & other joyes & tortures of those places, as made this Author & others turne them into allegories, and thinke they treated more reverently of Gods, when they placd them above the cares & disturbances of humane affairs, and set

order atheism was becoming fashionable among courtiers, notably the earl of Rochester, son of her cousin Anne Wilmot, who had intervened for her husband in 1660. Her own early translation of Lucretius was now returning to haunt her. Learning that an unauthorized manuscript was in circulation, she had a new copy made and presented to her friend Arthur Annesley, earl of Anglesey, with a dedication denouncing modern atheists as even worse than the deluded pagan poet."

them in an unperturbed rest & felicity, leaving all things here, to Accident & Chance, denying that determinate wise Councill and Order of things they could not dive into, and deriding Heaven & Hell, Eternal Rewards & Punishments, as fictions in the whole, because the instances of them in particular were so ridiculous, as seemd rather stories invented to fright children, then to perswade reasonable men. (*DRN* D.107-21).

Throughout the dedication, Hutchinson connects the ancient atomism with the skeptical philosophical stances of Royalists such as Hobbes, or Restoration court figures like Rochester (“the old comtemplative Heathen revivd, & brought forth in new dresses” (*DRN* D.95-6)). According to these passages, the Lucretian view of the world order is subject to a twofold error: on the one hand, cosmic order is conceived of as emerging from pure chance and accident; while on the other, natural order itself is seen as autonomous and independent from divinity, as the gods rest in their own perfected *ataraxia*, free of all concern with the goings-on of the world. Opposed to naïve trust in natural order is Hutchinson’s invocation, on the eve of the catastrophic flood, of “Nature’s loose frame,” of a world that would easily run to chaos without the constant interventions of Providence on the part of an active, involved, and personal divinity. In sum, then, in the lead-up to the flood event, we can detect several moments of incipient critique of Lucretian positions, and we see also that these critiques are bound up with topical political critiques.

Though Hutchinson writes, concerning the worldwide disaster of the flood and Noah’s experience, that “[t]hought cannot reach this universal rack” (*OD* 7.485) far enough to encompass it, *Order and Disorder* seeks virtue in the attempt. Noah has constructed his ark and its passengers have miraculously come aboard:

Meanwhile, at the first hour, the storm begun.
Black threatening clouds obscured the noonday sun
And added double horror to the night
Wherein no friendly star gave forth its light,
Those cataracts which from angry Heaven came

Seeming to have quenched out all its radiant flame
Except that whirling, cloud-engendered fire
That doth even in its dreadful birth expire.
Thick did these flames break thorough all the sky,
Where rattling south winds as their ushers fly.
Prodigious thunders followed the dire blaze,
Filling all hears with terror and amaze
While they the rocks, the oaks and mountains rent,
Nor with less fury tore the firmament.
These fragors thus unjointing the whole frame,
Heav'n and Earth Chaos once again became. (OD 401-16).

In terms of the question about biblical poetics and turning scripture into a romance, we may note here that *Order and Disorder* goes far beyond the account given in Genesis, filling in the grisly details of the scene. The passage serves as a ready corrective for those who might want to claim that Hutchinson's biblical poetics cause her to hew somehow slavishly to what is given in the scripture (a claim often made in contrasting *Order and Disorder* with Milton's more speculative supplementation in *Paradise Lost*).¹⁵² More positively, the additions here amplify the sense of grief at beholding the scene, stoking the compassion of the reader, and the above passage is only the beginning of Hutchinson's dilatory meditations on it:

Nor did the wretches single deaths endure,
Not less distracted now than late secure,
Struck with dire apprehension, which is still
The most tormenting plague in every ill.
Though sudden the surprise, their death was slow,
That terror might by the protraction grow.
Some run from the ascending floods in vain,
By falling torrents hurried back again;

¹⁵² See, for instance, Joanna Piccotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 403: "In assuming narrative responsibility for innocent existence, [Milton] engaged not in fiction but experimentation: an ongoing effort of rational reconstruction. The distinction was lost on many of his contemporaries. Lucy Hutchinson's hexameral epic *Order and Disorder*, clearly written as a corrective to *Paradise Lost*, is prefaced by the disclaimer, 'I tremble to think of turning Scripture into a romance'; the poem consists largely of pious refusals to fill in gaps in the Genesis account."

Some climbed up the high hills but only there
Longer in death's sad expectation were,
At last as certainly destroyed as those
Whom the first rising billows did enclose.
Some from high towers the desolation viewed,
Whom thither the triumphing flood pursued
And made them know, the walls that most aspire
Yield small defence against th'Almighty's ire.
[...]
Some vessels got, but could not then provide
Food to sustain their lives, and starving died.
Some pushed the billows back, but with those oars
Could not convey themselves to any shores;
Their strength they did in vain endeavors spend
And fainting could no more with fate contend. (*OD* 7.453-78)

We continue to see the affectively charged intent of these meditations on the influx of universal disorder, marked out by words explicitly evocative of compassion: the “terror” and “sad expectation” of the flood’s victims solicits the reader’s own emotional response. By presenting a scene of oceanic disaster in a way meant to elicit the emotions of grief and compassion, *Order and Disorder* actively reworks the “shipwreck with spectator” motif in *De rerum natura*. Attentive readers familiar with Hutchinson’s translation of that work would notice here a direct allusion: there are spectators of this scene just as in the Lucretian text, those who climb to “high towers,” only to be swallowed up themselves. The language here echoes the Lucretius translation, which speaks of “that high tower which wise mens learning builds” (DRN 2.8), i.e., the philosophical wisdom enabling the spectatorial distance of the sage, which the safety of shore in the shipwreck motif metaphorizes. The appearance of such “high towers” in *Order and Disorder*, the “walls that most aspire” to the security of philosophical wisdom, make clear the critical reference to this passage. And the experience of the inhabitants of those towers—they are not only engulfed in the universal wreck, but are first convicted of their vain aspirations—stands in stark contrast

to the spectatorial pleasure described by Lucretius. Further supplementing the Genesis account, *Order and Disorder*'s assertion that other sailors joined Noah in attempting to survive the flood on ships, but "[c]ould not convey themselves to any shores," also casts a sidelong glance to at the image of shipwreck with spectator, since it works to show that the shore itself, like the "high towers," are ultimately unreliable, offering only an illusion of the safe distance from disorder and concomitant emotional upheaval—the secure ground upon which *ataraxic* pleasure grounds itself. Hutchinson's description of the flood event stands as a meditative reminder that such safe harbor cannot be attained through the philosophical exercises of the pagan schools; wherever it exist, as on the ark, it comes by a grace that transcends the wisdom of any individual human being. Absent providence, or in cases where God's benevolence turns to wrath, then "Nature's loose frame" immediately reverts to a world-consuming chaos and disorder. These two moments in the description of the flood show Hutchinson offering direct critiques of *ataraxia*, echoing the exact language used in the translation of *De rerum*'s shipwreck with spectator passage. The "high towers" of philosophical wisdom, the safe harbors of the sage's mind, offer no protection from the universal flood.

After describing the slow death of swimming beasts and the birds of the air—another particularly grievous passage, since these creatures have not come in for the same strident moral critique as their human counterparts—we read:

With chokèd carcasses the seas grew black.
Dead shepherds floated with their drownèd sheep
And larger herds with those that did them keep.
The winds awhile with lighter things did play
Till ruder storms carried them all away.
The gallants' scarves and feathers, soldiers' tents,
The poor man's rags and princes' ornaments,
The silken curtains and the women's veils,

Themselves too borne up with light robes like sails,
Banded in sport awhile, at last did all
Equally lost into the hazard fall. (*OD* 7.486-96)

This closing note gives the lie to Hutchinson's self-effacing claim to have no "gift" for poetic invention, for it encodes a complex critique of the affectations of courtly culture, as well as a powerful statement about the transitory nature of political authority and social hierarchy, in a single striking image. There is a specific emphasis here on attire. Obsession with clothing went hand in hand, as N. H. Keeble points out, with the emphasis on "refinement in manners," the "polite, civil, and decent" bearing not only of courtiers, but also of Restoration culture more broadly.¹⁵³ Such material markers of social station and worldly aspiration are made to float "like sails," a grimly ironic simile driving home the inability of either these commodities or the wealth they conspicuously signify to provide any shelter.

The description of the biblical flood in *Order and Disorder* mounts a critique of the Lucretian ethical ideal of *ataraxia*, and along with that the underlying ontology of atomistic materialism. I have shown also that Hutchinson's biblical poetics in *Order and Disorder* do move beyond scripture in determinative ways, and that the author's proclamation of faithfulness to scripture does not mean the text takes no liberties with its material. The specific movement beyond scripture in *Order and Disorder*—a meditative elaboration of biblical narrative imagined as material historical event—invites emotional response, filling in the declamatory account in Genesis with details encoding complex critiques of ancient and contemporary philosophical and political positions. In the next section, I will clarify the exact nature of, and reasons for, Hutchinson's critique, via a discussion of the

¹⁵³ See Keeble, *The Restoration*, 180.

reevaluation of grief and compassion in Augustine, specifically *City of God*, Book IX. Drawing on the dedication of Hutchinson's *De rerum* translation, as well as her prose *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, I will present further instances where scenes of shipwreck encode the critique of Lucretian / Epicurean ethics. Following this, I explore the connection between Lucretian atomism and ataraxia, between the ontological vision of the world presented in *De rerum natura*, and the ethical stance held out as ideal. This exploration at the nexus of ontology and ethics entails consideration of theodicy.

4. Atoms and *Ataraxia*

Especially within the discipline of literary studies, a substantial portion of the scholarship on Hutchinson and Lucretius—and more generally on Lucretius in the early modern period—has centered on the reception of the pagan poet's atomistic materialism. I have already mentioned Stephen Greenblatt's *The Swerve*, which has prompted historians and literary critics to explore just how far, whether and in what ways, the idea of an atomic *clinamen* (rather than divine creation) at the origin of things may have helped usher in the modern age of the autonomous, freethinking subject. In this section I will briefly review a bit of the relevant criticism on Hutchinson and Lucretian materialism, before turning toward my principle argument: that the atomic natural philosophy and the ethical ideal of *ataraxia* cannot ultimately be separated, and that the celebrated physical theory is in large part instrumental, serving the ethical ideal, and is more rightly considered as a scaffolding for moral philosophy than as a theoretical value in its own right.

The discussion of Lucretian influence on *Order and Disorder* has largely centered on the question of how seriously Hutchinson took Epicurean atomism while she was translating Lucretius in the 1640s and 1650s, and whether she retained or jettisoned any

atomist-materialist notions after the catastrophic collapse of the Good Old Cause and her turn toward biblical epic. It is important to note here that atomic philosophy and Christian piety were not necessarily viewed as incompatible. Quite the contrary: Pierre Gassendi, Walter Charleton, Jan Comenius, Robert Boyle and others maintained that an atomic view of the natural world was more consistent with Christian teaching than was the older Aristotelian model.¹⁵⁴ This means Hutchinson's move away from the active study of pagan philosophy and toward scriptural meditation need not imply a concomitant rejection of atomic materialism. In this spirit Cassandra Gorman reads *Order and Disorder* as combining "Platonic, Lucretian and Calvinist terminology to establish a material experience that accommodates spiritual knowledge."¹⁵⁵ That is, Hutchinson remains a materialist of some stripe, and that materialism does not forbid but rather stands behind and strengthens Calvinistic / Augustinian references to sinful and redeemed bodies, and Platonically-inflected talk of forms. Gorman is right, I think, to point out that Hutchinson's engagement with materialism and atomism is every bit as complex as Milton's, and not reducible to simple binaries.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Reid Barbour, "Lucy Hutchinson, Atomism and the Atheist Dog," in *Women, Science and Medicine 1500-1700*, ed. Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 1997), 128-131. See also Norbrook, "Lucretian Sublime," 7: "Natural philosophers were finding the traditional Aristotelian framework for comprehending the universe inadequate and Epicurean atomism proved a more effective instrument for understanding many phenomena. In the 1640s and 1650s the philosopher Pierre Gassendi published a series of massive works on Epicureanism which rehabilitated all its aspects, and claimed that the very implausibility of atoms' coming together by sheer chance to form a cosmos was a useful proof for the existence of God. Lucretius could then be valued as an opponent not of religion but of superstition."

¹⁵⁵ Cassandra Gorman, "Lucy Hutchinson, Lucretius, and Soteriological Materialism," *The Seventeenth Century* 28.3 (2013): 293-309, and see esp. 306.

¹⁵⁶ Gorman, "Materialism," 306.

Jonathan Goldberg takes this recognition further still, and seeks to read back from Lucretius and into *Order and Disorder* a critique of notions of identity and difference that would destabilize even the critical assertion Hutchinson is negotiating a series of contradictions or tensions between *De rerum* and Puritan orthodoxies. In *Order and Disorder* Goldberg sees Hutchinson as “compulsively” attempting “to place God where Lucretian matter prevails,” which for him means “to place God at the invisible location of the atoms.”¹⁵⁷ The strength of Goldberg’s account lies in his recognition of a pervasive materialist thread running consistently through Hutchinson’s retelling of Genesis. But his argument tends toward an improbable conclusion: Hutchinson seems to emerge as a kind of proto- or perhaps crypto-Spinozan, a poet and thinker in whom the prospect of “*Deus sive Natura*” is already made available, even if *Order and Disorder* and other works leave that availability latent, waiting to be actualized by later critics.

Far less attention has been given the critique of the specific Lucretian ethical ideal of *ataraxia* in early modern Biblical epic. A notable recent exception is Jesse Hock’s essay in the collection *Milton’s Modernities*. Hock works with *Paradise Lost* rather than *Order and Disorder*, but makes the case that Satan in that poem at times figures forth the failures of *ataraxia*. A recent review essay by John Leonard wonders how the figure of Belial, whose lines about “thoughts that wander through eternity” directly translate Lucretius, might fit into the argument Hock puts forward. However that may be, taken together, the essay and Leonard’s response confirm that a critique of *ataraxia* from the standpoint of

¹⁵⁷ Jonathan Goldberg, “Lucy Hutchinson Writing Matter,” *English Literary History* 73.1 (2006): 275-301, 293. The essay is reproduced in Goldberg, *The Seeds of Things: Theorizing Sexuality and Materiality in Renaissance Representations* (New York: Fordham, 2009), 122-178.

Christian ethics was on the mind of Hutchinson's contemporary. We have already begun to see that Hutchinson's critique in the flood episode is more direct, more sustained, and more intently focused on metaphorical ramifications of the seminal Lucretian image of shipwreck with spectator than what we find in Milton's epic. This critique of *ataraxia* goes hand in hand with a critique of Epicurean natural philosophy, since the theory of the atoms was not an end in itself, rather serving as a theoretical instrument effecting the therapeutic attainment of an ataraxic stance toward the turbulence of the world.

Catharine Wilson, who has charted the progress of Epicureanism through the early modern period, puts this point very succinctly: "Epicureanism in its original form was not especially favourable to the open-ended investigation of nature."¹⁵⁸ Theoretical curiosity was not in and of itself a value for the Epicureans and Lucretius; the value lay rather in the therapeutic effect of repeatedly running up against the atoms, which were the absolute limits of knowledge. On the Epicurean-Lucretian account, "[o]ne should believe that all celestial phenomena, even [and especially] the most alarming, have atomic explanations, as there are no coherent alternatives to that position, but it is counterproductive to try for more."¹⁵⁹ The atomic theory of Lucretius stakes its claim to validity not on its truth value, but on its functional value for ethics; it is ultimately a "technique of demonstrating the affective neutrality of all possible theories about the natural phenomena that surround man and fill him with uncertainty."¹⁶⁰ The "affective neutrality" of all theory is the point; for the ancient Epicurean, the materialist, atomist theory is a therapeutic instrument.

¹⁵⁸ Catharine Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 34.

¹⁵⁹ Wilson, *Epicureanism*, 35.

¹⁶⁰ Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 263.

This strain of Epicureanism, with ontology in service of ethics, flourished in the seventeenth century alongside other materialist lines of thought.¹⁶¹ There is also quantifiable evidence of an increasing interest in the atomistic theories contained in *De rerum*, beginning in the late sixteenth century.¹⁶² By the time of Hutchinson's translation, Gassendi and others had created a strong interest in Lucretius's atomistic theory, and reimagined its ethical commitments in terms compatible with Christian belief.¹⁶³ Hutchinson's marginal glosses in the translation of *De rerum* show that she found the passages concerning natural philosophy noteworthy as well. Yet such notations do not necessarily imply an interest in ontology and natural philosophy for its own sake, nor an approval of theoretical curiosity. The flood episode in *Order and Disorder* demonstrates that Hutchinson was more concerned with how Lucretius's atomism militated against an appropriate affective experience of the meaning-laden processes underlying natural events. Thus Hutchinson recognized a fact that some of the more experimentally-minded early modern interpreters of Lucretius overlooked: that the atomic hypothesis in Lucretius was never meant to stand alone; it was rather intended to provide speculation with an absolute limit, and so to delimit the range of the sage's affective response to disturbing events in the

¹⁶¹ Wilson, *Epicureanism*, 35.

¹⁶² Ada Palmer, "Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 73, no. 3 (2012), 395-416, see esp. 415.

¹⁶³ On the Christianization of Lucretius, see Hutton, *British Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century*; Norbrook, "Atheists and Republicans"; and Joy, *Gassendi the Atomist*. Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 1983), 211, helpfully compares Gassendi with Boyle, observing that both thinkers "seek *one* hypothesis to explain the phenomenon [...] not in order to produce theoretical reassurance or practical indifference but rather in order to render the phenomenon itself producible independently of its real conditions in nature." Both Gassendi and Boyle, that is, put the atomic hypothesis to work in the service of human constructive capacity and experimentalism, rather than taking it as a therapeutic premise whose value is mainly in giving one "theoretical reassurance or practical indifference."

world by suggesting that beyond the limit imposed by the atoms, meaning is dissolved into the utterly stochastic churning of unintelligible forces. The atoms are to inquiry what the Pillars of Hercules were to the classical world: they furnish theory a *nec plus ultra*.

