

**The Mind Is Its Own Place:  
Satanic Vision, Wonder, and Creation in *Paradise Lost***

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## Introduction

The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n  
- Paradise Lost, Book I.59-60

Curiously, though ostensibly the crux of John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* is Original Sin, "man's first disobedience" (I.1) that "brought death into the world" (I.3), its principal actors are not the human Adam and Eve. Rather, pursuing "things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" (I.16), Milton directs the poem's focus toward the physical embodiments of Good and Evil – God and Satan, respectively – whose enormous presences and conflicts transcend the limits of "human imagination" (VI.300). Milton's ambitious objective to "assert eternal providence, / And justify the ways of God to men" (I.25-26) faces the challenge of translating a highly metaphorical and philosophical battle between theological abstractions into concrete, visible images that the limited human imagination can actually grasp.

Indeed, it is Satan rather than Adam whose point of view is the first presented in the epic, despite the fact that the relationship between the first humans and God is its explicitly stated focus. Significantly, Milton's decision to present the narrative *in media res* allows Milton to not only follow the conventions of classical epic and to "say first what cause / Moved our grand parents...to fall off / From their creator" (I.28, 29-30), but also to introduce Satan: "th' infernal serpent; he it was, whose guile / Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived / The mother of mankind" (I.34-36) and whose deception "first seduced them to that foul revolt" (I.33). Neil Forsyth suggests in his book *The Satanic Epic* that the point of the epic is the "attraction of Satan" (Forsyth 3), given that his "obvious appeal" from the onset of the epic allows Milton to construct him as "our point of access, a seductive way in, both to the action of the whole epic and to the world of Paradise itself" (Forsyth 4). Since, in a purely aesthetic competition between Satan and God, Satan is the

more attractive of the two in terms of his physical description and his rhetoric, Satan is therefore the figure who dominates the poem. Thus, the importance of Satanic vision, experiencing the Fall through Satan's eyes, is dependent on the creation of an immensely appealing figure in order to capture the reader's undivided attention. As a result, the reader's introduction to the intangible drama of the narrative – the incomprehensible conflict between an omnipresent, omnipotent tyrant and an angelic, revolutionary hero in a struggle for the liberty of free will rather than the self-delusions of a failed rebel – is illustrated through the biased eyes of Satan himself.

Therefore, although far from being the only epistemological method of inquiry applicable to *Paradise Lost*, vision is arguably the most significant as Satan's contagious visual lens is the mechanism by which he seduces Adam, Eve, and the reader. Jane Partner suggests in her essay "Satanic Vision and Acrostics in *Paradise Lost*" that an analysis of vision as an epistemological tool in *Paradise Lost* is appropriate:

Vision is central to the theological structure of *Paradise Lost*, a poem in which the fall of man is expressed as the fatal desire for 'that false Fruit that promis'd clearer sight' (XI.413). Visual perception is consequently Milton's most pervasive metaphor for knowing and understanding throughout the poem, where he uses different ways of seeing to distinguish mere empirical facts from the true wisdom that brings inward illumination. (Partner 129)

Furthermore, she suggests that the reader's experience of the poem is largely dependent upon the reader's relationship to Satan, specifically "the precisely imagined way that the Devil sees" (Partner 130). Essentially, Satan's perception of himself and his dilemma at the beginning of the poem allows Milton to force the reader into understanding the physical, seductive reality of Evil, and thereby primes him or her to later understand the camouflaged falsity of Satan's attractive façade as the poem progresses and lends a tragic sensibility to Satan's own fall from Heaven.

Thus, the poem slowly functions as a microscope, looking beyond the initial grandeur that is the “darkly charismatic anti-hero” (Partner130) and unearthing the flaws in Satan’s vision and image to highlight the true nature of Evil behind its seductive face. Satan’s perception through his visual lens – his fundamental understanding of reality – and his choices remain unchanged throughout the epic. Understanding the development, or the lack thereof, of Satan’s character therefore requires understanding how vision functions as an epistemological tool, especially as it pertains to the understanding of self, the creative and destructive force of imagination, and free will. Satan’s failure to progress and perhaps even redeem himself is due largely to the flaws in his unchanging, stagnant point of view. In other words, how he sees himself and his place in the universe is warped because the conclusions that he draws from his visual basis of knowledge are inherently flawed by his own hubris and agenda. His epic misrecognition, therefore, provides a medium for Milton’s theological, political, and especially philosophical commentary throughout the poem.

Vision as a way of knowing has been a widely accepted philosophical construct for millennia, as it seems that of all the five senses, vision is the sense most associated with perception and therefore cognition. To develop Satan’s visual lens, then, Milton relies upon exploiting the fundamental difference between what one perceives and what one understands to be true. Thus, analyzing the development of Satan’s visual lens involves focusing on the mutable, psychological aspects of vision. Tracing vision as a model for understanding human cognition begins with the study of optics from its classical origins, where the theory of sight suggested that the mind can both interact with and physically impact the real world, to the significant paradigm shift at the onset of the seventeenth century where the mind and the body were assumed to be separate. Furthermore, Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, in conjunction with Descartes’ insistence on the

fallibility of the senses and the inherent reasoning capabilities of the mind, can be combined with the theological phenomenon of theophany – a visible manifestation of God – and applied to understanding Satan’s visual lens. Satan’s relationship with God as well as his ability to wonder and create are inextricably linked to how he sees. Satan consistently and knowingly allows his emotions and motivations to taint his visual lens, leading to his expulsion from Heaven as well as the restriction of his vision to a single-minded focus on his plan for revenge against God (via humanity’s corruption), as well as projecting his desires and corrupted reason into his heretical creations *ex deo*. Essentially, Satan’s visual lenses not only dictate the objects upon which he fixates and how he perceives them, but also dictate his actions and the illusions he produces and then uses to seduce Adam and Eve, transmitting his faulty visual lenses to them under the guise of enlightenment.

It is the reader’s perception of Satan, therefore, rather than Satan himself that changes as the narrative progresses. In *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, Stanley Fish argues that overcoming Satan’s influence necessitates understanding not only how Satan operates but also how he thinks:

[T]he only defence against verbal manipulation (or appearances) is a commitment that stands above the evidence of things that are seen, and the method...is to lead us beyond our perspective by making us feel its inadequacies and the necessity of accepting something which badly contradicts it. The result is instruction, and instruction is possible only because the reader is asked to observe, analyse, and place his experience, that is, to think about it. (Fish 21)

Therefore, Milton’s ultimate goal throughout *Paradise Lost* is to diagnose the corrupted reason that lies at the heart of Satan’s diseased visual lens and, through the gradual decay of Satan’s heroic image and Adam’s clear vision of Original Sin, inoculate the reader against the contagion of Satan’s inherently flawed visual lens.

## **A Brief History of the Psychology of Vision**

### *Plato and Greek Theories of Vision*

In contrast with today's heavy emphasis on the scientific aspects of the phenomenon of vision, particularly the study of light, optics in its ancient and medieval incarnations was instead concerned with studying sight "in all its aspects from physical to psychological causes to perceptual and cognitive effects" (Smith vii). Oliver Darrigol in *A History of Optics: From Greek Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century* and A. Mark Smith in *From Sight to Light: The Passage from Ancient to Modern Optics* both discuss in detail how the theories concerning the psychological processes of vision developed by the Greeks and Romans persisted throughout the medieval period up until the Renaissance as the fundamental basis for the field.

Whereas modern theories assume a relatively rigid separation between the physical, physiological, and psychological aspects of vision, these ancient theories generally did not suppose that light had anything to do with vision and instead focused on the phenomenon of sight as a primarily psychological process (Darrigol 15). Smith suggests that, prior to the publication of Johannes Kepler's theory of retinal imaging in 1604 and its subsequent creation of a "new visual model" (Smith x), optics was dominated by what he characterizes as "perspectivist" theory. Perspectivists, unlike their more scientifically-minded descendants, did not assume that the phenomenon of vision was due to a purely physical interaction between the eye and light, or indeed that light had anything to do with vision whatsoever. Instead, vision was considered in terms of sight, itself a jointly psychological and epistemological phenomenon which perspectivists examined "from the lowest-level apprehension of visible radiation to the conceptual and intellectual grasp of its object sources" (Smith 3). In short, perspectivist optics supposed that the

mind had equal or even greater importance in the creation of visual images than did the physical act of looking itself.

Although certainly not the only theorists to reject supernatural forces, myth and religious authority as the explanation for the phenomenon of vision, the Ancient Greeks were among the first to replace these archaic paradigms with scientific reason and observation as the basis for explaining the phenomena of the natural world (Darrigol 1). Greek optics was a hybrid discipline evenly split by a “fundamental dichotomy” (Smith 73) between mathematics and philosophy. On the one side of the divide, philosophers like Plato and Aristotle supposed that vision was primarily psychological in nature. On the other, mathematicians and atomists such as Euclid and Hero argued that vision was less of a psychological process and more of a physical phenomenon involving interactions between the eye and the environment (Smith 24). Those theories that focus on the psychological nature of vision are most applicable to Milton’s treatment of vision in *Paradise Lost* and the nature of Satanic vision, specifically as it pertains to his mental state and its effect upon his perception.

Among these Greek psychological theoretical perspectives, however, there was little consensus. Although all demonstrated the conviction that sight could not and did not involve direct contact between the eye and the object but rather “action at a distance” – therefore requiring an intermediary in the intervening space – the exact nature of the interactions occurring within this medium was highly and contradictorily contested. Two diametrically opposed theories predominated. On the one hand, *extramissive* theory supposed that the eye sent out visual rays which then interacted with the object, whereas on the other *intramissive* theory supposed that the object emitted rays that then entered the eye to produce the phenomenon of vision (Smith 29).



Significantly, one *extramissive* theory in particular appears to have been the most influential. This theory supposed that vision was produced by a “visual fire,” wherein images resulted from direct interaction between an emission of fire from the eye and the surface of its target object (Darrigol 15). According to Hipparchus, a Greek astronomer and mathematician, this fire from the eye served as a “visual hand” with which the observer could interact with and attempt to understand his surroundings (Darrigol 2). Daylight, as an emission of fire from the sun, was therefore essential for vision, since the Greeks “assumed a deep analogy between the visual fire and sunlight” where, according to another important Greek philosopher, Empedocles, “like interacted with like” (Darrigol 5). In terms of its cultural impact, this theory of the visual fire gained significance beyond its scientific applications as it informed the epithetic conventions of classical epic. Characters associated with rage in Greek epic poetry, most notably Achilles and Agamemnon, are described as having eyes filled with fire in a metaphorical juxtaposition between anatomy and psychological state (Darrigol 3).

Although less well known than the theory of visual fire, the most well-known *intromissive* theories appear to be those postulated by the atomists and the Stoics, the latter including the celebrated Greco-Roman anatomist Galen, who was the first to discuss vision theory in terms of anatomy (Smith 36). According to the atomists, notably the only dissenters from the visual fire theory, atoms – though not in terms of the modern chemical definition – and the interactions between them were the basis for vision through the organ of the eye. One of these atomists, Epicurus, believed that vision resulted from the constant emission of particles from objects, which then interacted with each other and entered the eye to produce images (Smith 30). Furthermore, he suggested that vision was based on the creation of “images” or “idols” that mimicked the objects as they existed in reality (Darrigol 4). Darrigol summarizes the atomist theory as follows:

These effigies (*simulacra*) strike the eye and convey to it all the information needed to recognize the shape and colors of bodies. Figure corresponds to the arrangement of the atoms of the effigy, and color to their shape. (Darrigol 4)

Similarly, Democritus noted that vision seemed to be based on the creation of an impression in the air – the medium between the eye and the object – that replicated the replica of the image produced by the compressed air surrounding the object (Smith 30).

According to Smith, the definitive theory of *intromissive* vision comes from Aristotle's *De anima* ("On the Soul"), which suggests that vision is the result of Democritian imprinting dependent not on the transmission of "physical impulse" but rather on the "formal or qualitative transformation" of cognitive information concerning the object (Smith 31). In this context, "sight" is a function not only of sensory information about the object – for example the "formal" intrinsic quality of color – which renders them visible but also its proper integration "into a living, ensouled body" (Smith 32). Aristotle described the eye as though it were an animal, where sight would be the soul of the eye, its "essence." Without a cognitive understanding, a "common sensibility" (*aisthēsis koinē*) or abstraction about the nature of the object from information gleaned from the senses, vision will not occur. Sight, therefore, was for Aristotle a primarily cognitive process; even if sensory information is transmitted as a "wax imprint" of the object's visual properties, there will be no image produced in the brain without rational, intellectual judgment of those visual properties in juxtaposition with information from the other senses about that object's formal quintessence (Smith 33). The true final cause of vision, then, is knowledge (Smith 35).

Significantly, in terms of the implications of its epistemological function in the Allegory of the Cave, Plato's own analysis of visual perception laid out in the *Timaeus* is a hybrid *extramissive-intromissive* theory, where images are produced by simultaneous emission of fire from the eye and intromission of fire from visible objects (Smith 30). Notably, Plato "assumed that

the fire from the sun coalesced with the fire from the eye to form a coherent, homogenous, and percipient body between the eye and the sighted object" (Darrigol 5). Essentially, Plato assumed that vision occurred because the visual fire from the eye was able to "coalesce" with the fire emanating from the sun and that this visual fire was then "expunged" by darkness (Darrigol 5).

Perspectivist theory, then, can simply be considered the psycho-physical science of sight and, most importantly, the idea that vision was a creative process; images had to be physically, tangibly produced before they could be processed by the brain. Understanding how vision occurred was, from the classical period through the Middle Ages and up until the Renaissance, more concerned with the psychological processes that underlie cognitive perception rather than the actual physical processes by which the senses obtain that information. By the 1660s, vision was understood to be contingent upon the eye's function as a light-focusing device rather than an extension of the viewer's consciousness. Optical illusion and Descartes' theories on the fallibility and unreliability of sensory information directly contrasted the previous centuries' overwhelming conviction that perception and a cognitive understanding would lead to perfect knowledge of those objects.

#### *The Keplerian Shift: From Sight to Light*

Following the classical Greek and Roman period, an analytical shift occurred regarding perception in terms of an improved understanding of psychology and physics. Arabic theorists, most notably Alhacen – the Latinized name attributed to the authorship *De aspectibus*, a work on optics that proved highly influential throughout the medieval period – hypothesized that geometry had a significant role in the creation of images produced in the eye. However, Smith notes that despite the growing scientific understanding of vision demonstrated by this "Arabic transition," these new scientific aspects sought to reinforce the perspectivist model rather than dismantle it.

Indeed, he describes these early attempts to apply geometry and physics to the study of vision as “tentative efforts...to incorporate the geometrical analysis of sight into [the] perceptual model” (Smith 180). Furthermore, these Arabic thinkers, like their European intellectual heirs, were proponents of the perspectivist model because they were influenced heavily by theology. Vision was not merely a physical phenomenon but also a direct interaction between the terrestrial and the divine, providing a link between humanity and Heaven. According to these medieval theories, perceiving the created world allowed humankind to understand, albeit in a limited capacity, its place and purpose in the universe, as well as the will of their God.