Let us look again at the signature Lucretian image of shipwreck with spectator, informed now by the foregoing observations about the essential connection between atomism and *ataraxia*. The lines begin book two, and so follow directly on Hutchinson's proem, which I quoted above. The passage reads:

Pleasant it is, when rough winds seas deforme,
On shore to see men labour in the storme;
Not that our pleasure springs from their distresse,
But from the safetie we our selues possesse.
Pleasant, when without danger tis beheld,
To see two engag'd armies in the feild;
But nothing a more pleasant prospect yields,
Than that high tower which wise mens learning builds,
Where well secur'd we wandring troopes survey,
Who in a maze of error search their way,
For witt and glorie earnestly contend,
Both day and night in vaine endeavors spend,
To hord vp wealth, and swim in full delights.
O wretched soules whom ignorance benights! (*DRN* 2.1-14)

The sage stands on the terra firma of the shore, looking out at a scene of shipwreck, enjoying a pleasure carefully distinguished from *Schadenfreude*, but which still takes the suffering of others as a signifier of the security of the philosopher, rather than an ethical problem for her. Formally interesting here is the slight irregularity of the line "Than that high tower which wise mens leaning builds," in which the word "tower" potentially stretches out over the monosyllable which would ensure regular pentameter. Perhaps Hutchinson encodes a subtle, formal critique of the self-construction of the sage by bending

the poetic construction of the line.¹⁶⁴ In any case, the ethics of the autonomous, eudaimonistic self here is conditional upon the philosophical achievement of aesthetic distance from a catastrophe in which only the others are entangled, and this through their folly and thirst for distinction, their desire for “witt and glorie.” Here the Epicurean sage resembles Lucretius’s gods, who have removed themselves entirely outside the sphere of mundane concern and the affairs of humanity, so as to enjoy the pleasure of a permanent and perfected *ataraxia*.

Hans Blumenberg reads Lucretius’s invention as both a culmination and contradiction of the “theory ideal of classical Greek philosophy.” For the sake of argument let us take the generalization at face value: Blumenberg asserts that the Greek theory ideal accentuates the felicity of the observer of the starry heavens; the benefits of philosophy come through the contemplation of the noble objects of theoretical inquiry themselves. But in Lucretius:

what the spectator enjoys is not the sublimity of the objects his theory opens up for him but his own self-consciousness, over against the whirl of atoms out of which everything that he observes is constituted, including himself. The cosmos is no longer the Order whose contemplation fills the observer with happiness (*Eudaemonia*). It is at most the remaining assurance that such a firm ground exists at all, beyond the reach of the hostile element.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, “Lucy Hutchinson, Gender, and Poetic Form,” *The Seventeenth Century* 30, no. 2 (2015): 265-80, describes several instances of equally subtle poetic effects achieved by metric variation in Order and Disorder and in the De rerum translation. Baumann points out that willingness to see intention in such irregularities often breaks along gender lines: a textual irregularity that reads as intentional in Milton or Cowley is more likely to be dismissed as sloppiness in Hutchinson. Attending to poetic form in Hutchinson with the same kind of care as one would attend to it in Milton helps restore the balance.

¹⁶⁵ Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck With Spectator: Paradigm for a Metaphor of Existence*, trans. Steven Rendall (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 26-7.

Thus the pursuit of *ataraxia* as an ethical ideal shifts the locus of philosophical value away from the cosmic and/or worldly objects of inquiry—away, in fine, from the natural-philosophical theory of the atoms and all the sublimity of their chaos, *clinamen*, and coming into apparent order—and toward the “self-consciousness” of the observer. The “hostile element” in the atomic theory is ubiquitous, constituting both body and world; therefore the only secure harbor is in the *psyche* of the sage who has learned to treat all theoretical explanations of natural phenomena as ultimately indifferent, since in the end they all must run against the absolute limit of thought provided by the atomic hypothesis. Driving the point about the ultimate indifference of theory home, Blumenberg continues:

When Lucretius resorts once again to the metaphor of distress at sea and of shipwreck, he accordingly speaks of his universe of randomly moving atoms as an ocean of matter (*pelagus materiae*), from which the forms of nature are thrown onto the beach of visible appearance, like the debris from a massive shipwreck (*quasi naufragiis magnis multisque coortis*), as a warning to mortals of the perils of the sea. It is only because the supply of atoms is inexhaustible that the catastrophes of physical reality continue to be fruitful in forms and to allow the man standing on the shore of appearance to observe a certain regularity. One sees what the *indicium mortabilis* (advice to mortals) means here: man does well to be content with the spectator’s role and not to abandon his philosophical standpoint before and above the natural world. As an individual, he can gain no advantage from the identity of catastrophe and productivity in this theory of an ever-developing, ever-dissolving universe.¹⁶⁶

For the Epicurean (like Lucretius), the objects of theory are no longer a locus of value, but only the theoretical stance itself, with its assumption of distance from the sublime chaos underpinning apparent order, which theory regards as an unwitting byproduct of infinite disaster. And so the question of affect comes once again to the fore. The idea that a mind properly buffered by philosophical wisdom, having achieved the proper spectatorial

¹⁶⁶ Blumenberg, *Shipwreck*, 27-8

distance from the chaotic dance of atoms, could by this distance become affectively immunized from the turbulence of the world, can more readily be seen as virtuous in the case that the ultimate reality grasped by theory really is a matter of indifference. Even the Epicurean gods depend for their happiness on the attainment of this distance as they, “having passed through philosophy to their situation outside the worlds [...] are neither the authors nor the administrators of what happens in the world and are concerned wholly with themselves.”¹⁶⁷

But if the reality posited in a cosmology is not an object of indifference with respect to human beings; if, that is, there is not only a providential order of things (as the Stoics thought) but if that order has a personally involved author and administrator, one’s affective stance toward the world and its beings, oneself and all the others who find themselves within that world, must become quite different. A change of affective comportment under such circumstances would appear to be required, since the events that befall others have a meaning which encompasses the self. The line, essential to Stoic and Epicurean ethics, between my ends and values and the ends and values of others is blurred, since both are subsumed within a universal and all-embracing providential order, one requiring vigilant discernment so that its meanings, and their import respecting one’s own salvation, will not be missed. Hutchinson’s critique of Lucretian ethical philosophy, with its revaluation of grief and compassion as affects that respond appropriately to the truth of human suffering in the world, turns on just such a perception of authorship and meaning in the world. It also draws on Augustinian philosophical anthropology, articulated in the

¹⁶⁷ Blumenberg, *Shipwreck*, 27.

course of early Christianity's conflict with eudaimonism. It is to this early Christian background, and Hutchinson's adaptation of it, that I turn in the next section.

5. Compassion and Grief

The following excursion into Augustine will help us to understand the motives for Hutchinson's critique of Lucretian ethics, as well as to explain more generally the importance of emotion in Hutchinson's work. In a recent article on Hutchinson's religious prose, Elizabeth Clarke has noted that one distinguishing feature of the treatise *On the Principles of Christian Religion* (1668?) is the emphasis on affect:

Most of the last part of the treatise seems to be dedicated to how it feels to be a Christian: how the human believer discerns the presence of a Divine Spirit dwelling in her and how she facilitates its operations. The 'duties' Lucy Hutchinson talks about, which are the way a human believer relates to the divine presence, are the most original aspects of this theological treatise, and their very difference from the way 'works' are understood in the Arminian-Antinomian quarrel helps to illuminate the freshness of the theological thinking that is going on here.¹⁶⁸

The "duties" Hutchinson specifies are all what we might call affective in character: the list is made up of joy, delight, fear, desire, hope, and confidence.¹⁶⁹ Commenting on this list of "duties" in the context of debates around Antinomianism and the necessity of works, Clarke comments:

These are certainly not what Antinomians would refer to as 'works'—they are aspects of the believer's relationship with God, resembling what look like 'emotions' rather than 'duties'. This final section of *Principles* is, however, devoted to 'inward worship'. Hutchinson is very clear that 'inward worship' must accompany all 'outward worship'. It seems that Lucy Hutchinson is redefining 'duties' not as what Antinomians call 'works' but as something else—emotions, or what would be called

¹⁶⁸ Elizabeth Clarke, "Contextualizing the Woman Writer: Editing Lucy Hutchinson's Religious Prose," in *Editing Early Modern Women*, eds. Sarah C. E. Ross and Paul Salzman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 93.

¹⁶⁹ Clarke, "Contextualizing," 90-1.

‘motions’ in the seventeenth century—holy impulses produced by the Holy Spirit.¹⁷⁰

I quote this essay at some length because it shows that the turn toward affect and “holy impulses” of an emotional kind form the distinguishing conceptual basis of Hutchinson’s theology in general.

Further support for this is given by Mark Burden, who has shown that in Hutchinson’s translation of John Owen’s theological treatise *Theologoumena*, affect plays a key role. Without digressing too far: Owen’s treatise describes the growth of pagan philosophy out of the corruption of perfect theology after the fall. This corruption involves both human reason and human passions, and crucially involves them with each other. The word “feeling,” meaning both a groping movement of the reasoning mind, and an affective searching, comes to prominence when Hutchinson translates this part of Owen’s treatise. “Philosophy, then,” Burden summarizes, “is the consequence of the corruption of theology by the fallen mind, for which emotion and intellect are fatally intertwined. It is this dual element of feeling as both passionate reason and reasoned passion through which Hutchinson interprets Owen’s narrative of the vainglorious arrogation of philosophy by the Greeks.”¹⁷¹ Working with the *Elegies*, Erica Longfellow has similarly noted the importance of affect in Hutchinson’s cosmological and theological thought. Longfellow demonstrates that in the *Elegies*, Hutchinson “draws on a rich tradition of literature and Biblical scholarship that likened divine love to human love,” and that the “affective language of the Psalms and Song of Songs” works in the poems to support the analogy

¹⁷⁰ Clarke, “Contextualizing,” 91.

¹⁷¹ Mark Burden, “Lucy Hutchinson and Puritan Education,” in *The Seventeenth Century*, 30 no. 2 (2015), 172.

between human *eros* and divine *agape*. Longfellow describes how for Hutchinson, “[h]uman beings, and human history, issue forth like streams and reflections, bearing with them an element of the divine within their corrupt forms. It is this element of the divine that enables human beings to know God, who is otherwise invisible.”¹⁷² The evidence from Clark, Burden, and from this study suggests that the “element of the divine” in question is affective in character, and that a strong belief in the connection between human affect and divine affect is a large part of Hutchinson’s reasons for turning away from Lucretius. All of this evidence confirms the central importance of affect in Hutchinson’s theology. The critique of Lucretian *ataraxia* in *Order and Disorder*’s shipwreck with *salvator* setpiece in Book 7, enlarging as it does the story of the flood as a means of educating and shaping the affects of the faithful as a means of drawing them closer to the affective structure of the Godhead, shows (as does the passage from Owen) how struggling with classical sources participates in this educative process. In this struggle with classical exponents of eudaimonism, Hutchinson was preceded by, and took some cues from, Augustine.

In the fourth and fifth chapters of the ninth book of *City of God*, Augustine undertakes a critique of Stoic ethical philosophy which develops along lines similar to Hutchinson’s, and his critique centers on a scene of shipwreck. Augustine refers to the *Attic*

¹⁷² Erica Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 185. Longfellow describes the *Elegies* as steeped in a Neoplatonic language of divine union, and suggests a similarity with Spenser’s *Fowre Hymnes* (the subject of Chapter 1 of the present work). I would suggest that Hutchinson’s ‘Neoplatonism’ is more likely drawn from Augustine than from the Florentine tradition that informs Spenser’s work. Longfellow’s approach enlarges on the foundational observations made by David Norbrook, “Lucy Hutchinson’s ‘Elegies’ and the Situation of the Republican Woman Writer,” *English Literary Renaissance* 27, no. 3 (1997), 468-521.

Nights of Aulus Gellius, in which Gellius reports “that he once made a sea-voyage with a distinguished Stoic philosopher.” Augustine’s summary of the account continues:

when the sky and sea grew threatening and the ship was tossed about and in great peril, this philosopher grew pale with fear. Those present noted this, and, even though death was so close, they were most curious to know whether the philosopher’s mind would be disturbed. When the tempest had subsided and safety made conversation—or, indeed, gossip—possible, one of those who had boarded the ship, a wealthy and pleasure-loving Asiatic, jokingly teased the philosopher with having shown fear and grown pale while he himself had remained unmoved by impending disaster.¹⁷³

Some banter ensues, in which the philosopher says that while the prosperous man might be forgiven for not having much concern about the fate of such an ignominious soul, the philosopher himself was right to worry about his own valuable life. Such gibes aside, the philosopher explains to Aulus Gellius that the experience of fear is not properly an emotion at all, but rather a pre-emotion that may disturb the body and mind for a little while, until the Stoic sage can consent, or withhold consent, from the emotional judgment of the matter. Although some scholars have held that Augustine’s critique of Stoicism misses the mark because it confuses the pre-emotional disturbance with emotion proper,¹⁷⁴ in this instance Augustine seems less inclined to critique this technical dimension of the Stoic theory of the passions, and more inclined to take a more obvious tack: “But how much more honourable it would have been,” Augustine muses, “if the Stoic in Aulus Gellius’s story had been disturbed by compassion for a fellow man, in order to comfort him, rather than by fear of shipwreck! Far better and more humane.”¹⁷⁵ Yet this stance would, by his own

¹⁷³ Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 362-3.

¹⁷⁴ See Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 375-84.

¹⁷⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, 365.

lights, have been worse for the Stoic philosopher in the *Attic Nights* than the state of being perturbed in a preliminary way by fear, since “Stoics [...] are wont to reproach even compassion,” and a genuine experience of compassion could only come about through the kind of consent which Stoic ethical theory takes to be the hallmark of emotion proper, as distinguished from mere pre-emotional disturbance.¹⁷⁶

Yet Augustine admits in this same book that other pagan philosophers do not reject compassion in this way. “Cicero, so eminent an orator,” Augustine writes, “did not hesitate to call compassion a virtue, whereas the Stoics are not ashamed to number it among the vices.”¹⁷⁷ This is important because it points us to a deeper level of the Augustinian critique of pagan ethical thought, one that we have already seen at work in *Order and Disorder*. In short, it points us toward *grief*. While Cicero is willing to admit compassion into the list of affects that can be experienced positively, he joins the Stoics—and the other major schools of classical and antique eudaimonistic ethics—in rejecting grief. Augustine, however, appeals to the fallen nature of the world and the universality of loss inaugurated by the fall to suggest that the experience of grief cannot be warded off, if one stands in full acknowledgment of one’s condition. James Wetzel, commenting on this Augustinian revaluation of grief, writes:

Augustine’s rehabilitation of grief marks his profoundest break not only from the cognitive therapy of Stoicism but from all the various forms of philosophical self-help he associated with classical culture. Even his beloved Platonists, who seemed to him to love the one God, desired too blithely the soul’s separation from the body, as if this were a liberation of life and not the disintegration of personality that comes of sin and death.

¹⁷⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, 365.

¹⁷⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, 365-6.

They failed to comprehend, as would any school of philosophy untutored in scriptural wisdom, the first form of grief: the soul's lack of God.¹⁷⁸

The rejection of grief in Stoicism and elsewhere in ancient ethics depends upon the fact that it is an emotion without a eudaimonistic use: it contributes nothing to the life of the sage. The use that grief *could* be put to, namely instructing a person not yet wise in how to turn away from the evils of the world that invite loss into the life of the soul, do not apply in the case of the wise man.¹⁷⁹ Yet for Augustine, original sin touches every member of the human race, and its most intimately felt aspect is the one touching the insufficiency of self and the need for grace. And more importantly, the perception of security from grief on the part of the sage is based upon a misapprehension of the essential nature of reality, since it overlooks the fact that human beings are born into a loss they did not author—for Augustine, the loss of God introduced by the fall. Thus where the eudaimonist feels most secure in self-sufficiency, a self-sufficiency which is the source of joy in Lucretius's shipwreck with spectator motif, there they are in fact in most peril. As I showed above, Hutchinson's description of the inhabitants of the world before the world flood plays upon this same sense of security: "They wholly gave themselves to feasts and mirth [...] As if no danger threatened their lewd lives" (*OD* 7.128-30). As we will see presently, Hutchinson makes a similar gesture in the dedicatory epistle of the translation of *De rerum natura*, where the Augustinian sense of fallenness—of a world in which everything,

¹⁷⁸ James Wetzel, "Augustine," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 355. See also James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 98-111.

¹⁷⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, 596: "[T]he Stoics can reply, in defence of their own position, that, whereas grief does seem to serve a useful purpose when it gives rise to repentance of sin, it still cannot exist in the mind of a wise man, because he is subject neither to sin, for which he might repent and be grieved, nor to any other evil which it might grieve him to undergo or endure [...] [Thus] the wise man, the Stoics say, cannot experience such grief."

including nature and the human mind, are always already at sea, and so in danger of shipwreck—is turned ingeniously against the poet of *ataraxia*. In the epistle as in the flood episode, the specific emotion invoked is neither the pleasures of security from danger, nor righteous scorn of others' obduracy (both of which responses would betoken an underlying sense of pride), but rather a solidly Augustinian feeling of grief for the other, or what Hutchinson will call "sad compassion."

To summarize the foregoing: Augustinian philosophical anthropology challenges Stoic and Epicurean ethics—indeed it challenges the whole eudaimonist ethical framework—by fundamentally altering the definition of the self, and (what I have not discussed here) emphasizing the relationship between self and a fallen, compromised, duplicitous human will in the generation of affect. Augustine confers upon grief and compassion (a species of grief directed toward the other rather than the self) a nobility denied by, in particular, the Epicureans. The Epicurean gesture of refusing grief and compassion is enlarged and given vivid poetic expression in the shipwreck with spectator motif that opens the second book of *De rerum natura*. There, as we saw, the Epicurean sage adopts an ethical stance that takes pleasure in measuring the spectatorial distance between the autonomous observer of shipwreck and the plight of those involved others. Augustine's riposte to these refusals of grief and compassion give Hutchinson a template for her vision of the role of affect in a devout life, a vision in which right feeling comes to be as important as right acting, with the "duties" of inward devotion being tantamount to various affective stances. Such inward devotion informs the dedicatory epistle composed for the publication of *De rerum natura*. The passage contains a direct statement regarding

Hutchinson's critique of Lucretius, and her decision to go ahead with publishing her translation of the poem despite misgivings, so I quote it here at some length:

My Philosophers taught me, by their owne instance, that unregenerate, unsanctified reason makes men more monstrous by their learning, then the most sottish brutish idiots; while they employ the most excellent gifts of humane understanding, witt, & all the other noble endowments of the soule, as weapons against him that gave them. The gave me a dreadfull prospect of the misery of lapsed nature, whereby I saw, with sad compassion, the uncomfortable shadow of death wherein they consume their lives, that are alienated from the knowledge of God. I saw the insufficiency of humane reason (how greate an Idoll soever it is now become among the growne-men) to arrive to any pure & simple Truth, with all its helps of Art & Studie. I learnt to hate all unsanctified excellence, if that impropriety of expression may be admitted, & to run out of my monstrous selfe, to seeke Light, Life, knowledge, tranquility, rest, & whatever else is requisite to make up a compleate blessednesse, and lasting felicity, in its only true & pure devine fountaine. As one, that, walking in the darke, had miraculously scapd a horrible precipice, by day light coming back & discovering his late danger; startles and reviews it with affright, so did I, when I, in the mirrour of opposed truth and holinesse and blessednes, saw the ugly deformitie, and the desperate tendency of corrupted nature, in its greatest pretences, and having by rich grace scapd the shipwreck of my soule among those vaine Philosophers, who by wisdom knew now God, I could not but in charity sett up this seamarke, to warne incautious travellers, and leave a testimony, that those walkes of witt which poore vaigneglorious schollars call the Muses groves, are enchanted thicketts, and while they tipple att their celebrated Helicon, the loose their lives, and fill themselves with poyson, drowning their spiritts in those pudled waters, and neglecting that healing spring of Truth, which only hath the vertue to restore & refresh sick humane life. (*DRN* P.163-90).

The image of shipwreck recurs here, as Hutchinson imagines the “vaine Philosophers” themselves caught up in a catastrophe that for all their wisdom they could not even perceive. Turning the metaphors of maritime emergency back upon Lucretius, Hutchinson views the position of the sage, tranquil and deluded, with “sad compassion,” a grieving form of fellow-feeling that confirms faith without joying in self-sufficiency. The Lucretius text, which vaunts the security of the sage against existential shipwreck, becomes itself the occasion of such a disaster, needing to be flagged with the “seamarke” of the

dedicatory epistle's warnings. Hutchinson turns her own excursions into pagan philosophy into an emblematic instance of salvation from unsuspected dangers, met with not in the pursuit of fortune or honor, but of the very philosophical wisdom Lucretius considers a safe harbor.

Hutchinson's emphasis on grief and compassion, with its Augustinian roots, makes the claim to approach ultimate reality more closely than the pagan wisdom of antiquity. This claim centers on the question of how eudaimonism and Christianity understand the origins and the lived experience of evil in the world. That is to say, it centers on theodicy. As I noted in the introduction, Hutchinson's own life was marked by the kinds of suffering and loss that put theodical thinking to the test, especially the loss of her husband John on charges related to political sedition after the Restoration. In this final section I highlight one further instance of shipwreck metaphors in Hutchinson's work, this one drawn from her biography of John, which exposes how theodicy and politics interact in Hutchinson's work and thought.

6. Conclusion: Politics, Theodicy, and Authentic Emotions

I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. Isaiah 45:7 KJV

If for a moment we take a step back from the specific features of the ethical conflict between Hutchinson and Lucretius, we can make some general observations about maritime metaphors that lead us toward the connection between theodicy and politics. "Two prior assumptions above all," Hans Blumenberg writes, "determine the burden of meaning carried by the metaphors of seafaring and shipwreck." He continues:

First, the sea as a naturally given boundary of the realm of human activities and, second, its demonization as the sphere of the unreckonable and lawless,

in which it is difficult to find one's bearings. In Christian iconography as well, the sea is the place where evil appears, sometimes with the Gnostic touch that it stands for all-devouring Matter that takes everything back into itself. It is part of the Johannine apocalypse's promise that, in the messianic fulfillment, there will no longer be a sea (*he thalassa ouk esti eti*). In their purest form, odysseys are an expression of the arbitrariness of the powers that denied Odysseus a homecoming, senselessly driving him about and finally leading him to shipwreck, in which the reliability of the cosmos becomes questionable and its opposite valuation in Gnosticism is anticipated.¹⁸⁰

Both cultural assumptions—the sea as an ontological the boundary of human activity, and as the source and origin of anomy, meaninglessness, and evil (“the unreckonable and lawless”)—inform classical philosophy and the scriptures of the Abrahamic religions. For a scriptural instance we may turn to Psalm 107, which contains a direct statement about the dangers of going out to sea. Intriguingly, the psalmist connects seafaring not only to the acquisition of material goods but to the acquisition of knowledge as well; that is, the connection between seafaring and the claims of theory one finds in Lucretius is also grasped in this text. But unlike Lucretius's shipwreck, the force that causes the storm and the force that quiets it is not an impersonal and ultimately unsearchable natural reality, but rather a God who is—in this instance at least—concerned enough to respond to the distressed. In faintly condemnatory tones, the Psalm speaks of:

They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters;
These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders of the deep.
For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the
waves thereof.
They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths: their
soul is melted because of trouble.
They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits'
end.
Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of
their distress.
He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.

¹⁸⁰ Blumenberg, *Shipwreck*, 8.

Then are they glad because they are quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.¹⁸¹

The Psalmist here asserts that shipwreck itself is no less the work of God than is salvation. For Lucretius, as we saw, the world of natural forms emerges from an ungoverned infinity; the cultural assumption that the sea is the place from which evil emerges makes it a perfect vehicle for which the tenor of a lawless chaos of atoms. The sea can become the sign of ultimate reality as play of arbitrary forces—an ultimate reality licensing the ethical ideal of *ataraxia*. But for the Psalmist, as for Hutchinson, the sea is no less the creation of God for being as well the home and womb of Leviathan. The sea in this sense—which a deeply ingrained cultural assumption says is evil—raises the question of whether the creator of all Good might not be the author of evil as well. Or at the very least, whether the sea might not mark a limit not only to human endeavor, but also to God’s sovereignty. In the passage from Blumenberg above, the fact that in fullness of time the sea as a whole must be redeemed—indeed removed from—within the order of creation illustrates this problem. The sea brings the whole problem of theodicy into view in a way that’s difficult to ignore, because it is not a small instance of seeming evil in an otherwise benevolent natural order (a poisonous plant, for instance, or a dangerous animal), easily dismissed as an isolated privation of the good. The sea represents a limit to the order of the good itself, a zone standing over against the zone of providential control, seeming to retain the formlessness and senselessness of an arbitrary, ungovernable, stochastic primal chaos.

If in the world to come “there will no longer be a sea (*he thalassa ouk esti eti*),” then the “old world” (OD 7.193) consumed by flood represents an inversion of this image

¹⁸¹ Ps. 107: 23-30.

of perfection. In the story of Noah, the sea engulfs the whole order of creation; all is turned to chaos. The passengers of the ark vividly experience this ultimate disorder:

Its trembling sailors heard sick Nature's groans
Which shattered into atoms the firm stones,
And men's more flinty hearts with terror struck
Who now like trembling leaves in autumn shook
While they inevitable death beheld
With spirits sinking as the waters swelled,
And the great King of Terrors on the waves
In triumph sat, hemmed round with yawning graves (*OD* 7.441-8).

The poem once again nods to Lucretius, as the stones are torn asunder “into atoms,” an image of shattered natural and psychic constancy. Yet the sea is not, as for Lucretius, an ungoverned chaos; here the sea too bears an image of sovereignty in the form of the “King of Terrors,” who rides triumphant amid the gruesome spectacle of universal death.

The phrase “king of terrors” is drawn from Job 18:14, where it personifies death itself as sovereign. In Hutchinson's poem, the anti-Royalist charge of the image cannot be ignored. Yet by reaching out toward the politically potent metaphor, Hutchinson invites—no less, it is true, than does scripture itself in several places, not least the book of Job from which Hutchinson draws her reference—the idea that the sovereignty of the world is divided between a good ruler and an evil one, between forces of light and darkness. As the poem bends toward political critique here, it also veers toward Gnosticism, in the sense that Blumenberg invokes it above.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Blumenberg uses the word ‘Gnostic’ to cover a wide variety of dualistic thinking, in which forces of light and darkness war with one another. Also important in Blumenberg's understanding of the term is that the Lord of Creation and the God of Salvation are held to be separate, so that the order of the world is not seen as inherently good, and is in fact seen as an imprisoning structure designed to frustrate human endeavor rather than enabling offering affordances to it. In recent years, scholarship has moved toward appreciating the wide variety of so-called Gnostic sects, and attending to the differences between them. See, for instance, Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,

In that passage Blumenberg notes that Odysseys, and the world in which they take place, anticipate Gnosticism in the sense that they contain the idea of a world ruled over by gods who care about human beings, but also represents a conflict among good and evil, or benevolent and hostile, forces within the pantheon, so that the meaning-laden cosmic order can suddenly appear, as it did to Odysseus, to be a trap, a snare, the result of a malign conspiracy.

And sometimes a given order of things can in fact be precisely such a conspiracy. That is how the political order of the Restoration must have looked to Lucy and John Hutchinson and other partisans of the Good Old Cause.¹⁸³ Indeed Christopher Hill, in *The Experience of Defeat*, points out that the change in political fortunes was so sweeping that it had about it a certain theodical flavor: “The experience of defeat meant recognizing the collapse of the system of ideas which had previously sustained action, and attempting to discover new explanations, new perspectives” (17). This description links up nicely with

2005). Yet certain commonalities obtain, and those commonalities are in line with Blumenberg’s usage, as is pointed out in Walter Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 10-11: “Gnosticism seems to have derived from many sources—Persian, Jewish, Greek, and Egyptian—and was exhibited in an extraordinary variety of sects. What these sects had in common was to take away from God the responsibility for a wicked world where the souls of men are temporarily incarcerated in human bodies, from which they are promised release and salvation through gnosis, secret knowledge. [...] For most Gnostics, God was the First Principle, beneath whom many lesser, semidivine, eternal beings (eons) were arrayed in a perfect spiritual creation (the pleroma). Among the eons, about whose nature Gnostic sects disagreed, transgression of some kind led to a fall from perfection, which in turn gave rise to a subordinate creator (the Demiurge). He is was who formed the world, which like its maker is imperfect and antagonistic to the supreme, remote, and perfect Divine Being.” In short, we may say that Blumenberg takes Manichaeism as being synonymous with Gnosticism—a partial view with respect to current scholarship on the variety of Gnostic philosophies, but a reasonable one with respect to the views of Gnosticism developing within Christianity from Augustine on.

¹⁸³ Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat* (London: Faber, 1984), 17.

the discussion of John Berger's notion of a "sacred canopy" in the first chapter of this dissertation, by suggesting that the change in political order entailed a fundamental shifting of the normative fabric of interwoven explanations, and thus presented a profound problem for theodicy (considered as a broadly sociological rather than narrowly theological activity).¹⁸⁴ In such times of crisis, the desire to identify good and evil, to say who are the bearers of order and who of disorder, becomes a source of considerable urgency and anxiety. In the *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, Lucy Hutchinson write about her husband, a signatory of the death warrant of Charles I whose status in respect to good and evil (in political-theological terms) was formally put to question as he stood on charges of sedition. The defense—itsself a political theodicy of a kind—which Lucy reports John offering, sets out in terms of shipwreck metaphors the dangers of becoming involved in troublous political affairs, while at the same time evoking the demands of conscience that one become so involved. In response to his accusers, John claims:

That for his actings in those days, if he had erred, it was the inexperience of his age, and the defect of his judgment, and not the malice of his heart, which had ever prompted him to pursue the general advantage of his country more than his own; and if the sacrifice of him might conduce to the public peace and settlement, he should freely submit his life and fortunes to their disposal; that the vain expense of his age, and the great debts his public employments had run him into, as they were testimonies that neither avarice nor any other interest had carried him on, so they yielded him just cause to repent that he ever forsook his own blessed quiet, to embark in such a troubled sea, where he had made shipwreck of all things but a good conscience; and as to that particular action of the king, he desired them to believe he had that sense of it that befitted an Englishman, a Christian, and a gentleman.

¹⁸⁴ See Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City: Anchor, 1969). I discuss Berger's theory at length in the first chapter of this dissertation.

Here we can see the consequence of a belief-system in which existential seafaring is not an option, to be taken up by the fool and rejected by the sage. If one accepts that we are always already embarked upon the metaphorical sea (a metaphor in this instance of political engagement), a site of contested or ambiguous sovereignty in which the King of Death and the Lord of Life make claims upon their partisans, then one must choose. If one refuses to sail, what is left is not the security of shore but the listless insecurity of drifting. So John Hutchinson made his choice; and in his own defense here he enlists not his “judgment,” being defective, nor his wisdom, but rather his affect: despite having judged poorly, despite taking a foolish course, he did so without the “malice of his heart” being involved. His “sense” of things—a word pointedly inclusive of affect—was that of “an Englishman, a Christian, and a gentleman.” This appeal to sense, to affect, can be understood with reference to Lucy Hutchinson’s discussion of the “duties” of the Christian above, which as we saw took affective response to things as the sign of goodness. And it is on this basis that John makes his own appeal, ineffective as it would turn out, but leaving intact his conscience, as the one good saved from the existential shipwreck his actions had invited.

This chapter has taken up the question of theodicy in two distinct philosophical and poetic texts: Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*, and Lucy Hutchinson’s *Order and Disorder*. I have attempted to show how the dialogue across centuries between these two poets illuminates the theodical connections between ontology and ethics—between the order of the world, and the sphere of human existence. Hutchinson, following Augustine, takes what the eudaimonist ethics of Lucretius would consider to be involuntary and so of no moral account, namely the nature of the disturbances of the mind considered to be pre-emotions by the Epicurean sage, and places them at the center of the moral life of the Protestant

subject. Spontaneous emotional responses—of grief and compassion in the passages from *Order and Disorder* discussed here—come to be regarded as the defining feature of true piety. The experience of these emotions mirrors the life of the Godhead—a life which was for Hutchinson characterized by affects that can be tied by threads of accommodation to the affective lives of individual human beings. The watchwords of this project are *experience* and *authenticity*. The Puritan emphasis upon an experience of authentic and intense emotion as the guide to spiritual and religious truth has been well documented.¹⁸⁵ Owen Watkins, in *The Puritan Experience*, suggests that understanding and communicating experience was a cornerstone of the Puritan educational project, and that by these means “a particular way of life was communicated to many humble and poorly educated people. This caused them to extend their range of self-awareness, as the doctrines which they learned became almost simultaneously embodied in personal experience and afterwards articulated through narrative and testimony.”¹⁸⁶ Even before the pressure of successive political and social crises of legitimacy, the authenticity of such inner

¹⁸⁵ Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 18-62; 239-56. At pp. 4-5 Ryrie signals his major thesis: “[British Protestantism] was *intense* in that it sought and—often—found a particular, heightened pitch of emotional experience [...] It was the strength of these emotions, not their nature, which principally mattered. Above all, this was a search for authenticity, for the unmistakable touch of God in a believer’s life.” This study deals with British Protestant emotionality only to 1640; the evidence from Hutchinson’s writings and from other critical work (Achinstein, Keeble) suggests that the specific emotion of grief—the “nature” of that particular emotional experience—was indeed important in the context of Restoration and Dissent, both because of the political commitment implied by continuing to grieve the loss of the revolutionary cause and, more closely touching Hutchinson, because the experience of grief and compassion in particular distinguished Christian affective life from the Stoic and Epicurean counterparts eagerly conscripted into the Augustan culture of the Restoration, and from which Hutchinson consequently sought to distance herself in her late work.

¹⁸⁶ Owen Watkins, *The Puritan Experience: Studies in Spiritual Autobiography* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 15.

experience was for the Godly the marker—we might say, with Hutchinson, the “seamarke”—of the Good. After those crises of legitimacy in society and politics, the intensity of inner scrutiny required to authenticate experience would be expected to become even more acute, and we may read evidence of such an intensified scrutiny in Hutchinson’s turning back upon her own experience as a translator and reader of Lucretius in the context of the Restoration. The claim of authentic experience is at the center of John Hutchinson’s self-defense against charges of sedition, and is essential to the list of “duties” outlined in Lucy Hutchinson’s manual of personal devotion. By associating authenticity with the experience of what eudaimonist ethics would dismiss as pre-emotional, hence pre-rational and of no account with respect to morality or self-evaluation, Hutchinson’s work urges the reader toward the intensification of a specific kind of inwardness that continually challenges the notions of rational autonomy associated with Lucretian ethics.

CHAPTER 5: THEODICY, THEORY, AND MODERNITY IN *PARADISE LOST*

1. Introduction

In this chapter I attend to the use of the word “survey” in *Paradise Lost* (as well as a couple of instances where surveying takes place without the word being explicitly invoked) as a means of gaining insight into how the poem configures the relationship between theory and theodicy. I frame my analysis by drawing on the work of three modern philosophers who concern themselves with defining and describing modernity: Hannah Arendt, Hans Blumenberg, and Karsten Harries. These thinkers depict, in closely related ways, the transformation of theory wrought by early modern astronomical discoveries—the revolution of human beings’ understanding of their place in the cosmos, and the kinds of meaning-making activities afforded by that placement, signified by the names Copernicus and Galileo. This revolution in understanding, and the transformation wrought upon theory enabled by it, has been considered the watershed dividing the premodern from the modern epochs by many historians of ideas. In this chapter, I use *Paradise Lost* to probe the affordances and limitations of this way of periodizing intellectual history. Although the word “theory” is not itself to be found in *Paradise Lost*, I work from the premise that in Milton’s use of the word “survey” we ought to hear an echo of the Greek root of the English word “theory”: *θεωρός*, a word which, like “survey,” links the act of seeing clearly and comprehensively with the gaining of knowledge and the right interpretation of phenomena. The remainder of this section will set out the key terms used throughout the chapter, adumbrate my arguments about the Copernican turn and its discontents, and introduce my thesis: that in *Paradise Lost*, theodicy—the justification of God’s ways to mankind—is best thought of as a *theoretical* enterprise (and considered so, it bears affinity with forms

of theodicy that would go on to motivate philosophical developments from Leibniz through Kant and Hegel to Marx), but that the theory ideal it advances is a hybrid, joining constructive ('modern') and contemplative ('premodern') attitudes together via a complex metaphoric of visionary knowing (*theoresis*) and visionary making (*poesis*).¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ The scholarship on Milton and theodicy is, of course, voluminous. In asking whether God is good or wicked vis-à-vis the fall of mankind, William Empson, *Milton's God* (New York: New Directions, 1962) and Dennis Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) fairly divide the field between them. As a perennial question for Christian theological discourse, 'new' takes on the problem of evil in this limited sense are rare, and Danielson and Empson cover most of the traditional material. Danielson avails himself of John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan, 1966), which does develop something new—or at least long forgotten—within the Christian theological discourse around justifying the fall, by outlining his "Irenaean" approach (pp. 201-362). Before them, A. O. Lovejoy, "Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall," *English Literary History* 4, no. 3 (1937), 161-79, explored Milton's indebtedness in thinking about the *felix culpa* to Du Bartas and others. My own approach to theodicy as a question within the history of philosophy and sociology of religion includes but is not limited to the theological question of whether God's role in the fall makes Him good or wicked. Peter C. Herman and Elizabeth Sauer, eds., *The New Milton Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), includes six essays dealing more or less loosely with theodicy, of which Richard Strier, "Milton's Fetters, or, Why Eden is Better than Heaven" (25-44) especially chimes with my own sense that as regards *Paradise Lost's* take on the problem of evil, "The goal is rational explanation" (26). Strier's approach follows that of Peter Fisher, "Milton's Theodicy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17, no. 1 (1956), 28-53: "Evil must be treated as imperfection in its most universal sense and the problem which it raises will include the entire philosophic position of the thinker who would discover a solution" (30). In a similar vein see Christopher Kendrick, "Constituent Providence and Antinomian Obedience: Monistic Stories in Spinoza's *Ethics* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*," in *Milton's Modernities*, eds. Feisal Mohamed and Patrick Fadely (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 135-167, where Kendrick detects a Spinozan philosophical rational theodicy in *Paradise Lost*. See also Claire Colebrook, *Milton, Evil, and Literary History* (London: Continuum, 2008); William Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), esp. 8-12, 188-216; Dennis Danielson, "The Fall and Milton's Theodicy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. Dennis Danielson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 144-59; J. M. Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 242-92; William J. Grace, *Ideas in Milton* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), esp. 73-123; Northrop Frye, *The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965).