These European medieval theorists also demonstrated a definitive perspectivist understanding of vision and clearly not only were heavily influenced by the classical theories that stressed sight as primary cause of vision, but also attempted to combine theories that stressed the psychological aspects of vision with the geometric emphasis introduced by Arabic theorists. Smith notes that influential thinkers such as Roger Bacon, John Pecham and Witelo attempted to combine “Alhacen’s model of visual perception with Avicenna’s internal senses model of psychology” (Smith 275). Medieval theories not only seemed to suppose that vision was an indicator of a person’s spiritual state, since maladies were commonly attributed to God’s displeasure, but more importantly suggested that vision and the associated process of perception were a way in which a person could come to a better understanding of God through His creations (Partner 131).

During the Renaissance, theoretical knowledge was generally considered superior to practical knowledge since the latter dealt with “imperfect, material objects rather than perfect, mental objects” (Smith 324). Significantly, technological developments in the creation of optical devices to correct human visual inadequacies, most notably improved spectacles and, later, telescopes, “stimulated new analytic approaches” (Smith 371) for understanding vision. Philosophers such as

Descartes who were concerned with the nature of vision as a primary epistemological tool noted how the images perceived by the brain did not necessarily correspond to a perfect understanding of that particular object or concept. Rather, perception was the product not only of the anatomical interaction between the eye and the light rays that it focused but also of a person's preexisting cognitive schema.

In contrast with the seminal work on the subject, David C. Lindberg's *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (1976), Smith suggests that Johannes Kepler's theories, rather than being the culmination of perspectivist tradition, instead marked a major shift in which vision was understood to be a process involving physical phenomena and sensory perception rather than the primarily psychological process of "seeing" (Smith 4). Smith argues that this "Keplerian shift" marked a drastic break with the pre-Renaissance perspectivist theory in two significant ways. First, Kepler's retinal imaging theory discredited the "perceptual and epistemological link" between the physical structure of the eye and conceptualization within the brain, resulting in an increasing separation between the study of sight and the study of light and, secondly, he undermined the perspectivist "theoretical and methodological concepts" through his convex lens analysis (Smith 5). Kepler's disproof of perspectivist theory appears to have laid, at least in part, the scientific foundations for the Renaissance's avowed distrust of the senses and emphasis on the theoretical. If, as Smith asserts, Kepler proved that vision is not about seeing but rather about the physical phenomenon of perceiving, then it stands to reason that the minds and the senses are separate from one another. This separation, then, suggests that the interpretation of sensory information is a highly subjective process, heavily influenced by the mind and its preexisting cognitive schema.

## **Vision as Epistemology**

### *Platonism and the Cave Allegory*

If Stanley Fish is correct in his assertion that the role of the reader in *Paradise Lost* is to recreate Adam's morally convoluted fall within his or her imagination, Milton's poem must be designed to flesh out the visual realities of God and Satan as well as to present Satan's own Fall as a foil to and in juxtaposition with Adam's Fall. Like Adam, Satan is faced with information that he obtains visually and interprets rationally but, unlike Adam, his visual lens calcifies and leads to his character's stasis and resultant redemptive failure. This failure arises because Satan exercises his free will upon a flawed moral platform constructed by this faulty understanding of reality and of God. Understanding Satan's and Adam's cognitive processes is therefore contingent upon understanding exactly how vision functions as an epistemological tool, using visual sensory information as the basis for "justified true belief."

Plato's Allegory of the Cave, presented in Book VII of his *Republic*, is perhaps the best foundational philosophical model relating vision to knowledge and, more importantly, understanding. The allegory outlines the principles of what is now known as "Platonism," Plato's metaphysical understanding of the world that suggests that abstract, completely non-spatiotemporal objects exist (Balageur 3). Paradoxically, the allegory suggests that the intangible, intellectual world is in fact the most knowable while the visible world is subject to the predations of sensory illusions. Socrates, Plato's narrator throughout the allegory, argues that tangible reality is inferior to intellectual reality – that he who sees only with his eyes is blind – because the senses are inherently fallible. Humanity's first instinct is to suppose that the information that they glean

from their sensory experience of the world is sufficient for developing a complete understanding of the ideal or perfect form of an object, but Plato argues the visual world is made up only of imperfect, finite “shadows” of these forms. Plato’s underlying belief that vision is the sense most closely aligned with perception and therefore understanding is evident, given that vision is the primary sense in question throughout the allegory, and therefore Plato’s Cave Allegory provides an ideal platform for analyzing vision’s function as an epistemological tool throughout *Paradise Lost*.

In its nascent, unenlightened state, humanity exists within a cave, plagued and trapped by ignorance of reality’s truth. Escaping this cave is difficult, as the expeditionist must realize that humanity’s epistemological method is inherently flawed before he can begin to free himself from the chains and shadows within the cave. Plato describes humanity as a colony of fettered troglodytes who are “able to see only in front of them, because their bonds prevent them from turning their heads around” (Plato 187). The only source of illumination is “light...provided by a fire burning above and behind them” (Plato 187). Significantly, these prisoners never “see anything of themselves and one another besides the shadows that the fire casts on the wall in front of them” and “have to keep their heads motionless throughout life” (Plato 187). At this point, humankind is completely ignorant of abstract forms, believing that the “truth is nothing other than the shadows of those artifacts” (Plato 187), and therefore its entire epistemological framework is based upon simply the sensory information these shadows provide.

The Allegory then presents the escape from this cave in a series of distinct stages, beginning with the prisoner’s escape from this initial state of ignorance and his resulting fear and confusion. Plato’s narrator Socrates suggests that, initially, if the newly released prisoner were to be “freed and suddenly compelled to stand up, turn his head...and look up toward the light,” he would

initially be “pained and dazzled and unable to see the things whose shadows he’d seen before” (Plato 187). At first, he would still “believe that the things he saw earlier were truer than the ones he was now being shown” (Plato 188), and looking at the light itself would cause his eyes to hurt and induce him to “turn around and flee toward the things he’s able to see, believing that they’re really clearer than the ones he’s being shown” (Plato 188). Intellectual illumination, then, is initially characterized by temporary blindness.

In the next stage, the prisoner is further blinded by an even brighter light, “dragged...into the sunlight” where “with the sun filling his eyes” he would “be unable to see a single one of the things now said to be true...at least at first” (Plato 188). He would need “time to get adjusted before he could see things in the world above,” seeing “shadows most easily, then images...then the things themselves” (Plato 188). Once acclimated enough to his surroundings, the final object that he would be able to see would be “the sun itself, in its own place, and be able to study it” (Plato 188). Significantly, the sun not only is the brightest source of light and the penultimate true form in the universe, but also “governs everything in the visible world, and is in some way the cause of all the things that he used to see” (Plato 188). In this context, viewing the sun is tantamount to viewing divinity, and it is at this point that the prisoner has finally attained wisdom by intellectually observing abstract forms through clear eyes.

Finally, Plato suggests that the now enlightened seeker of truth has a responsibility to return to the cave, though his eyes will again be “filled with darkness” (Plato 189). Though this might “invite ridicule” from the rest of the prisoners or even result in his martyrdom when he tries to inform them that true vision exists outside the cave, were he to aid them he would likely merit “any honors, praises, or prizes among them for the one who was sharpest at identifying the shadows” (Plato 189). Plato concludes by definitively asserting that the “visible realm should be



likened to the prison dwelling, and the light of the fire inside it to the power of the sun” while “the upward journey and the study of things above as the upward journey of the soul to the intelligible realm” (Plato 189). Following this assertion, Plato makes clear his fundamental argument:

In the knowable realm, the form of the good is the last thing to be seen, and it is reached only with difficulty. Once one has seen it however, one must conclude that it is the cause of all that is correct and beautiful in anything, that it produces both light and its source in the visible realm, and that in the intelligible realm it controls and provides truth and understanding, so that anyone who is to act sensibly in private or public must see it. (Plato 189)

In this way, Plato asserts that vision, while useful and the predominant method by which humans obtain information, is an inherently imperfect epistemological tool. Truth and abstract forms, then, are only visible – and therefore knowable – when viewed purely through the intellect rather than through the senses. Within the context of *Paradise Lost*, although Adam appears to be able to recover from this momentary blindness, Satan does not; instead, he deliberately returns to the shadows, wherein all his machinations occur in the dark. Since he himself can no longer see light, he deludes himself into thinking that his own light, far dimmer than it was before his fall, can still rival God’s dazzling brightness.