In the introduction and in previous chapters I have made use of the idea that theodicy, and the problem of evil to which it responds, have to do with *intelligibility* and *meaning-making*, with recognizing a sensible order in the natural world and in human nature, and with the fabrication and maintenance of a *nomos* that orients the individual to society, and the society to what is ultimately real. It is worth briefly reviewing that claim again with special reference to Milton and to the other two keywords of this chapter (theory and modernity). Here the work of Susan Nieman can be of aid: in *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (2002), Nieman lays out a persuasive argument that the history of modern philosophy (with ‘modern’ in principle encompassing the sixteenth century to the present, but in practice mostly concerning developments from Leibniz through Nietzsche) can and indeed should be understood as a continual (though not continuous) struggle to frame a satisfactory theodicy—an adequate response to the presence of evil in the world. Writing about the way the problem of evil is phrased in the philosophical tradition, Nieman observes that “[t]he problem of evil can be expressed in theological or secular terms, but it is fundamentally a problem about the intelligibility of the world as a whole. Thus it belongs neither to ethics nor to metaphysics but forms a link between the two.”¹⁸⁸ Nieman’s description of the problem of evil as concerning intelligibility effectively dissociates theodicies—that is, responses to the problem of evil—from two distinct misconceptions. First, it shows that theodicies are not first of all about proving or disproving the bare existence of some God, although assertions about the world’s intelligibility may ascribe that intelligibility to an intelligent Creator. Second, it

¹⁸⁸ Susan Nieman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 7-8.

shows that theodicies are not only about whether this or that action ascribed to a specific God (say, to Yahweh) in scripture, or this or that doctrine of a given faith or denomination, is just or unjust, warranted or unwarranted. That kind of defense falls more into the realm of apologetics than theodicy as Nieman defines it here. In *Paradise Lost* one finds both ‘religious’ apologetics and ‘philosophical’ theodicy; indeed, the two are closely bound up with each other. Yet what is remarkable in the poem is the way the two interact, the way that a restless intellectual struggle with the question of the intelligibility of the world as a whole, or the lack thereof, is taken into account and allowed to shape and reshape the dogmatic truths it seeks to express.

Theodicy in this sense is linked to the fortunes of theory.¹⁸⁹ Can human beings expect theory to resolve the problem of evil, or must the mystery of iniquity remain impenetrable? If the intellect can provide theodical satisfactions, what are the limits it must

¹⁸⁹ Robert Markley, *Fallen Languages: Crises of Representation in Newtonian England, 1660-1740* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 1-33, demonstrates that the idea of “theory” in and out of the philosophy of science is at best fractious and diffuse: “If theory, like analysis, is uncertain, then we might say that it represents the desire for [...] ‘imaginary’ unity and closure [...] it marks the gaps between an ideal narrative form of transcendent meaning, purposeful intent, and logical and aesthetic closure and the ‘disparate facts’ on which that form must be imposed. If we view the discourses on theory as dialogical, fractured, and incomplete, then we can begin to redefine theory itself as a dynamic that mediates between idealist conceptions of order and the constructed and contested ‘facts’ of experience” (29). Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006) defines theory as “visualizing, abstractly and synchronically, that which already exists” (1); theory is held out against forward-looking *poesis*. My own view of what theory means is influenced by Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985). For Blumenberg theory means something like the human ability to sound out order and value in the world. It has at various times allied with and warred with sensory “facts,” and is something in which one can have more or less confidence, as the fortunes of theory after Copernicus and before Galileo demonstrate. See Bernard Yack’s essay-review of Blumenberg’s *Work on Myth*, in *Political Theory* 15, no. 2 (1987), 244-61.

accept, what are the criteria by which it may be judged? Must human reason be supplemented by some supra-intellectual, supernatural source of illumination, or will it produce sufficient light itself? All of these questions about the prospects and limitations of theory—what early moderns sometimes called ‘science’ in its broadest sense—come up when confronted with the philosophical problem of evil, conceived as the question of the intelligibility of the world as a whole. The linkage of theory and theodicy allows Hans Blumenberg, in *The Genesis of the Copernican World* (1975; trans. 1987), to describe the Copernican turn as an epoch-making act of theodicy that inaugurates the modern age. Copernicus inherited a situation in which the heavenly bodies and their motions were a source of bafflement and incomprehension. Centuries of astronomical and religious dogma insisted that the reason for this was that *God had made them that way*, evidence of a design feature at best indifferent with respect to human beings, and at worst positively intended to frustrate them. “This,” writes Blumenberg, “is the dilemma that Copernicus will aim to remove by relieving the Creator of the reproach that it is the object that confuses cognition, rather than cognition that fails when faced with its object. Seen in this way, the modern age begins with an act of theodicy. In it we are called upon not to rest satisfied with a state of theory that renders questionable God’s intentions with the world and with man.”¹⁹⁰ Readers will note that the endeavor to exonerate the Creator is at the same time a campaign in defense of the human creature and of the capability of theory to pierce through apparent confusion and arrive at truth; in other words, it is at once a theodicy—defense of God, from Greek *theos* (god) and *dike* (justice)—and an anthropodicy, or defense of mankind. Modern

¹⁹⁰ Hans Blumenberg, *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987), 262.

philosophical theodicies characteristically have this dual structure, which reflects a certain confidence in the theoretical capacities of the human, and assumes a reciprocal relationship between God's *reasons* for creation, and human *reason* in apprehending it.

Yet the Copernican turn also presented new challenges for theory, because it displaced human beings from the stable, central place in the universe presumed by geocentrism, and severed the traditional link between 'theory' and the naïve evidence of the senses. In a pithy moment, Blumenberg describes the Copernican dynamic this way: "From the motion of the object [i.e., the starry heavens], the subject apprehends his own motion. The systematic central point, however, from which the totality would have to become surveyable and transparent as a unified rational process, remains unoccupied and unattainable."¹⁹¹ (*But not lost*: Copernicus still supposes a principal cosmic center in the Sun—one of several such 'centers'—about which more shortly). Copernicus the theodocist in this way becomes, in the early modern imagination and beyond, a perpetrator of the great crime of setting human beings to perpetual wandering, displacing them from a stable cosmic homeland (a charge reflected in, for example, John Donne's *Ignatius His Conclave* (1611)).¹⁹² This ambivalence about the meaning of Copernicus's innovation has remained alive in the popular and philosophical imagination throughout the modern age. It prompted Karsten Harries to write *Infinity and Perspective* (2001), a book that seeks to redress what Harries calls 'postmodern nihilism'—the abandonment, sometimes mournful and

¹⁹¹ Blumenberg, *Genesis*, 651.

¹⁹² In which Copernicus beats upon the doors of hell, astounded at being barred entry, and exclaims: "Are these shut against me, to whom all the Heavens were ever open, who was a Soule to the Earth, and gave it motion?" John Donne, *Ignatius His Conclave* (London: John Maririott, 1631).

sometimes giddy, of theory's claim to truth. In the introduction to this work, Harries explains post-Copernican discontent this way:

The Greek or the medieval cosmos assigned human beings their place near the center, but the Copernican revolution would seem to have condemned us to an eccentric position. To be sure, eccentricity still presupposes a center: Copernicus (as we should expect, given his place still on the threshold separating our modern from the medieval world) was himself only a half-hearted modernist and continued to hold on to the idea of a cosmic center, as he continued to invoke the idea of a divine architect and with it the idea of a bounded, well-ordered cosmos; he only denied the earth that central place, giving it instead to the sun. But [...] of more fundamental importance than the shift from a geocentric to a heliocentric understanding of the cosmos proved to be the authority granted to human reason, bound up with a self-elevation that frees the thinking subject from any particular place. Such self-elevation, a new freedom, and a new anthropocentrism go together with a new sense of homelessness.¹⁹³

From almost the moment of its very inception, Copernicus's innovation in astronomical theory has provoked acute pessimism about this homelessness. I have already mentioned Donne, to which other early modern examples could easily be added.¹⁹⁴ Closer to our own time, Nietzsche registers a dour response: "Since Copernicus, man seems to have got himself on an inclined plane—now he is slipping faster and faster away from the center into—what? into nothingness? into a *penetrating* sense of his own nothingness?"¹⁹⁵ Copernicus frees theory from its bonds to the intuitive world of the senses, but that same freedom may be construed as a fundamental alienation of the human from her

¹⁹³ Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), 8.

¹⁹⁴ See Blumenberg, *Genesis*, 264-289. The chapter is tellingly entitled, "The Theoretician as 'Perpetrator'."

¹⁹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1989), 155. Harries calls attention to this passage in *Infinity and Perspective*, 8. See also David Luban, *Legal Modernism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 18, where this passage from Nietzsche is cited with the following comment: "Modernity sets us the task of relocating ourselves and rediscovering—or perhaps reinventing—our sense of worth against a background of cosmic indifference to us."

determinative place in the natural order.¹⁹⁶ In sum: our senses tell us that the world is still and the heavens move about us, but if we begin from this intuitive premise, the best theoretical efforts cannot come to grips with heavenly motion. Either our senses deceive, or our theoretical capacities are not adequate to the task of apprehending the reason in God's creation. The Copernican turn acquits God of designing a heavenly order that yields nothing but confusion; yet at the same time it irrevocably divorces theory from vision, reality from appearance, in a way that lays the groundwork for the incertitude of a Descartes, and for early modern philosophical theodicy writ large.¹⁹⁷

Today we stand on one side of this development and look back over it retrospectively. The failures of the modern project have been well documented, yet in many quarters confidence in the potentials of theory—now largely overseen by institutions of science—remains high.¹⁹⁸ I don't want to belabor this point about a crisis in and of the modern here, but I do want to look at what Harries recommends as a solution to it, because

¹⁹⁶ See also *Mary Thomas Crane, Losing Touch With Nature: Literature and the New Science in Sixteenth Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014). I discuss Crane's thesis about the breaking-apart of the Aristotelian synthesis (with its emphasis on intuition and naïve sensory evidences) in Chapter 1, with reference to Spenser.

¹⁹⁷ On Descartes's philosophy as a response to the problem of evil, see Zbigniew Janowski, *Cartesian Theodicy: Descartes' Quest for Certitude* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000).

¹⁹⁸ Works on the crisis of modernity taking in theology and theory include Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry Into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, trans. Catherine Porter, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); O. Bradley Bassler, *The Pace of Modernity: Reading With Blumenberg* (Victoria: Re-Press, 2012); Feisal Mohamed, *Milton and the Post-Secular Present: Ethics, Politics, Terrorism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) which tellingly borrows its epigram from Satan's opening monologue at PL 1.242-63; Leszek Kolakowski, *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: Free Press, 1990); and Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 1985).

it leads back in compelling and unexpected ways to *Paradise Lost*. Toward the conclusion of *Infinity and Perspective*, Harries writes:

An ontology is needed that is not born of pride. Such an ontology will recognize that the pursuit of truth has its measure in an ideal that will always be denied to human beings, accepting that the pursuit of truth demands objectivity even though we shall never be able to be altogether objective. But this ontology will also recognize that when reality in its entirety is subjected to the pursuit of objective truth, such a pursuit must become a movement toward nihilism. For the pursuit of objectivity is inseparable from the twofold reduction [...] where the first reduction robs the world of meaning and the second transforms it into a ghostly collection of facts. That is to say, such an ontology will recognize that theory, while legitimate within its limits, does not provide our only access to what is, as every lover knows. Theory alone will never overcome nihilism. That conquest presupposes respect, above all for the earth and its inhabitants. Notwithstanding the decentering power of Copernican reflection, there is a sense in which such respect will return the earth to that central position from which Copernicus had dethroned it.¹⁹⁹

Could we not describe the cosmological dimensions of *Paradise Lost* as an attempt to develop an “ontology [...] not born of pride?” As I will argue, in its complex meditations upon what could constitute a cosmic center or a place of privileged observation, and the criteria upon which the truth-value of such observations may be judged, Milton’s poem is already wrestling with the problem diagnosed by Harries, and already attempting a theodical solution to it. Yet where Harries recommends “respect, above all for earth and its inhabitants”—and here we ought to carefully distinguish between this recommendation and a more muscular anthropocentrism—Milton will suggest that such respect is impossible without acknowledgement of and (crucially) *obedience* to the Creator, which gives sense and intelligibility to creation and creature. This, then, is the sense in which *Paradise Lost*

¹⁹⁹ Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective*, 316-7.

engages in a modern philosophical theodicy that is nevertheless grounded in a religious sense ill fitted to Harries' resolutely secular conception of the human, and human theory.²⁰⁰

I say that the issue of obedience is crucial to Milton's theodical epistemology in *Paradise Lost*, because only through such obedience is the Copernican promise of freedom for the human mind made available. Such a view requires that the world as a whole be not only *rationally* intelligible, but *morally* intelligible also. One final piece of scaffolding will help to situate this aspect of the theodicy in *Paradise Lost* in its early modern context. As I mentioned in the introduction to this project, it was Leibniz who introduced the term theodicy into the philosophical lexicon of modernity. Leibniz engaged with the problem of evil throughout his career, and in the "Specimen Dynamicum" (1695) he considers the following approach to it:

[...] everything in the world can be explained in two ways: through the *kingdom of power*, that is, through *efficient causes*, and through the *kingdom of wisdom*, that is, through *final causes*, through God, governing bodies for his glory, like an architect, governing them as machines that follow the *laws of size* or *mathematics*, governing them, indeed, for the use of souls, and through God governing for his glory souls capable of wisdom, governing them as his fellow citizens, members with him of a certain society, governing them like a prince, indeed like a father, through *laws of goodness* or *moral laws*.²⁰¹

By dividing God's governance into two parallel 'kingdoms', Leibniz lays open the possibility of two separate, coactive regimes of explanation, which are in principle

²⁰⁰ Milton's uncanny relationship to the modern, the liberal, and the secular, and the kind of critical praxis necessary for grasping that relationship, has been well described in Mohamed, *Post-Secular Present*, 10-18. See also Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). Teskey's description of how Milton had to pass through and go beyond epic theory in order to arrive at poetic freedom relates obliquely to my own discussion of theory and technics.

²⁰¹ Leibniz, "Specimen Dynamicum," in *Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters, Vol. 2*, ed. Leroy E. Loemaker, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 711.

independent of one another. The rational intelligibility of the world on the one hand, and the moral intelligibility of the world on the other, are here depicted as separate and autonomous spheres. I point to this example to measure the distance between *Paradise Lost* and the works of early modern philosophical theodicy with which it nevertheless bears an affinity. In *Paradise Lost* what Leibniz calls the “kingdom of power” and the “kingdom of wisdom” are not separable, not autonomous explanatory regimes existing independently of one another; instead, the two interpenetrate and mutually inform one another. Physics and ontology reflect ethics and morality—thus at the moment of the fall not only the human intellect but the cosmos itself is wrenched from its original moorings.²⁰² Holding the two spheres together in a heroic act of constructive *poesis* is a central concern of the poem. Although the microcosm-macrocosm relationship is destabilized by the Copernican turn’s pushing human beings into an eccentric cosmic position, Milton will maintain and defend a version of it that is not based on geocentric or heliocentric physics, but rather on a strong consonance between theoretical reason (which allows for perception of the intelligibly true) and right reason (which allows for the perception of the morally good), a consonance that persists at once in the human intellect and in the order of things, despite the impairment of the fall.

In the next section of this chapter I trace the use of the word “survey” in *Paradise Lost*, and introduce Hannah Arendt’s description of the “human surveying capacity” in *The Human Condition*.²⁰³ In the section following that, I will use the work of Hans Blumenberg

²⁰² This point is made with full attention to seventeenth-century astronomical theory in Lawrence Babb, *The Moral Cosmos of Paradise Lost* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1970).

²⁰³ By investigating the use of the word “survey,” my argument moves parallel to the criticism on light as both a physical force and an image of vatic knowledge in Milton’s

to understand the astronomical vision of *Paradise Lost*, in Book 8 and elsewhere. I show that the poem's cosmology tries to work through the consequences of geocentrism and heliocentrism by rethinking the concept of a cosmic center in terms spiritual and metaphysical rather than physical; and that in doing so it promotes an "ontology not born of pride," in the phrase of Karsten Harries above. The poem thus evinces an ambivalent attitude toward astronomical theory: on the one hand, we see the advice of Raphael to Adam to "be lowly wise," disregarding as indifferent to salvation abstruse questions about the intelligibility of the cosmos. On the other hand, the poem leaves open the possibility that this advice, given to an unfallen Adam, does not adequately address the condition of fallen human beings, who may justly regard the unintelligibility of the heavens as scandalous, and desire theodical satisfactions about their rationality.

2. Three Forms of Surveying in *Paradise Lost*

And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. – Job 1:7

work. Here one may consult Sanford Budick, "Miltonic Mind," in *Milton's Modernities*, eds. Feisal Mohamed and Patrick Fadely (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 169-89; Tobias Gabel, "Hierarchies of Vision in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*," in *The Five Senses in Medieval and Early Modern England*, eds. Annette Kern-Stähler, Beatrix Busse, and Wietse de Boer (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 117-33; Erin Webster, "'Presented with a Universal Blanc': The Physics of Vision in Milton's Invocation to Light," *Milton Studies* 56, (2015), 233-72; John T. Shawcross, "Milton and the Visionary Mode: The Early Poems," in *Visionary Milton: Essays on Prophecy and Violence*, eds. Peter E. Medine, John T. Shawcross, and David V. Urban (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2010), 3-22; John Leonard, "Milton, Lucretius, and 'the Void Profound of Unessential Night,'" in *Living Texts: Interpreting Milton*, eds. Kristin A. Pruitt and Charles W. Durham (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2000), 198-217; and in the same volume, John Rumrich, "Of Chaos and Nightingales," 218-27; Michael Lieb, *Poetics of the Holy: A Reading of Paradise Lost* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 185-211; and Merritt Hughes, *Ten Perspectives on Milton* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 63-103.