### *Cartesian Metaphysics*

René Descartes, one of the most influential European philosophers of the early seventeenth century, also famously argued for distrust of the senses and instead championed the superiority of the brain as asserted by the tenets of Continental Rationalism. Unlike the Stoics and Aristotle, who maintained that all knowledge comes from the senses, Descartes and the Rationalists agreed with Plato’s assertion that the senses are inherently fallible and therefore human reason is the only source for all knowledge of abstract forms, especially through such rational avenues as physics, geometry, and algebraic proofs. Significantly, Descartes in his most seminal work, *Meditations on*

*First Philosophy*, expanded the definition of ultimate knowledge, Plato's proverbial sun, to refer to knowledge of God. Existence without God, according to Descartes, is like a valley without a mountain: impossible and inconceivable (Descartes, Meditation 5). God is a "supremely perfect being" (Descartes, Meditation 5) and therefore humans, as imperfect beings due to Original Sin, are physically incapable of understanding God except in a limited capacity.

Furthermore, Descartes suggests that the mind, as the seat of reason with its associated ingrained knowledge of God, is distinctly separate from the body and therefore the sensory experience of reality (Descartes, Meditation 6). He argues that it is far easier to know the mind than it is to know the body, since the legacy of humanity's creation in God's image and likeness is that the knowledge of God is fundamentally ingrained in the mind and can be set aside but never completely ignored. Additionally, the human mind is capable of both thought and perception, where ideas are simply images within the brain, although nothing guarantees that images produced through sensory perception are based in reality or the production of optical illusions (Descartes, Meditation 3).

If, as Descartes suggests in Meditations 1, 4, and 5 specifically, ideas are just mental images, any information that comes from the senses must be accepted only with extreme caution. In his "Dream Argument," Descartes argues that one cannot necessarily trust the senses because images within the brain do not necessarily correspond to an actual sensory experience. Citing a dream of a fire as an example, Descartes argues that even though he can "feel" the heat of the fire in his dream though in reality there is no fire, the result is the same; the brain still perceives the fire in exactly the same way, whether or not there is actually a fire present. Therefore, the image of the fire in the brain is not necessarily a reliable source of information (Descartes, Meditation 1).

Furthermore, Descartes expands upon his “Dream Argument” in his “Deceiving God and Evil Demon Arguments.” Again, since the human mind is capable of both thought and perception, images and sensations within the brain are never definitively based in truth. Since God is perfection and deception is absolute imperfection, Descartes argues that a “malignant demon” could take advantage of the fact that the mind is simply a brain being fed information. The only way to have “clear and distinct perceptions” (Descartes, Meditation 3), and by extension the only way that we can know anything, is through the application of the “natural light” or “good sense” (Descartes, Meditation 1) of reason. Descartes argues that, in order for a person to be an effective moral agent, he or she must realize that the ability to err is an intrinsic part of human nature, and that the ability to do or choose wrong is a God-given element of humanity.

In order to fit perfectly into God’s universe, therefore, a person must perfectly occupy his or her position as an imperfect being. Erring is simply a misuse of God’s given approach to knowledge, the ability to use reason to distinguish between reality and illusion. Descartes’ moral rules place a heavy emphasis on skepticism; since deductions made purely on the basis of visual perception are unreliable, distrust of the material world and confidence in the mind’s ultimate ability to overcome it are paramount. Essentially, Descartes argues that God has given the human mind the ability to be skeptical and to use reason to completely control the images within the brain, making the mind the ultimate master of reality (Descartes, Meditation 4).

*Of Things Invisible to Mortal Sight: Theophany, Light, and the Invisible King*

In combination with Plato’s argument for the existence of perfect, abstract forms and the temporary blindness caused by extreme illumination, Descartes’ equation between God and light closely relates to the Biblical phenomenon of theophany. That looking at God is impossible is a fundamental tenet of Christian faith; God explicitly states “you cannot see my face, for man shall

not see me and live” (Exodus 33:20). Theophany, therefore is God’s purest form of “self-disclosure” (Drubach and Claassen 545), which most frequently involves a paradoxically blinding and illuminating beam of light – the burning bush, the transfiguration of Jesus, and the beam of light that blinds Paul, to name but a few examples – which necessitates the aversion of the eyes, even for angels.

In *The Discourse on the Holy Theophany*, the Greek theologian Hippolytus explicitly states that God is “present everywhere, and absent nowhere...incomprehensible to angels and invisible to men” (Hippolytus II). Furthermore, Hippolytus argues like Plato and Descartes that vision is the primary epistemological tool for understanding God since it best links sensation and perception. In particular, he suggests that God can best be seen through his physical creations, particularly Heaven, Earth, and the Son, even though He himself yet remains incomprehensible for human minds: “all the works of our God and Savior are good — all of them that eye sees and mind perceives, all that reason interprets and hand handles, all that intellect comprehends and human nature understands” (Gray 23). However, while creation is the most readily available physical manifestation of God, it is yet an incomplete representation of God’s overwhelming incorporeal and immaterial essence.

Therefore, despite the fact that God is omnipresent, the human senses are physically incapable of actually perceiving God’s presence. Daniel Drubach and Daniel Claassen argue in *Perception and the Awareness of God: The Importance of Neuronal Habituation in the Context of Jewish and Christian Faiths* that belief in God is tantamount to blind belief in an immaterial, incorporeal being of a pure and unchanging “essence” (Drubach and Claassen 542). Awareness of God falls solidly in the category of “nonphenomenal awareness,” which involves understanding data that cannot be described through the senses, including abstractions such as thoughts, feelings,

emotions, and the passage of time (Drubach and Claassen 542). God's effective invisibility is due to the process of neuronal habituation, wherein the human senses can only perceive changing data. Static stimuli, like the nose in the bottom of the visual field, are often ignored by the brain, rendering such information functionally invisible. Since, in a monistic universe God is everywhere present and unchanging – the *materia prima* of the universe – in addition to being an overwhelmingly intense presence, he is rendered completely imperceptible to the human senses (Drubach and Claassen 544). Theophany, therefore, is a “sensory modality” wherein God condenses his presence into a more changeable, less intense phenomenon that the human senses can actually perceive, again usually taking the form of a brilliant beam of light or fire (Drubach and Claassen 454).

Throughout *Paradise Lost*, Milton's definition of God as well as his treatment of the concept of light and intellectual enlightenment fits within the thematic framework of theophany. Indeed, Milton's God is “invisible Glory” (I.368) as well as the monistic center of the universe, the “one first matter all” (V.472). His first appearance in the poem is itself a moment of theophany for the reader:

omnipotent,  
Immutable, immortal, infinite,  
Eternal King; thee Author of all being,  
Fountain of light, thyself invisible  
Amidst the glorious brightness where thou sitt'st  
Throned inaccessible, but when thou shad'st  
The full blaze of thy beams, and through a cloud  
Drawn round about thee like a radiant shrine,  
Dark with excessive bright thy skirts appear,  
Yet dazzle Heav'n... (III. 372-381)

God is not only “immutable” and “invisible,” he is also the source and quintessence of light itself, the “fountain of light...glorious brightness.” Even when he diminishes himself, “shad'st / The full

blaze of [his] beams” he still manages to “dazzle” all those who would look upon him, overwhelming their senses. Effectively, they are blinded, the sight of God rendered “dark with excessive bright,” echoing the blindness the prisoner in Plato’s cave experiences upon emerging into the sunlight of the intelligible world. Milton, through the narrative voices of Raphael and Michael specifically, consistently and repeatedly reminds Adam – and through him the reader – that God is “unspeakable, who sit’st above these heavens / To us invisible or dimly seen” (V.155-156). Though a beam of light is, of all God’s manifested forms, the closest to God’s true form, it still exceeds human capabilities to perceive and comprehend Him, and therefore visualizing God must occur through means other than the physical.