In Book 9 of *Paradise Lost*, Satan takes a seven-day tour of the earth by orbiting it, surveying the habitation of humanity's first parents for possible points of weakness beyond the prying eyes "the cherubim / That kept their watch" (9.61-2).²⁰⁴ At the end of his quest, he has found a back door to Paradise and a "[f]it vessel" (89), the serpent, in which to conceal himself for the purpose of tempting Eve. The poem tells us that:

[...] full of anguish driven,
The space of seven continued nights he rode
With darkness, thrice the equinoctial line
He circled, four times crossed the car of Night
From pole to pole, traversing each colure;
On the eighth returned, and on the coast averse
From entrance or cherubic watch, by stealth
Found unsuspecting way. (9.62-9)

But before he sets about infiltrating Eden, Satan experiences a moment of "inward grief" (97), occasioned by all that he has seen during his "inspection deep" (83) of the earth. Overwhelmed by his "bursting passion" (98) Satan is moved to a kind of exuberant melancholy, and spontaneously articulates an ode to our world:

O earth, how like to heaven, if not preferred
More justly, seat worthier of gods, as built
With second thoughts, reforming what was old!
For what god after better worse would build?
Terrestrial heaven, danced round by other heavens
That shine, yet bear their bright officious lamps,
Light above light, for thee alone, as seems,
In thee concentrating all their precious beams
Of sacred influence: as God in heaven
Is center, yet extends to all, so thou
Centring reciev'st from all those orbs; in thee,
Not in themselves, all their known virtue appears
Productive in herb, plant, and nobler birth
Of creatures animate with gradual life

²⁰⁴ Citations of *Paradise Lost* are drawn from Alastair Fowler's edition (John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 2nd Edition, ed. Alastair Fowler (Harlow: Longman, 1997), which is hereafter referred to as "PL" in parentheticals when needed. References to Fowler's notes are footnoted with line numbers and "n."

Of growth, sense, reason, all summed up in man.
With what delight could I have walked thee round,
If I could joy in aught, sweet interchange
Of hill and valley, rivers, woods and plains,
Now land, now sea, and shores with forest crowned,
Rocks, dens, and caves; but I in none of these
Find place or refuge; and the more I see
Pleasures about me, so much more I feel
Torment within me, as from the hateful siege
Of contraries; all good to me becomes
Bane, and in heaven much worse would be my state.
But neither here seek I, no nor in heaven
To dwell, unless by mastering heaven's supreme. (9.99-125)

Although Satan's sevenfold circumnavigation of the earth has shown him all its varied splendors, he remains as fundamentally alienated from the world as he is from heaven. His speech here suggests that in addition to his immediate errand of finding an entry-point into Adam and Eve's walled garden, Satan has been in a sense looking for himself. "Rocks, dens, and caves; but I in none of these"—the slightly inverted syntax delays the verb and objects ("find," "place or refuge") which the prepositional phrase modifies; "I in none of these" suggests a Satan half-hoping to find among earth's plentiful landscapes a *locus amoenus* of his own, some site bearing an affinity with him. Satan's denial of having so sought at the end of the speech only strengthens the impression, coming as it does on the heels of another moment of recognition that he is condemned to limitless exile, a cosmic alienation not conditioned by place or space. Satan searches for a privileged place, but is unwilling and unable to relinquish the idea that he himself embodies, and so perpetually inhabits, the sovereign place. His objectifying gaze can but measure distance between himself and the world; surveying from within the inviolable sphere of the self isolated from the divine—emphatically conveyed in "I see [...] I feel"—Satan's envious apprehension

converts the existence of unpossessable goodness into a sense of his own suffering born of lack.

Although the poet-speaker affirms that Satan's fact-finding mission involves "inspection deep," the knowledge he gains from the endeavor seems curiously superficial. Consider the poet's description of the journey, rich with context-bound information and place names, compared with Satan's strangely detached explanation of what he has seen.

The poet tells us that Satan journeys:

From Eden over Pontus, and the pool
Maeotis, up beyond the river Ob;
Downward as far Antarctic; and in length
West from Orontes to the ocean barred
At Darien, thence to the land where flows
Ganges and Indus: thus the orb he roamed. (9.77-82)

The place names here signal specificity and an experiential or historical depth; they suggest a richly meaning-laden geography fitted within a pattern of providential history. The sonorous, incantatory quality of the catalogue reinforces the sense that these places are sites of lived experience to which their names bear witness. Beside this, Satan's bare list of deracinated landscape features—"land [...] sea [...] shores [...] forest [...] rocks, dens, and caves" (9.117-8)—appears bereft of any sense of context or meaning. The contrast between the poet's catalogue of places and Satan's own abstract description heightens the effect of the pun involved in "thus the orb he roamed / With *narrow search*," where *narrow* initially suggests an investigation especially illuminating because it is "painstaking, careful" (see OED 1A4a), but in full context implies instead a search "limited in range or scope" (see OED 1A3a). Compared to the richly immanent knowledge of the poet-speaker, Satan's understanding of the world is flattened by his condition of alienation; his utter exclusion

from the world as a dwelling-place affects the kind of knowledge he can have of it, causing it to be limited, abstract, solipsistic and instrumental.

It is of course possible to say that the difference between Satan's report and the poet-speaker's is merely temporal: when Satan is looking at earth, the place-names mentioned in the poem have not been established; only the poet-speaker, because of his position in history, knows what they will come to be called. Yet the real contrast here is not between Satan's surveying capacity and the poet-speaker's, but between Satan's vision and God's, which the poet-speaker here shares and to which the poetic description approximates. God's surveying capacity as described in Book 3 (the word "survey" is used in connection with God the father at 3.69) comprehends time as well as space. So when the poet-speaker advertises knowledge of the place names involved in Satan's bare survey, the poem's language approximates to, or at least brings into the ken of the reader, this supra-temporal dimension of divine surveying—a prophetic outlook which Adam will also be able to share when Raphael presents to him the panorama of global history in Book 11. Satan's survey comprehends only the objects in the world as they relate to himself; the poet-speaker, divinely inspired, understands them in the context of creation and prophetic history.

Satan's surveying is opposed to the all-encompassing spatiotemporal survey of divine omniscience; but it is also contrasted in the poem with Adam's unfallen human surveying capacity, which is depicted in Book 8. Discussing with Raphael the story of his own creation, Adam relates:

Straight toward heaven my wondering eyes I turned,
And gazed a while the ample sky, till raised
By quick instinctive motion up I sprung,
As thitherward endeavoring, and upright

Stood on my feet; about me round I saw
Hill, dale, and shady woods, and sunny plains,
And liquid lapse of murmuring streams; by these
Creatures that lived, and moved, and walked, or fled,
Birds on the branches warbling; all things smiled,
With fragrance and with joy my heart o'erflowed.
Myself I then perused, and limb by limb
Surveyed, and sometimes went, and sometimes ran
With supple joints, as lively vigor led. (8.257-69)

Adam's observations lead directly to the beginnings of the development of self-knowledge, based on recognition of himself as a created being, one bearing affinity with the "Creatures that lived, and moved, and walked, or flew," and "Birds on the branches warbling" (8.264-5). Adam then intuits the similarities between these creatures, their means of locomotion and their communicative calls, and himself: "Myself I then perused, and limb by limb / Surveyed, and sometimes went, and sometimes ran / With supple joints, as lively vigor led" (8.267-9). Having already intuited a creaturely similitude between himself and the wholly animate world around him, Adam reasons back from his creatureliness to the existence of a creator, and further reasons that he might pose a question:

[...] Thou sun, said I, fair light,
And thou enlightened earth, so fresh and gay,
Ye hills and dales, ye rivers, woods, and plains,
And ye that live and move, fair creatures, tell,
Tell us ye saw, how came I thus, how here?
Not of myself; by some great maker then,
In goodness and in power pre-eminent;
Tell me, how may I know him, how adore,
From whom I have that thus I move and live,
And feel that I am happier than I know. (8.273-83)

This primal scene of naming takes place dialogically; Adam addresses the world as a Thou, filled with fellow-creatures who insofar as they are creatures share the ground of his

being.²⁰⁵ For Satan to experience the affinity he seeks in his seven days survey of the earth, he would have to admit his own createdness, which of course he cannot do. Thus unlike Satan, whose observation of the world inflames his mind with newly refreshed envy and a redoubled sense of alienation, who finds “I in none of these,” Adam’s act of “surveying” himself is only made possible on the basis of affinity between himself as a created being whose existence depends upon the Creator, and the other creatures that dwell in the world alongside him. The truth of Adamic self-perception—the validity of this unfallen “survey”—springs from a recognition of likeness that Satan cannot admit.

These, then, are the three forms of surveying at work in *Paradise Lost*: the omniscient divine survey, the fallen Satanic survey, and the unfallen Adamic or Edenic survey. We could add to these a fourth, the prophetic survey occasionally voiced by the poet-speaker—the word is used in connection with Ezekiel who “when by the vision led / His eye *surveyed* the dark idolatries / Of alienated Judah” (1.456)—although this is in effect derivative of the first, divine and omniscient, form. (Hence Ezekiel’s survey is “led” by another, supervening “vision”). The use of the word “survey” in these three ways evokes three divergent but interdependent epistemologies of vision, three distinct ways of seeing-as-knowing—that is, three different versions of theory.

In Blumenberg and Harries special attention was paid to the transformation of theory as a cause and a result of revolutions in astronomical thinking. Hannah Arendt offers an account similar to those of Blumenberg and Harries in *The Human Condition* (1958), writing of the “human surveying capacity” and its transformation in modernity. Arendt’s

²⁰⁵ On Adamic language in *Paradise Lost* the classic study remains John Leonard, *Naming in Paradise: Milton and the Language of Adam and Eve* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), esp. 23-85.

insights are especially productive for interpreting *Paradise Lost*, because instead of drawing on Copernicus, who does not appear directly in the poem, Arendt draws on Galileo and the technics of telescoping, both of which the poem explicitly thematizes. In the wake of Copernicus's severing the traditional bonds of theory and vision, opening up a gap of uncertainty, Arendt argues that Galileo and the telescope effect a temporary recoupling of theory with sense certainty, one dependent upon the abstraction and mediation of technology. The question that swirls around Galileo, in the criticism on *Paradise Lost*, is how to evaluate his contribution: is the telescopic searching of the heavens more akin to Satanic, Edenic, or perhaps prophetic surveying?²⁰⁶ Arendt's argument that surveying becomes the fundamental form of knowledge practiced in modern science also allows us to test how *Paradise Lost* might fit into a sophisticated scheme of periodization.

The telescopic discoveries of Galileo—who in *Paradise Lost* stands as an ambiguous figuration of the advancement of learning—ought then, according to Arendt, to be considered along with two other “great events” which “stand at the threshold of the modern age and determine its character,” namely the discovery of the New World by early modern explorers, and the Reformation, which inaugurates an era of capitalism urged on

²⁰⁶ On Galileo and *Paradise Lost*: John Guillory, *Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton, and Literary History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 161, makes the oft-cited claim that the figure of Galileo serves as a “cryptic self-portrait” of Milton himself, a claim this chapter tests. See also Dennis Danielson, *Paradise Lost and the Cosmological Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 78-128; John Leonard, *Faithful Labourers: A Reception History of Paradise Lost, 1667-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 705-819; Malabika Sarkar, *Cosmos and Character in Paradise Lost* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 145-60; Denise Albanese, *New Science, New World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 121-47; Marjorie Hope Nicholson, “Milton and the Telescope,” *English Literary History* 2, no. 1 (1935), 1-32; Alan H. Gilbert, “Milton and Galileo,” *Studies in Philology* 19, no. 2 (1922), 152-85.

by what Max Weber identified as the “innerworldly asceticism” of the Puritans.²⁰⁷ These three events, for Arendt, all bear witness to the development of surveying as the paradigmatic form of modern human rationality. Of the three, Arendt speculates, it was perhaps the Galilean innovation that has exerted and will continue to exert the most profound influence over the course of history, from premodernity to modernity to what comes after, since its consequences have “eclipsed not only the enlargement of the earth’s surface [...] but also the still apparently limitless economic accumulation process.”²⁰⁸ For what Galileo’s telescope heralded was “the discovery of the Archimedean point,” the establishment of a perspective from which to view the world in universal terms, and to dispose of the world as if from a point outside.²⁰⁹ Arendt cites Galileo rather than Copernicus in her account of the development of modernity because Copernicus’s theoretical innovations—daring and brilliant though they were—still left the status of theory, having been severed from vision, in question. The gap between what appeared to be real to theory and what was evidently true to the senses set up a conflict that was only resolved by the expansion and transformation of the human sensorium by means of technique—the telescopic survey of the heavens. Galileo’s discoveries married the theoretical confidence of Copernicus to a form of certainty delivered to the senses, but mediated, indirectly, abstractly, and by means of a practical advance in the technology of vision. Arendt explains:

What Galileo did and what nobody had done before was to use the telescope in such a way that the secrets of the universe were delivered to human cognition ‘with the certainty of sense perception’; that is, he put within the

²⁰⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 248.

²⁰⁸ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 250.

²⁰⁹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 257.

grasp of an earth-bound creature and its body-bound senses what had seemed forever beyond his reach, at best open to the uncertainties of speculation and imagination.²¹⁰

It was precisely this enlargement of the scope of human experience noted by Arendt, the modification through technology of what constitutes the horizon of human sense perception, and the similitude of this amplified vision to the vatic aspirations of Milton's own attempt at cosmic description, that prompt the Tuscan artist's inclusion in the epic. The *visual* and *technological* dimension of Galileo's investigations, as distinct from the *theoretical* character of Copernicus's modeling of the heavens, make him a figure of interest to both Arendt and Milton, because it combines visionary knowing (theory) and skillful making (praxis; *poesis*) in a way that produced dramatic, indeed epoch-shaping results. Copernicus's theory was built upon the edifice of medieval physics and mathematics; it remained in a sense a product of reason as contemplation alone; it could still be rendered as an inert hypothesis as Osiander's preface to *De revolutionibus* makes evident; and most importantly it retained the notion of a physically localizable cosmic center—the sun, rather than the earth. (This last assumption is one that *Paradise Lost* explicitly works to destabilize, as I discuss below). Galileo's discoveries on the other hand, and the profound change in world picture entailed by them, came about through observation and mapping assisted by technology, and so emblemize the modern paradigm of reason as surveying, with surveying here meaning a form of knowledge combining 'pure' theory with technical praxis.

²¹⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 259-60.

Arendt's description of "surveying" as the paradigmatic modern form of knowledge seems to afford a comparison with the Satanic surveying we have been looking at in Book 9:

It is in the nature of the human surveying capacity that it can function only if man disentangles himself from all involvement in and concern with the close at hand and withdraws himself to a distance from everything near him. The greater the distance between himself and his surroundings, world or earth, the more he will be able to survey and to measure and the less will worldly, earth-bound space be left to him.²¹¹

Unlike theory-as-contemplation, theory-as-surveying alienates the knower from what it discloses. The alienation, according to Arendt, begins with the objectifying tendencies of an empirical knowledge gotten through the senses enhanced by technology, as was the case with Galileo but goes on to leave the specifically human perspective (scale-bound and reliant on the unaided senses) behind altogether. "The modern astrophysical world view, which began with Galileo," we read, presents a "challenge to the adequacy of the senses to reveal reality," leaving us "a universe of whose qualities we know no more than the way they affect our measuring instruments," which bear only the most tenuous relationship to the phenomenological domain of human perception. Arendt continues: "Instead of objective qualities, in other words, we find instruments, and instead of nature or the universe [...] man encounters only himself."²¹² In the mode of world-intelligibility given in modern science, human beings encounter themselves as the inheritors of a dubious autonomy—a freedom from the limitations of the human senses bought at the cost of self-evidence, not only in matters of empirics and reason, but also in matters of value and faith. And for Arendt, the autonomy bought at the cost of world alienation is the defining feature

²¹¹ Ibid., 251.

²¹² Arendt, *Human Condition*, 261.

of modernity: “World alienation, and not self-alienation as Marx thought, has been the hallmark of the modern age.”²¹³ Satan seems to have such an encounter with himself at the end of his own journey of surveying, finding nowhere on the earth a “place or refuge.” And yet, Satan seeks to use this very alienated knowledge as a means of solving the problem of his alienation. As noted above, what Satan finds in his survey is a sort of back door into Eden, a portal granting access to our first parents, through whose temptation he hopes to begin “mastering heaven’s supreme,” which he fantasizes will allow him to “dwell” in full autonomy, within the world, but beyond the reach of God.

For Arendt, the survey is a paradigmatically modern form of knowledge because in it we begin to “dispose of the earth as if from a point outside of it.” In it we stake a claim on the world’s intelligibility for us, at the cost of a sense that our experience of its intelligibility is immanent to it. Surveying, we realize the utility of approaching our knowledge of the world not as nature within nature—a microcosm dwelling within a macrocosm that repeats and reflects our being—but as something standing outside of the world, upon an Archimedean point. That is, Arendt views the act of *surveying* as emblematic of the transformation of *theory* that launches the modern age, a transition from a contemplative form of knowledge to an active, reconstructive, practical and utile one. Contemplative truth is both quiescent and, since it is not governed by an ideal of generalizable and repeatable construction, subject to the perspectival distortions of the contemplator. Active, reconstructive truth, by contrast, supposes itself to be free from such distortions and its mark of veracity is that it is in principle available to everyone who wishes to construct it anew. In the transition from theoretical contemplation to utilitarian surveying

²¹³ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 254.

in the service of a constructive human science, Arendt discerns an epistemological shift characteristic of the passage from premodern *vita contemplativa* to modern *vita activa*.