Significantly, although Raphael contends that the best method by which Adam can “know / In measure what the mind may well contain” (VII.127-128), the reality of God is through “contemplation of created things” (V.511). God’s most important tangible manifestation is in fact the Son. The language Milton uses to characterize the Son demonstrates that he, like all God’s creation, is himself a form of theophany “in whose conspicuous count’nance, without cloud / Made visible, th’ Almighty Father shines, / Whom else no creature can behold” (III.385-387). The lens through which the various characters, Satan and Adam specifically, view the Son therefore indicates their conceptualization of and attitude toward God Himself.

Humans too are theophany, since God and the Son made Adam and Eve “in our image” (VII.519): here, the *imago dei* manifests in the “human face divine” (III.44) and, according to Descartes, involves not only this physical reflection of God but also God’s gift of reason, the ability to view and understand the intelligible realm independent of the visible realm. Consequently, the way that Satan views Adam and Eve also demonstrates how he conceptualizes this visible face of God. In this way, theophany throughout *Paradise Lost* serves to demonstrate how characters view

and conceptualize Plato's visible and intelligible worlds; theophany is tantamount to a "shortcut" between the two, and characters with vision unclouded by their own agendas and prejudices have been afforded the opportunity to circumvent the physical limitations of the eye and see God clearly.

### **As Far As Angels Ken: Angelic Bodies and Intelligence**

As Satan is of heavenly origin, Satanic vision is a function of angelic rather than human perceptual and conceptual abilities. However, Milton's descriptions of angels' physical bodies and reasoning capabilities demonstrate that there is little disparity between the two classes of sentient beings, though "angels were long before this visible creation was the opinion of many ancient Fathers" (I Arg.). Therefore, human models of physical and cognitive vision are applicable to angels. Satan in particular, given that he is no longer entirely angelic since his rebellion has rendered him "far removed from God and the light of Heav'n" (I.73), is perhaps the most human, and therefore the most limited, in his sensory perception of all the angelic characters in the epic. Indeed, Milton explicitly states that Satan views Eden just as a human would, "beneath him with new wonder now he views / To all delight of human senses exposed / In narrow room Nature's whole wealth" (IV.205-207). Partner argues that Milton's assertion that Satan sees "at once as far as angels ken" (I.59) suggests that while he can see as "far" as an angel can, he no longer perceives the same way that angels do and is instead subject to the same frailty of the "visual ray" (III.620) Adam and Eve are (Partner 131). Indeed, throughout the epic, Satan's point of view is the most limited, yet ambitious, of all the angelic characters.

Furthermore, unlike humans' decidedly Earth-bound physicality, Milton defines angelic substance as "spirit," a form that is neither entirely corporeal nor noncorporeal:

For spirits when they please  
Can either sex assume, or both; so soft  
And uncompounded is their essence pure,  
Nor tied or manacled with joint or limb,

Nor founded on the brittle strength of bones,  
Like cumbrous flesh; but in what shape they choose  
Dilated or condensed, bright or obscure,  
Can execute their airy purposes... (I.423-430)

While angels, fallen and unfallen both, are capable of this fluid state of being, they more often than not take physical form rather than an immaterial, “uncompounded” form. When these “incorporeal spirits to smallest forms / Reduce their shapes immense” (I.781-782), their physical forms are therefore as subject to the limitations of human senses and human needs as Adam and Eve’s are:

Intelligential substances require  
As doth your rational; and both contain  
Within them every lower faculty  
Of sense, whereby they hear, see, smell, touch, taste,  
Tasting concoct, digest, assimilate,  
And corporeal to incorporeal turn.  
For know, whatever was created, needs  
To be sustained and fed. (V.407-415)

Although Raphael condescendingly relates how difficult it is for him to “relate / To human sense th’ invisible exploits / Of warring spirits” (V.564-566) and contends that angels, unlike humans, “stand / In sight of God enthroned” (IV.535-536) with “perfect sight” (IV.577), Milton asserts that even angels cannot view God directly. Since God’s brightness can “yet dazzle Heav’n” (III.381), even the “brightest Seraphim / Approach not, but with both wings veil their eyes” (III.381-382), since angels are just as vulnerable to being blinded by God’s undiluted presence as humans are. Consequently, Michael’s instructions to distrust the senses and to avoid jumps in logic from appearances directly to conclusions is as true for Satan and, by extension, the rest of the angelic host, as it is for Adam (Fish lii).



More importantly, beings of both “rational” and “intelligential substances” – humans and angels, respectively – are charged by God to use reason to overcome the limitations of sensory perception:

And I will place within them as a guide  
My umpire conscience, whom if they will hear,  
Light after light well used they shall attain,  
And to the end persisting, safe arrive... (III.194-197)

Whether characters are angelic or human, they have been “endued / With sanctity of reason...self-knowing...[and can] acknowledge whence his good descends, thither with heat and voice and eyes / Directed in devotion” (VII.507,509-513) as Descartes suggests. Crucially, this innate God-given ability to reason is governed by free will – “He left it in thy power, ordained by thy will / By nature free, not overruled by fate / Inextricable, or strict necessity” (V.526-528) – and, hence, reason can be manipulated to serve the self rather than God.

Again, Milton lessens the gap between angels and humans since humans can “to vital spirits aspire...to intellectual, give both life and sense” (V.483) and like angels, their minds are populated by “fancy and understanding, whence the soul / Reason receives, and reason is her being” (V.484-487). In other words, through the proper application of reason and the “contemplation of created things” (V.511), humans can become the intellectual equals of angels – “And from these corporal nutriments perhaps / Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit” (V.496-497) – and view the intelligible realm and God just as well as angels can. Throughout the epic, Satan is threatened by this marginal intellectual disparity between humans and angels, and thus his jealous view of God’s other sentient creations is further exacerbated.

Furthermore, angels are like humans “made...perfect, not immutable” (V.524) and therefore are just as susceptible to faulty reason. Satan exemplifies how incorrectly exercising free will can result in cognitive frailty; “Confounded though immortal” (I.53), Satan is proof that even

“in heavn’ly sprits [can] such perverseness dwell” (VI.788). God explicitly states that using reason as He intended for it to be used is not compulsory:

When will and reason (reason also is choice)  
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,  
Made passive both, had served necessity,  
Not me (III.108-111)

Satan’s corrupted reason is therefore “whose fault...but his own” (III.96-97), since although God “made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, through free to fall” (III.98-99), Satan and his angels “themselves decreed / Their own revolt” (III.116-117). Ergo, when Raphael warns Adam to remain satisfied with “knowledge within bounds” (VII.120), and:

beyond abstain  
To ask, nor let thine own inventions hope  
Things not revealed, [which] th’ Invisible King,  
Only omniscient, hath suppressed in night (VII.120-123)

he is in effect detailing exactly how Satan failed in his reason, choosing not to favor “temperance over appetite” (VII.127) and “inventing” ways to see beyond his “ken.” Raphael is therefore explicitly, yet ultimately futilely, cautioning Adam not to make the same mistake.

### **Through Pride that Sight: The Ontogenesis of the Satanic Visual Lens**

In keeping with Plato’s hybrid *extramissive-intromissive* theory of vision, Satan’s visual lens is as much a product of his physical eyes’ limitations as it is a manifestation of his underlying mental processes and motivations. Fish notes that Satan relies on his senses for the “apprehension of reality, but they are unreliable and hopelessly limited” (Fish 28), and, furthermore, he contends, the primary flaw in Satan’s vision – and consequently its most virulent effect on the reader’s moral experience of the poem – is that Satan has “taken his eye from its proper object – the glory of God, and the state of his own soul” (Fish 10) replacing it with narcissistic self-idolatry. Throughout the epic, and in the first four books specifically, Satan’s

vision both results from and further reinforces his flawed reasoning; just as God endows his sentient creations with an innate affinity for *recta ratio*, Satan's position as the purveyor of deception is contingent upon rejecting this right reason in favor of his own biased understanding. Rather than allowing an escape from the pitfalls and limitations of a reliance on vision as a method of gaining knowledge and moving further toward the development of wisdom, Satan's rebellion instead renders him vulnerable to optical illusions.

Notably, since the poem begins *in media res* with Satan and his minions after their expulsion from Heaven but before their resolution to corrupt humanity, the first scene in the narrative presents a critical evolutionary moment of choice for Satan and his followers. At this point in the narrative, Satan's visual lens is developing while the reader is simultaneously rapidly becoming enamored with Satan and the way in which he views the spectacular panoramas to which he is exposed (Partner 134). His "name in Heav'nly records...blotted out and razed, by their rebellion" (I.361-363), he is no longer Lucifer but is now the "Arch-Enemy...thence in Heav'n called Satan" (I.81-82). Crucially, although Satan recognizes that he and his followers are "how fall'n! How changed" (I.84) in appearance, he still asserts that "the mind and spirit remains / Invincible, and vigor soon returns" (I.140-141) and therefore his new identity is based upon his unchanged mental state. Understanding Satan's visual lens, then, is dependent upon understanding how Satan reinvented himself and developed his own corrupted reason.

Just as Descartes postulates that the mind is ultimately the master of reality, Satan's visual lens is predominated by his refusal to accept that he is God's inferior—"what should I be, all but less than he / Whom thunder hath made greater" (I.256-257)—and his conviction that his cause is noble despite his incarceration in Hell and his resounding defeat in Heaven. Satan deliberately refuses to accept the validity of his punishment and God's superiority, suggesting that "descent

and fall / to us is averse” (II.76-77). Therefore their expulsion from Heaven, “from what highth fall’n” (I.92), is an affront to Satan’s very nature as a being of intelligible, Heavenly origin. He maintains that “this infernal pit shall never hold / Celestial spirits in bondage, nor th’ abyss / Long under darkness cover” (I.657-659), which suggests that he considers their situation to be so counter to their essential natures that it cannot be permanent. Notwithstanding the fact that Heaven is vastly “unlike the place from whence they fell” (I.75), Satan asserts that his is “a mind is not to be changed by place or time” (I.252) which will not change no “matter where, if I be still the same” (I.255). The belief that he “can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” (I.254) demonstrates his determination to view all sensory information as evidence of his convictions and suggests that, by his own volition, Satan has made himself vulnerable to optical illusions on account of his unwavering revenge mentality.

Furthermore, Satan continually deludes himself throughout the epic with the illusion that he is still a creature of Heaven, a “lost Archangel” (I.243) of “empyrean substance” (I.105), instead of a prisoner of Hell. Within the context of the Cave Allegory, this suggests that Satan can no longer see himself clearly due to the lack of illumination in both the physical and intelligible realms. Satan’s myth of self-creation is his delusional attempt to reconcile his rejection of God, and therefore the *imago dei*, with the retention of his angelic physical and intellectual being:

Remember’st thou  
 Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?  
 We know no time when we were not as now;  
 Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised  
 By our own quick’ning power (V.857-861)

Stating that he is “self-begot, self-raised” by his “own quick’ning” power indicates that Satan has replaced reverence of God with self-idolatry. Satan and his fallen angels see themselves as being led by a “great commander” (I.358) and they themselves as “godlike shapes and forms / Excelling

human, princely dignities” (I.358-359) whom Satan views with pride through his “experienced eye” (I.658), a force still made up of “armies bright” (I.272) despite their defeat. Satan perceives that his “form had not yet lost / All her original brightness, nor appeared / Less than archangel ruined” (I.591-593) despite his expulsion from Heaven.

Consequently, Satan’s rejection of the *imago dei* involves both a rejection of God’s image in the form of the Son, Adam, and Eve as well as a rejection of God’s light and reason, replacing it with self-idolatry and a reverence of his own visual lens instead of God’s. Satan’s relationship to light is in direct contrast to the narrator’s invocation of the muses, where the narrator is assumed to speak for Milton himself. Here, Milton’s underlying philosophical understanding of his own blindness informs the treatment of light as an extension of God – “God is light” (III.2) – and therefore a physical reality that links God, as an intangible abstraction, to the fundamentally limited human vision and intellect. Comparing himself to the blind Greek prophet Tiresias, Milton suggests that he gained improved intellectual perception at the cost of physical vision since, for a human mind, the two are by necessity mutually exclusive:

So much the rather thou celestial light  
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence  
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight

(III.51-55)

This “inward” shining of God’s “celestial light” allows the narrator to “see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight,” but these internal eyes capable of viewing the intelligible realm come at the cost of physical eyes. As both Plato and Descartes suggest, *recta ratio* – “right reason” – is a purely cognitive process dependent upon deeply ingrained knowledge, either of abstract forms in the case of Plato, or of God according to Descartes. Again, both philosophers stress the ease with which reliance upon visual epistemology can lead to erroneous conclusions given the fallibility of

the human senses. Milton also appears to imply that his divine inspiration is a form of intellectual rather than physical theophany. Like viewing the sun, looking at God directly is both impossible and painful to attempt for the human senses. Therefore, Milton's blindness is a trade-off that allows him to more clearly see the "holy light" (III.1) of God, intellectually at the expense of his ability to perceive God as physically manifested in His creation. Despite his absolute conviction that his poem is divinely inspired, Milton's lamentations of his own blindness throughout the epic suggests that he did not consider this direct intellectual connection to Heaven to be adequate recompense for his loss of sight.

In contrast, Satan's rejection of God results in the blinding of his intelligible eyes rather than his physical ones. The loss of Heaven is the loss of God's internal light, and therefore the new source of illumination that he and his angels are forced to rely upon is vastly inferior to the illumination that God himself provided in Heaven: they are "in utter darkness... far removed from God and the light of Heav'n...O how unlike the place from whence they fell!" (I.72,75). Though Satan can still see "the dismal situation waste and wild" (I.62), the flames that serve as the only source of illumination provide "no light" (I.65). This illumination is not really illumination at all: instead, the crucial point is that Satan gains information from the oxymoronic "darkness visible" (I.65) which "served only to discover sights of more woe" (I.66). In terms of the Cave Allegory, Satan's perception involves seeing shadows as "darkness visible," perceptions that provide fallacious information because they lack illumination but that Satan perceives as abstract truth. Consequently, the reason that Satan fails in terms of theophany is likely because he suffers from a lack of illumination due to his literal and metaphorical estrangement from God.

Satan's rejection of God's light affects his perception of all other forms of theophany as well; Satan's mental state is characterized by his envious hatred of all God's creations, notably

still being “fraught / With envy against the Son of God” (V.660-662). This jealousy arises from his inability to recognize that the Son is a form of theophany, “the radiant image of his [God’s] glory” (III.61) in whose “face / Divine compassion visibly appeared” (III.141-142), since he views God as an oppressor who “holds the tyranny of Heav’n” (I.105-124). Francis Blessington notes in *Paradise Lost and the Classical Epic* that deviations from the archetype of the classical warrior prove that Satan, despite his self-image to the contrary, is “only a verbal Achilles” (Blessington 11) in direct contrast to the Son, who “rises so far above his epic predecessors” in terms of rhetoric and merit (Blessington 37). Additionally, unlike Adam, whose heroic strength relies upon his reason for protection and defense, Satan instead abuses rhetoric and logic. This perverted reason, which arises as result of Satan’s “free choice” (II.19) to reject God’s light, belies his seemingly heroic rhetoric (Blessington 51) and contrasts directly with the Son’s.