Although Arendt's discussion of modernity may seem somewhat outdated, the most recent scholarship on surveying, scientific knowledge, and *poesis* in the early modern period confirms the applicability of Arendt's basic insights to the interpretation of *Paradise Lost*.²¹⁴ Ayesha Ramachandran, to take one example, notes "the doubling of cartography and astronomy in *Paradise Lost*," arguing that both impulses are tied to the early modern project of *worldmaking*.²¹⁵ Ramachandran shares Arendt's insight that the mapping of the

²¹⁴ Worth mentioning in connection with worldmaking, surveying, and modernity is the literature on Milton and global empire, most notably Balachandra Rajan, *Under Western Eyes: India from Milton to Macaulay* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), esp. 50-66. Rajan rightly observes: "*Paradise Lost*, although not imperialist, is imperial as no other poem in the canon is. It is true that the imperial display is consecrated to the pervading and benevolent force of the universal and mild monarchy of heaven, but in the inevitable secularizing of the sacred, other translations of the display must emerge. The center-circumference dispositions, the hierarchical ordering of the poem's principal and almost only human relationship, the omnific word transforming a cosmic chaos that it is not difficult to displace into political anarchy, and the wilderness set against the ordered garden that must be tended and watched over if it is not to relapse into its origins are all perceptions that play a crucial part in the imperialist statement as an apparently timeless work of the literary canon, symbolically blind to the contingent, finds its way back to the arena of power. *Paradise Lost* is the work of a totalizing energy by which dreams of empire cannot but be nourished" (65). The phrase "totalizing energy" well describes diabolical surveying and its worldmaking capacity, and Rajan convincingly notes affinities between it and the poem at large. See also Talya Meyers, "Images of the East in *Paradise Lost*," in *With Wandering Steps: Generative Ambiguity in Milton's Poetics*, eds. Mary C. Fenton and Louis Schwartz (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2016), 157-72; and in the same volume Joshua Lee Wisebaker, "Alternative Histories and the New World in *Paradise Lost*" (173-90); *ad libitum* Balachandra Rajan, *Milton and the Climates of Reading*, ed. Elizabeth Sauer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), but esp. 64-71, 93-111; J. M. Evans, *Milton's Imperial Epic: Paradise Lost and the Discourse of Colonialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Paul Stevens, "Paradise Lost and the Colonial Imperative," *Milton Studies* 34 (1996), 3-21; and David Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), esp. 268-324.

²¹⁵ Ayesha Ramachandran, *The Worldmakers: Global Imagining in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015), 195.

heavens in the wake of Galileo and the mapping of the “New World” are epistemologically twinned enterprises of surveying as a mode of knowing. Her argument also confirms that theodicy in *Paradise Lost* is ultimately a matter of the world’s intelligibility as a whole, that “the justification of the ways of God to men is finally tied to evidence of a coherent system of world order,” and that surveying-as-knowing is related to the attainment of theodical satisfactions in the poem.²¹⁶ But where Arendt’s analysis emphasizes the existential cost involved in transforming the theoretical enterprise from a kind of world *contemplation* (in the premodern *vita contemplativa*) into an iterative process of world *making* (in the modern *vita activa*), the stress in Ramachandran’s argument falls on the liberatory gains the subject achieves thereby. Rather than seeing technologies of worldmaking as a dubious intrusion of knowledge as power, Ramachandran sees in worldmaking an extension of early modern imaginative cosmopoesis, writing of the “union of science and the aesthetic imagination.” Descriptively the accounts of Arendt and Ramachandran are quite similar; yet Arendt’s ultimate evaluation of the use of surveying in the pursuit of worldmaking is at most hesitant and ambiguous, whereas Ramachandran’s tends to be quite positive, even exuberant.

In a coda on twenty-first-century mapping technologies like Google Earth, Ramachandran sees in “the image of the individual at her computer screen playing with a digital globe that she makes and unmakes with virtual push-pins” an image of “worldmaking at its most exciting.”²¹⁷ (The image calls to mind Raphael’s description of those worldmaking astronomers who seek virtually to “model heaven,” “build, unbuild,”

²¹⁶ Ramachandran, *Worldmakers*, 211.

²¹⁷ Ramachandran, *Worldmakers*, 227.

and “wield / The mighty frame” (PL 8.79-81)). Combining incredible surveying power with responsiveness to the imaginative impulses of individuals, this kind of worldmaking exemplifies the “supple, expansive approach to the problem of expressing a vision of totality—without succumbing to totalizing rigidity” that the term “worldmaking” seeks to capture. One could of course argue that the “supple” virtual interface of Google Earth is paid for by a kind of material “totalization” that goes unmentioned here; nevertheless, this analysis provides a noteworthy counterpoint to Arendt in our exploration of the modern in *Paradise Lost*, since it reminds us of the special role played by *poetry* in early modern attempts to render the world as a whole intelligible. The leading idea is that poetry like that found in *Paradise Lost*, “as a form of human worldmaking that imitated a presumed divine original,” has the power to “unite religious faith, rationalistic exegesis, empirical method, and a changed understanding of the world order to produce a new kind of skeptically grounded faith, one which acknowledged uncertainty but triumphantly asserted its own creative potential.” In poetry, that is to say, the sacred and the secular harmonize. Yet as the seven days of uncreation episode demonstrates, imitating the “divine original” in *Paradise Lost* is often freighted with diabolical associations. So while we do well to see in poetic imagination a potential to reconcile the keen desire for objective truth with the realities of perspectival limitation, we must also bear in mind that this potential is compromised in *Paradise Lost* by its uncomfortable similarity to diabolic pride.

For Satan, excluded permanently and in advance because of his fall, the instrumental handling of knowledge about the world is not an option among others, but is the only possible epistemological stance. It seems clear on the evidence of the text that what Satan does during his “seven days of uncreation” in Book 9 counts as surveying in

Arendt's sense: it is affectively marked by a clearly registered sense of world-loss and alienation; it attempts to dispose of the world from the outside inward as Satan seeks access to Paradise; and its ends are finally instrumental in character since the knowledge acquired cannot, we are told, be enjoyed for its own sake. Yet Arendt and Milton also seem to disagree about the fundamental significance of Galileo, with Milton holding open a possible meaning of telescopic surveying quite different from the one imagined by Arendt. As Dennis Danielson has shown, beyond its explicit references to Galileo, there are multiple examples in *Paradise Lost* of Milton adopting and repurposing Galilean insights to serve the ends of divine epic. To Galileo and the telescope we owe the existence in the poem of the "innumerable stars" (3.565) populating the heavens and composing the Milky Way, the identification of the earth as a shining star among other luminous bodies, and the pluralization of celestial phenomena (i.e., "other suns perhaps / With their attendant moons" (8.148-9)).²¹⁸ By weaving these telescopic observations into the fabric of a divine epic in the way that he does, Milton holds out the possibility that the figure of Galileo, and his telescopically enhanced surveying capacity, may have more in common with the unfallen Edenic survey than with the diabolical survey. Arendt's account positions the technological supplement of the telescope as an ambiguous step forward into uncharted territory, an overcoming of the natural human sense of scale by means of instrumental reason; but there are hints—and indeed more than hints—that Milton may have seen in it

²¹⁸ See Dennis Danielson, *Paradise Lost and the Cosmological Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 84-90.

a reclamation of the full, natural human surveying capacity lost in consequence of the fall.²¹⁹

So the semantic field of the word “survey” in *Paradise Lost* is attended with all kinds of ambiguity, and the inquiries of Arendt and Ramachandran help us to understand how evaluations of surveying as a way of knowing come to affect attitudes toward modernity. We can now return to the seven days of uncreation episode, and to the import of diabolical surveying more generally, with our own horizons somewhat expanded. Although the keyword “survey” is not used in the seven days of uncreation sequence in

²¹⁹ The lapidary lines from Milton’s tract *Of Education* come to mind: “The end then of Learning is to repair the ruines of our first Parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the neerest by possessing our souls of true vertue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection. But because our understanding cannot in this body found it self but on sensible things, nor arrive so clearly to the knowledge of God and things invisible, as by orderly conning over the visible and inferior creature, the same method is necessarily to be follow’d in all discreet teaching.” The case that Milton viewed progress in ‘science’, broadly construed, as working to reconstitute an Edenic state has lately been made by Joanna Picciotto, “Reforming the Garden: The Experiementalist Eden and Paradise Lost,” *English Literary History* 72, no.1 (2005), 23-78; and more capaciously in the same author’s book *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). Picciotto helpfully points to Joseph Glanvill’s *Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661) (“Reforming,” 27), where Glanvill writes that Adam had a clear and intuitive sense perception that the earth was in motion. A similar argument to Picciotto’s is laid out in Peter Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Modern Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For additional insights on Milton and education, see Ryan Netzley, “Learning from History: Empiricism, Likeness, and Liberty in *Paradise Lost*, Books 11-12,” in *Milton’s Modernities*, eds. Feisal Mohamed and Patrick Fadely (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 85-110; Sarah Higinbotham, “Education as Repair: *Paradise Lost* in Prison,” in *To Repair the Ruins: Reading Milton*, eds. Mary Fenton and Louis Schwartz (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2012), 339-58; Catherine Gimelli Martin, *Milton Among the Puritans: The Case for Historical Revisionism* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 203-11; Thomas Festa, *The End of Learning: Milton and Education* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 23-44; 99-157; Janel Mueller, “Embodying Glory: The Apocalyptic Strain in Milton’s *Of Reformation*,” in *Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton’s Prose*, eds. David Loewenstein and James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge Univeristy Press, 1990), 9-40.

Book 9, it is used earlier in connection with Satan: in Book 3, when the fallen angel stands “on the lower stair / That scaled by steps of gold to heaven’s gate,” and “Looks down with wonder at the sudden view / of all this world at once” (3.540-3). In this scene, we are told, Satan “surveys” the entire universe with a mixture of wonder and envy, the same affective mixture that characterize his soliloquy in Book 9. The poem also includes some telling language here: “Round he surveys,” we read, “and well might, where he stood / So high above the circling canopy / Of night’s extended shade” (3.555-7). One could read the aside “and well might, where he stood” as simply setting up the stunning astronomical descriptive passage that follows on this moment, as Satan winds his “oblique” way toward the human world through “innumerable stars” (3.564-5). But the phrase “and well might, where he stood” seems to be signaling, more than the sublime position that Satan adopts as he surveys the world, a sense that he ought not be there at all, a sense that the vantage point from which he gazes at the world is not properly his, that he is interloping there. Shifting attention from “where he stood” to “and well might” encourages questions about the legitimacy of Satan’s perspectival position here, about his claims upon this point of vantage above the universe—in other words, it raises the question about whether his survey can embody truth. His affective response, blending envy and wonder, reveals that even in this moment of sublimity there is in fact an overriding poverty of perspective—a poverty of ethical perception which undermines empirical perception as well.²²⁰

²²⁰ My reading of Book 3 is indebted to Isabel G. MacCaffery, “The Theme of Paradise Lost, Book III,” in *New Essays on Paradise Lost* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 58-85: “The poem treats the ways of God to men; Book III deals specifically with divine epistemology, the ways whereby men can know, or come to know, God” (58). To which I would add (in the visual epistemology of Satan) also the ways whereby they *can’t*. Also sensitive to the play of perspective, scientific knowledge, and Satanic surveying in

In order to grasp the stakes of Satan’s diabolical surveys of the universe and the world in Book 3 and Book 9 respectively, we must first understand that he is himself at those very moments not only the surveyor but also the surveyed. Earlier in Book 3, we read the following about God the Father:

Now had the almighty Father from above,
From the empyrean where he sits
High throned above all height, bent down his eye,
His own works and their works at once to view:
About him all the sanctities of heaven
Stood thick as stars, and from his sight received
Beatitude past utterance; on his right
The radiant image of his glory sat,
His only Son: on earth he first beheld
Our two first parents, yet the only two
Of mankind, in the happy garden placed,
Reaping immortal fruits of joy and love,
Uninterrupted joy, unrivalled love
In blissful solitude; he then surveyed
Hell and the gulf between, and Satan there
Coasting the wall of heaven on this side night
In the dun air sublime, and ready now
To stoop with wearied wings, and willing feet,
On the bare outside of this world, that seemed
Firm land imbosomed without firmament,
Uncertain which, in ocean or in air.
Him God beholding from his prospect high,
Wherein past, present, future he beholds,
Thus to his only Son foreseeing spake. (3.56-79)

Here God sits upon “his prospect high,” not high in the merely spatial sense applied to Satan later in Book 3, but “high above all height,” in a way that transcends time as well as space, since from that prospect “past, present, future he beholds.” What follows upon this moment of divine surveying is God the Father’s description of all that will follow in the epic, and all that will follow upon that: Satan’s temptation, mankind’s disobedience, and

Book 3 is David Quint, *Inside Paradise Lost: Reading the Designs of Milton’s Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 93-118.

the Son's redemption. God's perfected knowledge allows for a comprehensive survey of all temporal duration as well as all spatial extension; this knowledge provides the substance of Adam's prophetic education in Book 11, another instance in which a vatic seeing-as-knowing partakes of and participates in the omniscient, divine survey. In this moment, which is called "surveying" only by way of accommodation, to be sure, though the gap between the reality and the accommodation is precisely our point of interest here, God need not parcel his attention in any way. Although He "bent down his eye," his beneficent gaze still goes out to all the "sanctities of heaven" that surround him; nor is the "image of his glory" slighted by this seeming shift of attention. God's survey here, shared by the reader, shifts the frame of reference in which Satan's journey is viewed: what seemed in Book 2 as a heroic rise from Hell and Chaos appears now as a descent, with Satan appearing "ready now / To stoop with wearied wings" to the "opaque sphere" surrounding the entire universe.²²¹ Recall also that in Book 9 Satan undertakes his survey precisely in order to escape being, himself, surveilled, that he seeks to enter Eden undetected by "cherubic watch," to find some "unsuspected way" (9.68-9). Divine omnipotence, however, has already seen all that will develop in its maximally panoramic spatiotemporal aspect. Considered in this way, Satan's act of surveying must be read not as a prelude to his fraud, but already an instance of it, an attempt to attain a kind of universal knowledge by usurping the vantage from which God views the earth in an all-encompassing perspective. The fact that the seven-days' survey travesties the seven days' creation reinforces this thematic fact at the level of narrative and formal construction. The attempt founders by confusing the

²²¹ PL 3.75n.

metaphysical locus of divine omniscience with a physically privileged observational point—an Archimedean point, to recall Arendt’s terminology above.

Later in Book 9, when Eve succumbs to the serpent’s temptation, there occurs a double change in her perspective that deserves some mention in this discussion of seeing-as-knowledge in the poem. The passage has become a *locus classicus* for discussing Milton’s attitude toward science. After “greedily” eating the fruit, Eve speaks the following lines as though “heightened as with wine”:

O sovereign, virtuous, precious of all trees
In Paradise, of operation blest
To sapience, hitherto obscured, infamed
And thy fair fruit let hang, as to no end
Created; but henceforth my early care,
Not without song, each morning, and due praise
Shall tend thee, and the fertile burden ease
Of thy full branches offered free to all;
Till dieted by thee I grow mature
In knowledge, as the gods who all things know;
Though others envy what they cannot give;
For had the gift been theirs, it had not here
Thus grown. Experience, next to thee I owe,
Best guide; not following thee, I had remained
In ignorance, thou op’nest wisdom’s way,
And giv’st access, though secret she retire.
And I perhaps am secret; heaven is high,
High and remote to see from thence distinct
Each thing on earth; and other care perhaps
May have diverted from continual watch
Our great forbidding, safe with all his spies
About him. (9.795-816).

Still intoxicated by the immediate effects of the fall, Eve begins to think of knowledge in terms of experience, which is to say in terms of fallen or diabolic surveying, colored by exteriority and alienation. According to Eve, experiential “sapience” grants “access” to “wisdom’s way,” which otherwise, she reasons, would have stayed barred. Knowledge here moves from the outside in; it is figured as a penetration of mystery, just as Satan’s survey

led to the penetration of Eden. At the same time that Eve begins to think of knowledge as something concealed, and of the pursuit of knowledge as a movement from a position of outsideness to one of penetrating insight, she also comes to regard herself as “secret,” hidden from the all-perceiving survey of God. This, then, is the double change resulting from the fall into knowledge-by-experience: truth is regarded as something remote and occluded which must be approached and then penetrated; and, at the same time, the self comes to be regarded as something hidden, so that God’s knowledge seems like espionage, not surveying but surveillance (hence Eve calls the angels God’s “spies”).²²² Eve’s self-deceived discussion of the “high and remote” vantage from which God surveys all of creation echoes the language used to describe God’s surveying in Book 3, but is prone to the same physicalizing error evident in Satan’s attempt to occupy such a privileged observational place. The description of divine surveying in Book 3 explicitly denies both of Eve’s assumptions about the way in which God’s visionary knowledge works: first that it is ineffective because too distant, and second that he might be temporarily distracted. From Book 3, recall, we have already learned that God can “bend his eye” through space and time from “where he sits / High throned above all height,” and that attending to one thing (ex. “Our two first parents”) does not involve leaving something else unattended (ex. “the sanctities of heaven”).

²²² This moment in *Paradise Lost* connects the poem back to *Measure for Measure*, the subject of Chapter 2 of the present study. In the play the question of whether a human (rather than divine) sovereign power may justly come to know the secrets of his subjects is explored. The difference between a truly providential divine knowledge and an approximately providential sovereign knowledge is at the core of *Measure*’s meditation on the problem of evil as a question in the context of Jacobean political theology.

The change in Eve's perception of knowledge and self after the fall, and its proximity to Satan's view of knowledge in the seven days of uncreation, seems to confirm Arendt's sense that the human surveying capacity is inevitably tied to alienation and world-loss. It also seems to imply a certain scientific backwardness in *Paradise Lost*, since it associates the new science—its reliance on experiment, its search for nature's secrets, and its assumption of an Archimedean point from which to dispose of the world as from outside—with the primal scene of sin. In this analysis eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge becomes synonymous with the "discovery of the Archimedean point," although that discovery, which was itself coming to fruition in Milton's time in the form of Galileo's telescopic surveys and unprecedented voyages of discovery, is projected back into the primal scene of fallen epistemology.

Although Eve's speeches after the fall place full confidence in the validity of sense perception as a means of access to the truth, as we will see presently, the example of Adam's unfallen inquiry about the heavenly motions proleptically points forward to a situation in which, precisely, what is seen—the sun is seen to move about the earth, the sphere of fixed stars is seen to whirl about—is not to be believed, in which theory must go beyond what is seen in order to achieve theodical results. It is true that the evidentiary force of Galileo's telescopic discoveries helped to invalidate many arguments against Copernicanism. But it is just as true that in the adoption of the idea that the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies—something to us utterly apparent—is actually the result of the earth's motion—something we do not perceive at all—modernity shows itself not to be a seeing-is-believing empirical enterprise only, but rather one in which theory can sway us away from appearances.