Similarly, Satan misconceives God’s image in the physical form of human beings. Though Satan initially views humans with wonder, ultimately his visual lens is characterized by the same jealousy and “grief” that lead to his expulsion from Heaven in the first place:

O Hell! What do mine eyes with grief behold,  
Into our room of bliss thus high advanced  
Creatures of other mold, earth-born perhaps,  
Not spirits, yet to Heav’nly spirits bright  
Little inferior; whom my thoughts pursue  
With wonder, and could love, so lively shines  
In them divine resemblance, and such grace  
The hand that formed them on their shape hath poured (IV.356, 358-365)

Here again, Satan is threatened by humanity just as he is threatened by the Son, and therefore experiences another theophanic failure to visualize the *imago dei* when he consciously rejects Adam and Eve’s “divine resemblance” to God.

Critically, Satan's visual lens through which he views reality is essentially his physically manifested emotions, and therefore allow for his mental state and corrupted reason to literally control what he perceives and how he interprets it. Indeed, the first few lines of the epic reference the ideas that underlie his voracious vision directly:

round he throws his baleful eyes  
That witnessed huge affliction and dismay  
Mixed with obdurate pride and steadfast hate:  
At once as far as angels ken he views (I.56-59)

Satan sees this "huge affliction and dismay" through the visual lens of "obdurate pride and steadfast hate," that results from his "confounded" (I.53) reason and thoughts "both of lost happiness and lasting pain" (I.55) that torment him. Again, Partner points out that Satan's eyes, his visual lenses, no longer see as "far as angels ken," and instead his vision is characterized by an "insatiable viewpoint" (Partner 134) that is "baleful" in intent and expansive in scope, since his gaze is cast "round" instead of focusing on one particular sight. This suggests that Satan does not view his and his cohorts' situation in Hell, this confinement to a "dismal situation waste and wild" (I.43), to be anything other than an affront. Even before the particulars of their situation have been delineated, Satan has already made clear his menacing intent: inflict widespread harm in his attempt to revenge himself upon God. Effectively, although Satan can view wide panoramas, what he actually sees in those vistas is narrowly focused on whatever best fits his visual lens.

Furthermore, and more importantly, Fish suggests that Satan literally sees *through* his emotions (Fish xxix). Satan's attitude toward the object of his gaze is inextricably linked to how he perceives that object:

could not bear  
Through pride that sight, and thought himself impaired  
Deep malice thence conceiving and disdain (V.664-666)



In this situation, Satan sees through his pride as a physical visual lens, which both *extramissively* projects his prideful assumptions and consequently *intromissively* taints any sensory information that enters through his eye. Regardless of the reality of the situation, Satan thinks “himself impaired” and therefore conceives his “deep malice...and disdain.” Significantly, this pattern holds true throughout the entire epic. For example, the fact that his eyes “sparkling blazed” (I.193) suggests that they both emit and taint everything he sees with his rage; each time Satan views his surroundings and situation, his emotions consistently dictate the nature of his visual lens and how he perceives sensory information.

It is Satan’s rhetoric throughout the epic, then, that most clearly demonstrates desires that underlie his visual lens:

but he his wonted pride  
Soon recollecting, with high words, that bore  
Semblance of worth, not substance, gently raised  
Their fainting courage, and dispelled their fears (I.522-530)

Forsyth suggests that although Satan relates his apparently noble motives through his seemingly heroic rhetoric, inconsistencies between his public and private statements provide the first subtle markers that his vision and reason are inherently flawed (Forsyth 6). Though Satan assumes the rhetoric of liberty and merit, it is the “semblance of worth, not substance.” In particular, Satan’s suggestion that Hell is a refuge from God’s tyranny has the appearance of “New World” optimism:

Here at least  
We shall be free...  
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:  
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav’n (I.250-259, 262-263)

The reality, however, is that Hell is a prison and Satan admits in his soliloquy at the onset of Book IV that he is aware of the futility of his actions and the nature of his punishment, which is ultimately exile rather than independence.

Accordingly, Satan's visual lens develops through a restriction of his perception of events to a singular and highly confining point of view – his pride-fueled obsession with destroying humans, God's favored creation – that blinds him to all other alternative courses of action. Free will, specifically Satan's free will, is the mechanism by which he rejects God's image and "his umpire conscience" (III.195), resulting in the perversion of *recta ratio* and, ultimately, the emergence of optical illusions due to a forced separation from God. As Fish points out, "Satan continually deludes himself by supposing that he can act apart from God" (Fish 18-19), and it is this separation from and rejection of God that defines Satan's visual lens. In this way, "internal sight" (VIII.461) *extramissively* produces reality. Thus, the characters in *Paradise Lost*, Satan most especially, appear to live in worlds of their own making, trapped by their own "first conceivings" (Fish xxxix).

### **Space May Produce New Worlds: Wonder and Conquest**

Once his obsessively narrow visual lens has been firmly established, Satan turns his eyes towards his larger goal "to wage by force or guile eternal war / Irreconcilable, to our grand foe, / Who now triumphs" (I.105-107). Satan's underlying desire is "to found this nether empire, which might rise / By policy, and long process of time, / In emulation opposite to Heav'n" (II.292-298), an empire which he arrogantly assumes will not only rival but eclipse Heaven's glory. Satan's actions throughout the epic, despite his stated motivations concerning the merit and nobility of his continued rebellion, can all be read as unconscious endeavor to imitate God in his capacity as both king and creator. Since he admits that he cannot wrest Heaven from God's control, Satan attempts to be a king in Hell and, upon realizing the futility of turning his prison into a kingdom, instead strives to become a conqueror of Chaos and Earth. Similarly, his creations *ex deo* are all "abortive, monstrous, or unkindly mixed" (III.455-456), perversions of God's creations, as he cannot "value right / The good before him, but perverts best things / To worst abuse, or to their meanest use"

(IV.202-204). Satan's children are created in his image but ultimately serve God's purposes rather than Satan's since each of his spiteful actions against God ultimately "still serves / His glory to augment" (II.385-386), just as his creation of gunpowder and the bridge connecting Hell to Earth ultimately fail to secure victory over God.

Satan's visual perspective throughout his peregrinations through Hell, Chaos, and Earth is primarily characterized by a sense of "wonder." Mary Baine Campbell in *Wonder & Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe* and Denise Albanese in *New Science, New World* argue that the language of Satan's exploration echoes the "New World" discourse of Milton's seventeenth century literary climate, where advances in science and the conquest of new colonies encouraged the creation of worlds yet unseen and unimagined in literature. Campbell suggests that "wonder" is a form of perception that involves the making of new worlds, the "rewriting of the past as well of the future" provoked by the novelty of the New World across the Atlantic as well as Galileo's telescopically-inspired "multi-centered space" and Kepler's idea of "innumerable worlds" (Campbell 3, 114-115). Indeed, "wonder" is a central concept to *Paradise Lost* since it not only concerns itself with attempting to translate into physical form "things invisible to mortal sight" (III.55), but also presents Heaven as the Old World and Satan as the intrepid explorer of the false New Worlds of Hell and Chaos, in addition to the true New World of Earth. Satan in this context is not simply a corrupted deceiver, but also an innovator capable of extending free will to allow for creation *ex deo*.

Similarly, Albanese suggests that Milton's Eden is a "phantasmic topography of modern times" because it is placed within the "thematics of colonialist novelty" (Albanese 121) wherein Eden is God's true New World, the battlefield upon which humanity's forefathers compete with Satan for jurisdiction. Furthermore, she notes the extreme symbolic significance of Galileo's

telescope throughout the epic, defining it as an “apparatus that signifies the ‘New Science’ of the seventeenth century, and a technology that makes ‘new worlds’ available for inspection...a useful index of the transfer of cultural authority from humanism’s printed texts to colonialism’s and science’s natural ones” (Albanese 122). For Milton specifically, the telescope is “theory materialized” and astronomy is “the long view of the divine.” More importantly, the “glass” (V.261) itself is metonymically substituted for the eye and represents an *extramissive* extension of the viewer rather than simply a tool that he uses (Albanese 127). The Son’s golden compass is likewise a symbol of creation, but unlike the telescope, its purpose is not to expand creative horizons but rather to mark their finite boundaries, “to circumscribe / This universe, and all created things” (VII.225, 226-227). Milton’s discussion of Satan’s capability for creation *ex deo* is therefore a paradox, equal parts condemnation and commendation of imagination and innovation.