When Satan is tempting Eve in serpentine form, he makes the following false claims about the effects of the forbidden fruit. He climbs the tree and eats, and then,

Sated at length, ere long I might perceive
Strange alteration in me, to degree
Of reason in my inward powers, and speech
Wanted not long, though to this shape retained.
Thenceforth to speculations high or deep
I turned my thoughts, and with capacious mind
Considered all things visible in heaven,
Or earth, or middle, all things fair and good. (9.598-605)

I want to pause for a moment over “speculations high or deep,” which points to a connection between knowledge as surveying and knowledge as penetration. This same relationship between surveying and penetration also finds expression in the seven days of uncreation episode discussed above, in which Satan’s world tour serves to find a hidden entrance through which he can steal into Paradise. Thus the diabolical form of surveying always seems to possess a depth dimension, being at once an inspection from on high and also, in the poem’s language, an “inspection deep.” The connection between surveying from above and fathoming the depths is further confirmed in Book 6, when Satan, prompted by Nisroc, lays out his invention of diabolical war machines powered by “materials dark and crude”:

Not uninvented that, which you aright
Believ’st so main to our success, I bring:
Which of us who beholds the bright surface
Of this ethereous mould whereon we stand,
This continent of spacious heav’n, adorned
With plant, fruit, flower ambrosial, gems and gold,
Whose eye so superficially surveys
These things, as not to mind from whence they grow
Deep under ground, materials dark and crude,
Of spiritous and fiery spume, till touched
With heaven’s ray, and tempered they shoot forth
So beauteous, op’ning to the ambient light.
These in their dark nativity the deep

Shall yield us, pregnant with infernal flame,
Which into hollow engines long and round
Thick-rammed, at the other bore with touch of fire
Dilated and infuriate shall send forth
From far with thundering noise among our foes (6.470-87)

Knowledge as surveying, knowledge as penetration, and the invention of ingenious but destructive technics come together here in a passage dense with references to alchemy and sexual procreation. One wonders how Satan's rhetorical question would have been answered—do all the fallen angels share the impulse to plumb the depths that Satan describes here? Whether they do or not, Satan is the progenitor and exemplar of this restless impulse to tear up the “bright surface” of things, to peer into their depths, to seek out the hidden, to master the occult properties of nature through technics. For Satan, to “mind” is at the same time to “mine” as the pun advertises.

The connection between diabolical surveying and penetration, the thing that binds “speculations high or deep” into a single, and singularly pernicious sin, is *curiosity*.²²³ Like surveying—diabolically shaded into surveilling—the world from a superior vantage got by usurpation, prying into the depths transgresses a boundary of knowledge. Satan's reaction to the beauty of heaven is precisely that *concupiscentia oculorum* (“lust of the eyes”) which, under the name of *curiositas*, Augustine in the *Confessions* enrolls in the list of vices.²²⁴ By endorsing the notion that knowledge ought to have its limits, *Paradise Lost*

²²³ On Milton, curiosity, and forbidden or vain knowledge, see Regina Schwartz, *Remembering and Repeating: Biblical Creation in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 40-59; Howard Schultz, *Milton and Forbidden Knowledge* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1955), 43-95.

²²⁴ The theme of curiosity runs throughout St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2nd ed. 2006). On interpretations of Augustine and curiosity, I draw principally upon Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 1985), 229-456, and esp. 309-24; and see also

might appear distinctly out of step with modernity, which valorizes curiosity, especially and above all the “scientific curiosity” which in its more aspirational forms seeks limitlessly to expand the frontiers of the world’s intelligibility. Yet the ambiguity attending Galileo and the telescope should be borne in mind, since the expansion of frontiers in that case finds its way into the fabric of Milton’s own inspired *poesis*. Galileo’s telescope appears in the poem as an ambiguous emblem, rather than an image of all that is to be condemned. And although Raphael gently chastises Adam for his (unfallen) expression of astronomical curiosity in Book 8, I will show in the next section that the poem leaves open the possibility that for fallen human beings, the search for theodical assurances in the form of a theory that can make the heavens intelligible to reason may not be an instance of curiosity at all.

Having now discussed the diabolical or fallen survey and its relation to the omniscient, divine survey in *Paradise Lost*, I will turn now to the unfallen, Edenic mode. The word “survey” is used twice in connection with Adam. In both cases, Adam’s sense of, and use of, surveying take place within human bounds, but the perfected and (by comparison with ours) enlarged form granted at their first creation. His theoretical capacity—his faculty of seeing-as-knowing—is not yet conditioned by the alienation that marks the diabolical surveying of Satan, and the paranoia about being surveilled of the fallen Eve. At the same time, Adam’s surveys are not divine; they are not omniscient and insofar as they are not colored by pride, they do not aim to be. The unfallen surveying capacity complicates the categories set out by Arendt: it is at once enhanced (as if by

P. G. Walsh, “The Rights and Wrongs of Curiosity (Plutarch to Augustine),” *Greece and Rome* 35, no. 1 (1988), 73-85.

technics) and natural; it is at once able to perceive the “innumerable stars” of the Milky Way as though telescopically, and yet it is not bound to the technological teleology which gave Arendt pause and colored her evaluation of modernity. In short: the possibility of an unfallen or Edenic epistemology opens up an entirely new horizon within the account of *The Human Condition*, one in which knowledge-as-vision takes place without the assumption of an Archimedean point. As discussed briefly in the first section of the present chapter, in Book 8, Adam describes his first moments of dawning consciousness to Raphael with the following words:

Straight toward heaven my wondering eyes I turned,
And gazed a while the ample sky, till raised
By quick instinctive motion up I sprung,
As thitherward endeavoring, and upright
Stood on my feet; about me round I saw
Hill, dale, and shady woods, and sunny plains,
And liquid lapse of murmuring streams; by these
Creatures that lived, and moved, and walked, or flew,
Birds on the branches warbling; all things smiled,
With fragrance and with joy my heart o'erflowed.
Myself I then perused, and limb by limb
Surveyed, and sometimes went, and sometimes ran
With supple joints, as lively vigor led:
But who I was, or where, or from what cause,
Knew not. (8.257-71)

The poem here presents, in a highly condensed form, the foundations of an unfallen human anthropology, and it is not by accident that the keyword we have been tracing appears in conjunction with its near synonym “peruse.” Adam’s moment of self-surveying at the moment his consciousness dawns differs from Satan’s diabolical survey in that it does not seek to imitate the divine surveying of Book 3; it does not rely on the usurpation of a privileged vantage point, as did Satan’s. Adam’s seeing-as-knowing moves swiftly from a heavenward gaze—from which Adam derives a kinesthetic impulse toward adopting an

upright, hence specifically human posture—to a consideration of his own body.²²⁵ In fact, the word “survey” may seem slightly out of place here, accustomed as we might be to take the word “survey” in its geographical sense of cognizing and describing something vast in comparison with human limits: a continent, say, or the sweep of centuries worth of literary history. The word’s appearance here confirms the existence of a prelapsarian surveying capacity operating on a human scale at once intimate and (as book 8 has already demonstrated through the cosmological dialogue with Raphael) vast, yet one that operates without the dubious luxury of an “Archimedean point” supplied by any technics. Such a point, once attained, is supposed to allow the philosopher to set move the earth in all its immensity; Adam’s survey intends only to set the body to moving, it does not tally with the demiurgic desire of an Archimedes. One last point of contrast between Satan’s surveying and Adam’s bears mentioning: Adam’s moment of looking on the whole of his own corporeal form remains at a level that Satan calls “superficial”—it does not seek out the mechanical causes buried beneath his own skin, does not turn to imagining the “materials dark and crude” from which he has been fashioned. Recalling Leibniz above, the cause Adam seeks is not that of the “kingdom of power” (efficient cause) but of the “kingdom of wisdom” (final—or in this case first—cause). Yet at the same time, Adam’s self-surveying does entail mastery of allows him to put his own body into a form of motion

²²⁵ On human upright posture, see PL 7.505-11n. Fowler points out that this is a hexameral commonplace. Milton’s treatment obliquely connects the upright posture to an astral destiny. For a contrasting description, see Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985). Blumenberg imagines the upright posture as a compensatory feature bespeaking the weakness of the human creature and the loss of an original protective enclosure (cave, forest), rather than a divine spark or image of God in mankind.

that gives him delight, he locates a depth of use in his own corporeal form, rather than self-destructively attempting to strip it away. Yet some questions about this passage remain.

Why does Adam, whose language we know to be perfectly adequate and unfallen, use two words to describe his self-perception, and where does the difference lie between “peruse” and “survey,” if indeed there is a difference? The OED cites this passage in definitions of both words. At *peruse*, v. II.3 the word is supposed to mean “To examine in detail; to scrutinize, inspect, survey, oversee; to consider, to take heed of.” And at *survey*, v. 4.a this passage is adduced in support of the sense, “To look at from, or as from, a height or commanding position; to take a broad, general, or comprehensive view of; to view or examine in its whole extent.” (Interestingly, the OED also includes under this definition the moment of God the Father’s surveying of creation at 3.555; I will return to this point shortly). Judging from the OED then, the words are quite nearly synonymous. But etymologically “peruse” is rooted in the word “use,” whereas “survey” is rooted in the Latin “videre,” to see. What I want to highlight here is that in this moment of self-apprehension it seems that use and enjoyment, *uti* and *frui*, are not yet divided for Adam, but seem rather to combine into one sense. Perusing himself, learning the use of his limbs, and surveying them in their peculiar arrangement that makes him alone among creatures walk upright on two legs, Adam then begins to put his body to work, running and walking as pleases him. The use of his body yields an aesthetic sense of pleasure. In this scene of dawning self-awareness, then, *uti* and *frui*, the distinction upon which Augustine based his limitations on the human desire for knowledge—we should strive to know only what is useful, and be wary of seeking knowledge only for the sake of pleasure divorced from use—is not yet operative. For Adam, exercising the unfallen human surveying capacity is

not bound to attend to the same difference between useful and vain knowledge that constrains human beings in their postlapsarian state. This must change the way we view Raphael's gentle rebuke of Adam in Book 8, because it suggests that curiosity, if it exists at all in an unfallen mind, must operate quite differently.

Is the OED justified in combining this moment of unfallen human survey with the divine sense of survey in Book 3? On the one hand, it appears strange to say that Adam here views his own body "from, or as from, a height or commanding position," or that he is able to "examine in its whole extent" his own corporeal form. His back, for instance, would be hidden from view, and he can hardly be said to perceive himself here as from above, although he is in a "commanding" position understood in terms of agency rather than space. Yet the similarity between the two moments runs deep, maybe deeper than the OED's editors had in mind when they adduced the two passages in support of one sense. As Dennis Danielson has showed through an analysis of *Paradise Lost* and *De doctrina*, the "first matter" of creation, out of which all celestial, terrestrial, and diabolical being is woven, is in some sense a part of the body of God. Until now we have been proceeding as though God's surveying in Book 3 was like a justified and heightened version of what Satan did in Book 9, but here there is an indication that the proper point of comparison is rather with Adam's surveying of his own body. God looks out over the creation not as one watching others—as the fallen Eve seems to think as she grows paranoid about God's observation of her—but as Being perceiving itself.

This sense of surveying as self-perception finds oblique confirmation the second time Adam makes use of the word. When he expresses his doubts about the heavens to Raphael, he says that he has considered them "in all their vast survey," using the word in

its substantive form to mean their whole sweep, their entire extent. The stars “in all their vast survey” seem to gaze upon themselves, just as Adam has gazed upon himself limb by limb, and God, when surveying creation, observes those things which are his. In all, what is suggested here is an intimate connection between the way of seeking knowledge that we know by the word “survey” on the one hand, and relative scales or the play of perspectives on the other. The “human surveying capacity” identified by Arendt, and cited as the primary organ through which the intelligibility of the world is transmitted in the modern age, operates licitly when it operates within the perspectival frame set for it, rather than seeking the vantage of the Archimedean point. The ‘invention’ of the telescope by Galileo also marks the discovery of this point for the modern age, since it finally puts to rest the idea of a two-story universe operating through distinct sets of physical laws, and since it did so through a demonstration with all the hallmarks of sense-certainty but was nevertheless a technical achievement. From there a mathematized, universal physics was but a short step. And it was this universality of knowledge bought at the price of abstraction that gave impetus and meaning to the Enlightenment. Answers to the question: Wouldn’t it have been better if human surveying had stayed within the perspectival bounds set out for it by God? tend to be given in vain, as is the attempt to dictate a system of rules or a cultural condition in which those bounds might be revived. Once the Archimedean point has been discovered it cannot be walled off again, though the way to it can indeed be forgotten, and politics and culture can aid in this forgetting. But thinking this way anticipates a conclusion which we are not yet in a position to make. First we must look more closely at Adam looking at the stars, which gaze at themselves within the constant, active survey of God.

3. Theodicy, Astronomical Curiosity, and Theory's Claim to Truth in Book 8

In *Milton and the Natural World: Science and Poetry in Paradise Lost* (2005), Karen Edwards declares in no uncertain terms: “Milton stands on *this* side of modernity”—and by modernity is meant the project of modern science, including the new astronomy of the late seventeenth century.²²⁶ Up to this point, our examination of the keyword “survey” in *Paradise Lost* has not really supported such a claim. It has showed, via Arendt and Ayesha Ramachandran, that surveying and worldmaking are characteristically modern enterprises; and it has demonstrated that in *Paradise Lost* surveying is frequently associated with diabolism, with the illicit usurpation of divine perspective, and that the poem tends to condemn the “discovery of the Archimedean point” which Arendt claims begins when Galilean technics confirms the theoretical picture of Copernicanism in a way that challenges the self-evidence of the sense, yet is “delivered to human cognition ‘with the certainty of sense perception’ through the mediation of technology. In this section, I will offer some evidence that *Paradise Lost* is in one sense “on this side of modernity” in its approach to what we might call (borrowing from Odo Marquard) *gnoseological evils*—evils related to forbidden knowledge and vain learning, and to the desire for such

²²⁶ Karen Edwards, *Milton and the Natural World: Science and Poetry in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3. Edwards persuasively makes the case for a scientifically engaged Milton, against the tradition of, ex., Kester Svendsen Milton and Science (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956) and the redoubtable Stanley Fish, *Surprised By Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967; 2nd ed. 1997), esp. 241-54. Much of the literature on Milton and science has been cited above, but worth mentioning here are the recent study of N. K. Sugimura, “*Matter of Glorious Trial*”: *Spiritual and Material Substance in Paradise Lost* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), which challenges longstanding views on Milton's commitments to ‘monism’ and ‘materialism’ as laid down in, ex., John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) and Stephen Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

knowledge that Augustine condemned under the name *curiositas*.²²⁷ The desire for knowledge of the heavens—frequently an emblem of the vain knowledge sought for by the intellect guided by curiosity—is given a certain warrant in *Paradise Lost*, since Adam expresses it in a sinless, unfallen way. But the “modernity” of this desire is ambiguous, since it also signifies a return to a lost prelapsarian state, a step along the way toward a restoration of ideal humanity, rather than a striking out toward unexplored horizons of thought.

The single biggest obstacle standing in the way of a fulsome reading of *Paradise Lost* as a poem allied with the scientific revolution is Raphael’s speech to Adam in Book 8, where the archangel tells our universal parent to “be lowly wise,” seeming to deride the attempt to assay celestial mechanics as vanity and proud curiosity. Even though John Leonard and Dennis Danielson have persuasively shown—contravening some two hundred years worth of scholarly consensus on the subject—that Milton’s epic does *not* take place within and reflect a Ptolemaic cosmos, this passage equivocates in such a way that it has become impossible to see the *Paradise Lost* declaring support for the renovation of astronomical theory—and hence in theory itself—undertaken by Copernicus and Galileo.²²⁸ Ultimately the question of whether *Paradise Lost* espouses “heliocentrism” or

²²⁷ Odo Marquard, “Unburdenings: Theodicy Motives in Modern Philosophy,” in *In Defense of the Accidental: Philosophical Studies*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 18, writes that among the “theodicy motives” in modern philosophy is the process whereby “*Gnoseological evil is rendered no longer evil*. Curiosity, which had been a vice, becomes the central scientific virtue” [emphasis in original].

²²⁸ John Leonard, *Faithful Labourers: A Reception History of Paradise Lost, 1667-1970, Vol. 2: Interpretive Issues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 705-819. Leonard lays bare a process, begun in the nineteenth century, whereby a mishandled reading of the Paradise of Fools section of PL Book 3 becomes established as a critical commonplace supporting the poem’s adherence to geocentrism.

“Copernicanism” is inconsequential to the poem’s modernity or lack thereof. There are better litmus tests for determining whether its attitudes toward astronomy are compatible with the flowering of modern astronomical theory—namely, its attitude toward theory itself, its description of the potentialities and limitations of seeing-as-knowing. Looking to questions of theodicy as they were discussed above, as having to do with the intelligibility of the world as a whole, as justifying God’s good intentions toward humankind by proving an essential consonance between God’s reasons for creation and the reason of the human creature, illuminates better the question of *Paradise Lost*’s modernity.

Before embarking on an interpretation of Adam and Raphael’s exchange in Book 8, I would like to return to Hans Blumenberg’s account of the Copernican turn, briefly discussed in the introduction of this chapter. The more detailed exposition will help to secure the connection between astronomy, theodicy, and curiosity, and will elucidate the role played by this constellation of concepts in the epochal shift into the modern age. In *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, Blumenberg relates an apocryphal story about the Castilian King Alfonso X, called the Wise, a legend that “became a *topos* that was varied in many ways” in Renaissance-era and modern histories of the transition from Ptolemaic to Copernican astronomical theories. Alfonso earned his sobriquet partly through his patronage of astronomical science, which resulted in the creation of the Alfonsine tables, an aid to astronomical computation—extremely popular throughout the middle ages and well known to Copernicus—based on the geocentric system of Ptolemy. But he was to become most famous for a remark he perhaps never made, namely, “Si a principia creationis humanae Dei altissimi consilio interfuisset, nonnulla melius ordinatiusque condita fuisse” [If he had participated, through advice to God almighty, from the beginning

of the creation of man, man would have been better and more properly fashioned in many respects]. (This, at least, is how the comment is recorded by Pierre Bayle in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*). The remark—originally restricted to the formation of human beings—quickly came to be applied more widely to the heavens as well, precisely because “the king’s posthumous fame as a stimulator and promoter of astronomy [...] survived the centuries and at the same time made the inadequacy of the theory underlying those tables increasingly manifest” (Blumenberg 260). In its cosmic form, Alfonso’s anthropocentrically indignant rebuke of the apparently disordered state of the starry heavens is supposed by later writers to give expression to the “crisis of geocentric astronomy” that led to the Copernican turning. Concluding his discussion of Alfonso’s remark, Blumenberg writes:

It is true that Alfonso is anything but a forerunner of Copernicus; but he is nevertheless a significant pre-Copernican figure. He grasps for the first time the whole offensiveness of the fact that the God of the Middle Ages was supposed to have created the heavens in such a way that man is only able to perceive confusion in them. For this is the dilemma that Copernicus will aim to remove by relieving the Creator of the reproach that it is the object that confuses cognition, rather than cognition that fails when faced with its object. Seen in this way, the modern age begins with an act of theodicy. In it we are called upon not to rest satisfied with a state of theory that renders questionable God’s intentions with the world and with man.

Most important here is the cooperation of *theodicy* with *theory* in the formation of modernity. Ptolemaic astronomical theory inscribed disorder into celestial mechanics, a disorder that only increased through further observations. The more Ptolemaic astronomers looked at the night sky, the less sense it made; the astronomers responded by redoubling their commitment to theoretical resignation, saying in effect that the objects of astronomical theory were created to be resistant to, perhaps even hostile to, the human capacity to understand the cosmos. The legend of King Alfonso’s impious remark

represents the moment at which resignation turns to indignation, when the dogmatic certainty that God's ways are unsearchable turns to suspicions regarding such imperious high-mindedness. Blumenberg's careful reconstruction of the pre-Copernican lifeworld shows that arriving at such a moment is neither purely accidental nor purely inevitable. But once arrived at, the unintelligibility of the heavens were less and less capable of serving as a curb to human reason, and more and more came to be viewed as a scandal requiring some theodical resolution. No matter how much resignation the astronomers exercised, the confusion occasioned by the starry heavens increasingly came to be a stumbling block, leading human beings into the sin of intellectual pride expressed in the Alfonso episode. What was needed was a theodicy: some form of reason-giving that makes the world intelligible, and by doing so removes the growing enmity between the mind of man and the mind of God.

The Copernican turn supplied a theodical resolution to this situation in the form of a new model of the heavens. But more important, both for the Copernican turning itself and for *Paradise Lost's* approach to the debate over the order of the heavens, was that the theodical solution depended absolutely on renouncing the old resignation in the face of the baffling stars, and claiming instead that human beings could in fact understand the noble objects of the firmament, even if they had not done so before. If God was to be relieved of the accusation of indifference or hostility toward human beings in his framing of the world, then theory, the outgrowth of human reason, must be able to access truth. Put differently, the question of whether the sun or the earth sits at the center of the universe is a second-order question with respect to the Copernican turn. Blumenberg writes:

The dispute about the world-systems is not of the same rank as the dispute about man's access to the truth. Thus also the antithesis that came into the

world through Copernicus and was to become disturbing for the century after him is not originally an antithesis of cosmological schemes but rather one of anthropological preconditions for the possibility of truth. The important thing for Copernicus, in his changes in the world-system, was to register reason's claim to truth; and the object of the anti-Copernican reaction, just as soon as it was fully formed, was to reject that claim.

One can begin to see that accusing *Paradise Lost* of backwardness when it comes to astronomy because it does not express a partisan devotion to heliocentrism is misguided. More important—for the poem and for Copernicus—is the status of human reason, and the issue of “anthropological preconditions for the possibility of truth.”

Turning back to the poem now, in the passage from Book 8 in which Adam and Raphael discuss the heavens, Adam has just heard Raphael's account of the creation, and has sat transfixed by the story. Coming back to himself “as new waked,” Adam replies as follows:

What thanks sufficient, or what recompense
Equal have I to render thee, divine
Historian, who thus largely has allayed
The thirst I had of knowledge, and vouchsafed
This friendly condescension to relate
Things else by me unsearchable, now heard
With wonder, but delight, and, as is due,
With glory attributed to the high
Creator; something yet of doubt remains,
Which only thy solution can resolve.

Adam's pious expression of thanks here also reemphasizes the conditions under which natural philosophy can be pursued: not for its own sake, but always with the intent of giving “glory [...] to the high / Creator.” This moment puts us back in mind of the beginning of Book 7, when Adam asks Raphael to reveal the story of creation “not to explore the secrets” of nature, “but the more / to magnify his works, the more we know” (7.97). The theme of

curiositas is once again in play as Adam begins to express his “doubt” about celestial mechanics. The passage runs:

When I behold this goodly frame, this world
Of heaven and earth consisting, and compute
Their magnitudes, this earth a spot, a grain,
An atom, with the firmament compared
And all her numbered stars, that seem to roll
Spaces incomprehensible (for such
Their distance argues and their swift return
Diurnal) merely to officiate light
Round this opacous earth, this punctual spot,
One day and night; in all their vast survey
Useless besides, reasoning I oft admire,
How nature wise and frugal could commit
So many nobler bodies to create,
Greater so manifold to this one use,
For aught appears, and on their orbs impose
Such restless revolutions day by day
Repeated, while the sedentary earth
That better might with far less compass move,
Served by more noble than herself, attains
Her end without least motion, and receives,
As tribute such a sumless journey brought
Of incorporeal speed, her warmth and light;
Speed, who to describe whose swiftness number fails. (8.15-38)

Adam’s Edenic knowledge—unaided by any telescopic intervention, and not yet the product of progressively elaborate computation and modeling of the heavens—has brought him to the point of doubt about celestial mechanics, and in particular doubt about whether the earth’s motion provides a better explanatory framework for the observed motion of the stars. Is it fair to say that Milton here projects back into Paradise the very astronomical controversy exercising seventeenth-century natural philosophy? The representation of Galileo in the epic seems to show that this is not quite true: Adam’s doubts are much closer to the doubts of King Alfonso—albeit still expressed piously, without the taint of sinful pride. In other words, Adamic doubt about the heavens is definitively *not* the doubt of the

seventeenth century astronomers. It would be more accurate to say that it represents a recurrent problematic in the history of thought. That the problem of deciding between geocentric and heliocentric world systems occurs here in the primal scene of knowledge-giving implies perennality rather than topicality. This is not to suggest that the exigency of the problem is suppressed: the presence of Galileo attests to this, as does the passage in Book 4 when Uriel, after having met with Gabriel, returns to stand guard over Eden:

[...] Uriel to his charge
Returned on that bright beam, whose point now raised
Beneath the Azores; whether the prime orb,
Incredible how swift, had thither rolled
Diurnal, or this less volúble earth
By shorter flight to the east, had left him there (4.592)

Here the voice of the epic poet-speaker introduces the same doubt Adam later expresses, bringing the recurrent problematic of heliocentric and geocentric cosmic pictures directly into the moment of the poem's composition.

Paradise Lost, then, treats the problem of heliocentrism and geocentrism as a perennial one in the history of natural philosophy that has occasionally become a topic of urgent discussion, but has never been quite resolved. But the question of what is at the center of the cosmos is not at all in question within the poem: the cosmic center is God, although there "center" cannot be understood in physical terms, but must be thought of metaphysically. To confuse the physical with the metaphysical "center" is to repeat the error made by Eve in physicalizing the location of heaven after her fall. Or witness Satan making a similar error in the context of the seven days of uncreation episode, in his peroration to the earth:

O earth, how like to heaven, if not preferred
More justly, seat worthier of gods, as built
With second thoughts, reforming what was old!

For what god after better worse would build?
 Terrestrial heaven, danced round by other heavens
 That shine, yet bear their bright officious lamps,
 Light above light, for thee alone, as seems,
 In thee concentrating all their precious beams
 Of sacred influence: as God in heaven
 Is centre, yet extends to all, so thou
 Centring receive'st from all those orbs; in thee,
 Not in themselves, all their known virtue appears
 Productive in herb, plant, and nobler birth
 Of creatures animate with gradual life
 Of grown, sense, reason, all summed up in man. (9.99-103)

Satan here gives voice to a geocentrism and an anthropocentrism, similar to one of the alternatives that Raphael holds out to Adam in the cosmological discourse in Book 8. The difference, as Fowler notes, is that Satan's version of geocentric theory is tainted, characteristically, by pride.²²⁹ Satan's fundamental error involves not anthropocentrism, nor geocentrism, but a catachrestic understanding of *center*: the confusion of divine centrality with the physical centrality of sun, of earth, or of any created thing. Replying to Adam in Book 8, Raphael points out "that great / Or bright infers not excellence" (9.90-1), i.e., the size and luminosity of heavenly bodies does not signal spiritual rank. Satan makes a similar mistake—though in the manner of a self-serving error rather than an Adamic blunder—by assuming that something's being created temporally "before" or "after" has some essential bearing on its value. In the same way, the question of whether something is physically "centric" or "eccentric" is indifferent; the only centrality that serves a genuinely orienting function with respect to reality is the centrality of God, who is not physically but metaphysically and spiritually central. Though its depiction of Satan's confusion about the importance of centrality, *Paradise Lost* accuses the whole debate between heliocentric and

²²⁹ PL 9.103-13n.

geocentric, “Copernican” and “Ptolemaic” cosmic systems, of pride, insofar as it associates physical centrality or eccentricity of this or that heavenly body with divine significance.

Yet the question remains as to why Adam frame his question to Raphael in terms of a “doubt,” a word that seems already to suggest a certain skepticism, a certain latent accusation of unintelligibility directed toward the heavenly order, if not toward its author? About the appearance of doubt here, Alastair Fowler writes: “Proleptically, Adam treats the paradox about little earth’s centrality as a matter for doubt rather than wonder.” “Proleptically” is doing some very heavy lifting there, and leaves open the question of what Adam’s doubt signifies in the moment it is phrased. The appearance in this context of the phrase “reasoning I oft admire” (8.25) suggests a consonance of intellect and visual aesthesis in Adam’s celestial theorization, rather than the projecting backward of a fallen hiatus between them. As I read it, the word “doubt” is itself used proleptically at line 13, functioning as a Miltonic “anti-pun” (Leonard), evoking while excluding its fallen sense. Not only Adam’s inquiry, but also Raphael’s response is described, in the Argument to Book 8, as an example of doubt (i.e., Adam “is doubtfully answered” by the archangel) which seems to further indicate that “doubt” in this passage means rather an innocent state of being of (at least) two minds about a situation that admits of (at least) two interpretations. In other words: in the prelapsarian discussion about astronomy, the “doubt” occasioned by celestial phenomena has not yet come to be a “doubt” about God’s intentions toward man, or the rationality of the world system, or the harmony of faith and reason. It has not yet become a question or a scandal needing some theodical satisfaction, but is merely puzzling.

Yet by means of the anti-pun, and the proleptic bent of the passage in general as it leans in to seventeenth-century astronomical debates, the poem anticipates the arrival of

such a situation—a situation that is not only dependent on the impiety of fallen human knowledge seekers, but is irrevocably bound up with the complication of the cosmic structure as a result of the fall. Adam’s doubt is not the impious doubt of King Alfonso, or of the seventeenth century natural philosopher meditating on the competition among world systems. It does not yet bespeak an existential pressure requiring proof of intelligibility, a theodical reassurance of God’s intentions with regard to humankind. If Raphael’s answer fails to satisfy our expectations of what a “forward-looking” poet of the seventeenth century should say, if it does not seem to indicate that Milton is on “this side of modernity,” that is because this answer is first of all an answer for *Adam*. It is not intended to answer directly to a modern doubt about the heavens—it answers such a doubt, only indirectly.

While it might seem to suggest that desiring reassurance of the world’s intelligibility—that is, desiring a theodical proof—amounts to sinful curiosity, we do well to bear in mind that this is not what Adam is after at all. His innocent inquiry cannot have the structure of a theodical demand, though it proleptically looks forward to that structure. We can read this passage not as a straightforward rehearsal of the traditional prohibition of vain philosophy or curiosity as applied to fallen human beings who ought better to mind their eternal salvation, but rather as a proleptic gesture toward a situation in which what once counted as curiosity and vanity has become, after the invention of the telescope, a search for theodical satisfaction that cannot immediately be called illegitimate or sinful. Here there is a prospect—albeit somewhat indistinctly drawn, hinted at only through the trace evoked by the anti-pun—of a specific “gnoseological evil” being rehabilitated. We may not be able to say that *Paradise Lost* overturns the negative association of curiosity with the sins of pride and lust—indeed, the one time “curious” appears in the poem (4.240)

it is used pejoratively. Yet we find here that astronomical speculation—which had been cited as the preeminent example of vain curiosity, of the search for useless knowledge at the expense of that self-knowledge essential to salvation—is reconsidered in light of the postlapsarian need for theodicy to which the poem itself also responds in its attempt to “justify the ways of God to men.” If the figure of Galileo in the poem serves, as Paul Guillory has suggested, as a “cryptic self-portrait” of Milton, here then is one way they are unified: both are positively engaged in the search for theodical satisfactions “unattempted” in previous epochs.

Now to Raphael’s reply. The archangel’s response to Adam’s celestial “doubt” tends to turn his question about the nature of heavenly mechanics into a question about the ethical and divine significance of creation. We read that one of Adam’s errors lies in the belief that the brighter bodies must be the nobler ones, since “bright infers not excellence” (8.91). Raphael points out that the bright sun is “barren” compared to the “solid good” of the earth (8.93-4). The archangel thus corrects Adam’s evaluation, without declaring his description of the facts false. A similar idea guides the response to Adam’s question about scale: Raphael advises Adam to let the unintelligible scale of the heavens compared to earth “speak / The maker’s high magnificence, who built / So spacious, and his line stretched out so far; / That man may know he dwells not in his own” (100-3). The unfathomably rapid diurnal movement of the sphere of fixed stars, Raphael says, should be attributed to “his omnipotence / That to corporeal substances could add / Speed almost spiritual” (108-10) and goes on to compare the swiftness of the stars with the celerity of Adam himself who in his first day of existence has come from heaven to earth, traversing a “distance

inexpressible / By numbers that have name” (113-4). Finally, Raphael underlines all these points and expresses the principle of his intervention into Adam’s doubt:

[...] But this I urge,
Admitting motion in the heavens, to show
Invalid that which thee to doubt it moved;
Not that I so affirm, though so it seem
To thee who hast thy dwelling here on earth.
God to remove his ways from human sense,
Placed heaven from earth so far, that earthly sight,
If it presume, might err in things too high,
And no advantage gain. (8.114-22)

Raphael explicitly refuses to affirm that heavenly bodies really move around a static earth, and in the lines that follow he suggests the alternative possibility, that the apparent movement of the sun, stars, and planets is an effect produced by the “three different motions” of the earth. The principle of Raphael’s response is clear: he is urging Adam toward obedience. Where Adam asks for *explanations* of natural phenomena, Raphael instructs him as to the *meanings* of the phenomena for him.

We return at this decisive point to the idea of the “intelligibility of the world as a whole” that we took at the outset as the hallmark of modern philosophical theodicies. Recall that Leibniz postulates two parallel regimes of explanation, each in principle complete in itself: the “kingdom of power,” God’s governance through the immutable rational laws of nature, and the “kingdom of wisdom,” God’s governance through a sometimes mysterious providence. This program of theodicy set out by Leibniz, which takes as its fundamental guiding axiom and as its most important result the idea that ours is the best of all possible worlds, consists of harmonizing these two explanatory frameworks, suggesting a fundamental consonance between the realm of nature and the realm of grace. Elsewhere Leibniz writes that “[a]ll the phenomena of nature can be

explained solely by final causes, exactly as if there were no efficient cause; and all the phenomena of nature can be explained solely by efficient causes, as if there were no final cause” (Labyrinth, 253). The principle of sufficient reason extends to every natural phenomenon, and can be expressed in either mechanical or in providential terms; either way is complete in itself. This is the dream of “intelligibility” that guides and misguides modern philosophical theodicy.

Paradise Lost does not share this dream. The fall of Adam and Eve bring about the fall of the cosmos as well; the fallen cosmos is more complex than Adam could have foreseen in Book 8, and the fallen human intellect tends to let doubt about the world bloom into doubt about its author’s intentions. Yet there is still a demand for justification, for rationalization in the heart of *Paradise Lost*. Ours may not be the best of all possible worlds, but it needs to be *good enough*, despite its fallen character. Raphael’s speech to Adam in Book 8 also speaks to Milton’s contemporaries and to us, but we must take care not to think that our own obedience can be best served by practicing the same kind of theoretical resignation recommended to our first parents. If this section of *Paradise Lost* constitutes an episode in the centuries-long “trial of theoretical curiosity” charted by Hans Blumenberg in *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, its outcome is ambiguous. Curiosity is a sin, and it is a sin that consists of prying into that which is hidden from us. It is linked with surveying in one way, in that both wide surveying and curious probing of phenomena seek forms of knowledge outside of human view. But the most celebrated emblem of vain knowledge—knowledge of heavenly motions—is partly rehabilitated as a legitimate area of inquiry. In our fallen state, within a cosmos of broken hierarchies and eccentric orbits, Milton opens up the possibility that a doubt like that of King Alfonso, impious though it might be, ought

to be given a hearing and is in principle able to be satisfied, perhaps by a restoration of the sensory capabilities lost in the fall. The presence of Galileo in the poem reminds us that such a restoration might be possible. Yet the telescopic survey and the diabolical survey have points of commonality, and astronomers run the risk of the same error regarding physicalizing the spiritual center that the fallen Eve shares with Satan.

I have tried to highlight in this chapter a certain tension in *Paradise Lost* concerning the theoretical impulse of modernity in its relation to theodicy, here understood as the search for assurances of intelligibility of the order of things. On the one hand, the poem disparages theorizing that seeks to exceed perspectival limitations, to take up a “high” position from which to survey the world as a whole. Such attempts, on the part of angels and humans, run the risk of confusing creation and Creator, of falling into idolatry, and of conflating true knowledge with vain philosophy. On the other hand, the poem seems to recognize—through the device of Adam’s proleptic doubt and Raphael’s dialectical response—that the desire for theodical satisfaction may indeed push humans to seek truths that can only be attained by exceeding the natural human scale, by augmenting the human sensorium, and by relying on explanatory frameworks that seem to pry into the nature of things. This recognition is mostly negative; it appears only in the recognition that what Raphael tells Adam cannot suffice for us, and through a reading of Raphael’s speech that sees God’s laughter at the astronomers’ theories directed primarily toward the old astronomy of Ptolemy, with its multiplication of epicycles and ascription of increasingly scandalous complexities to the heavenly motions. Though the poem does not go so far as to rehabilitate curiosity, it does seem to participate in the process of rolling back prohibitions from specific areas of knowledge. In this sense, then, we can say that in

Paradise Lost what had been considered gnoseological evils—areas of forbidden knowledge—are rendered inert. By portraying ‘forbidden’ knowledge as, instead, ‘lost’ knowledge, the poem suggests that the search for theodical satisfactions through the technological amplification of astronomy, may in fact be praiseworthy, recuperating through human effort guided by the hand of providence an Edenic state of theory.

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