Pandemonium, the setting for the first scene of *Paradise Lost*, is Satan’s first test of his ability to transform his will into actual sensory images and his manifested vision of a seat of power to rival Heaven’s light which, as with everything Satan creates *ex deo*, falls far short of its intended mark. The city is described as the “city and proud seat / Of Lucifer, so by allusion called, / Of that bright star to Satan paragoned” (X.424-426) and, as the name suggests, is Satan’s attempt to remedy the presence of “this mournful gloom / For that celestial light” (I.244-245). However, Hell’s substance is antithetical to God’s, and therefore completely uncondusive to creation. Satan, who was “headlong sent / With his industrious crew to build in Hell” (I.750-751) assumes that they can overcome this substance of Hell—the “black tartareous cold infernal dregs / Averse to life: then founded, then conglobed / Like things to like” (VII.238-240)—by adapting themselves to Hell’s physical attributes. In keeping with Empedocles’ *extramissive* imperative that “like with like” interactions convey visual fire, they suppose that they can manifest their image of a kingdom

to rival Heaven if these Hellish substances “become our elements, these piercing fires / As soft as now severe, our temper changed / Into their temper” (II.275-277). Imitating God, Satan and his followers suggest that “as he our darkness, cannot we his light / Imitate when we please? This desert soil / Wants not her hidden luster, gems and gold” (II.268-270). Therefore their building materials in Heaven are primarily “gems and gold,” substances classically associated with Hades.

Pandemonium not only is made with building materials that allude to the classical underworld but also resembles a pagan temple with its “golden architrave” (I.715) and “roof was fretted gold” (I.717). Although Satan and his followers are not consciously aware that they are futilely attempting to recreate Heaven’s light, Pandemonium’s pervasive gilding and liberal covering of gems suggests that they are attempting to make their dark prison brighter and therefore more like Heaven, using what little light “was left him, or false glitter” (X.450-452). In particular, Pandemonium’s roof appears to be a desperate attempt to recreate Heaven’s sky:

from the archèd roof  
Pendant by subtle magic many a row  
Of starry lamps and blazing cressets fed  
With naphtha and asphaltus yielded light  
As from a sky (I.726-730)

Within the context of the Cave Allegory, this detail suggests that the illumination provided by Pandemonium’s “regal luster” (X.448), though it “outshone the wealth” (II.2) of future human cities, was yet a pale imitation of God’s light and did little to alleviate their punishment, the blinding of both their visible and intelligible worlds. Ultimately, however, Satan perceives that Hell is not and will never be the location for a new Heaven, as it is:

A universe of death, which God by curse  
Created evil, for evil only good,  
Where all life dies, death lives, and nature breeds,  
Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,  
Abominable, inutterable, and worse

Than fables yet have feigned, or fear conceived

(II.622-627)

Even Satan's incredibly restrictive visual lens allows him to apprehend that Hell, this "universe of death," will never provide the materials necessary for his schemes for revenge, and therefore steers both his eyes and his minions' away from Hell and toward different, more promising prospects.

As a result of this failing to make a "Heav'n of Hell," the Congress in Hell is convened in an attempt to develop an alternative plan to spite the Almighty, ultimately suggesting the creation of "a growing empire" (II.315) through an acquisitive exploration of the newly created world. Recognizing that "space may produce new worlds" (I.650), the council elects Satan to embark upon an uncertain journey through the total darkness of Chaos:

Who shall tempt with wand'ring feet  
The dark unbottomed infinite abyss  
And through the palpable obscure find out  
His uncouth way, or spread his airy flight  
Upborne with indefatigable wings

(II.404-408)

Satan's self-idolatry has reached new heights at this point in the epic; despite the fact that the election was a sham given that Satan engineered his dramatic apparent self-sacrifice, he believes himself to be elevated above his peers, having by his own merit transcended his punishment and proved his claim to leadership to be equal to God's:

none among the choice and prime  
Of those Heav'n-warring champions could be found  
So hardy as to proffer or accept  
Alone that dreadful voyage; till at last  
Satan, whom now transcendent glory raised  
Above his fellows, with monarchal pride  
Conscious of highest worth, unmoved

(II.423-429)

Satan views himself as Aeneas – an intrepid conqueror, a scout "on whom...the weight of all and our last hope relies" (II.415-416)—who, by virtue of his unchallenged bravery and merit, will have

proven himself to be the obvious and rightful leader for the new empire he and the rest of the fallen angels will found after having corrupted mankind and assumed control of Eden. Indeed when he accuses Gabriel, and through him, God and the Son, of being ignorant of what constitutes a true leader – “a faithful Leader, not to hazard all / Through ways of danger by himself untried” (IV.933-934) – he conveniently forgets that his having volunteered to traverse Chaos by himself was not motivated by self-sacrifice. Instead, Satan’s motivation for having “alone first undertook / To wing the desolate abyss, and spy / This new created world” (IV.935) is to set himself above his peers by “winning cheap the high repute / which he through hazard huge must earn” (II.472-473). Since “fame is not silent” (IV.938) in Hell, and Satan’s self-idolatrous visual lens is again proven to be inherently flawed as he is more concerned with being lauded for the appearance of heroics than the reality.

Satan’s view of Chaos is likewise flawed, his “thoughts inflamed of highest design” (II.630) as he “explores his solitary flight” (II.632). He views Chaos as an “illimitable ocean without bound / Without dimension, where length, breath, and highth, / And time and place are lost (II.894-896), fraught with danger:

These past, if any pass, the void profound  
Of unessential night receives him next  
Wide gaping, and with utter loss of being  
Threatens him, plunged into that abortive gulf.  
If thence he scape into whatever world,  
Or unknown region, what remains him less  
Than unknown dangers and as hard escape (II.438444)

Satan perceives that although Hell suffers a dearth of light due to a physical separation from God, Chaos poses an even greater threat, the possibility of the “utter loss of being” rather than simply complete sensory blindness. He believes that his bravery in traversing such a dangerous, uncharted expanse makes him God’s equal:

difficulty or danger could deter  
Me from attempting. Wherefore do I assume  
These royalties, and not refuse to reign,  
Refusing to accept as great a share  
Of hazard as of honor, due alike  
To him who reigns, and so much to him due  
Of hazard more, as he above the rest  
High honored sits?

(II.438-456)

However, Satan's perception of Chaos again highlights the limitations of Satan's physical perception and the deception inherent in his visual lens. While he imagines that his bravery firmly establishes himself as the rebels' "matchless chief" (II.487), he again experiences a theophanic failure; Chaos, since it is eternal and since Milton supports the idea of a monistic, God-centric universe, is likely another aspect of God himself. Viewing Chaos as immutable darkness is therefore tantamount to a reverse or dark theophany – Satan is blinded not by an excess of light but rather by an excess of darkness, and fails to realize that they are two sides of the same coin.

Furthermore, Milton suggests that Chaos is perhaps simply a reservoir of unformed matter available for God's use, "the womb of nature and perhaps her grave" (II.911) in which uncreated matter lies dormant "unless th' Almighty Maker them ordain / His dark materials to create more worlds" (II.915-916). God doesn't necessarily need to use Chaos to create – He is omnipotent, after all – and this suggests that the darkest things in creation, or particularly those outside of creation, can be used by God to create things that serve his will, most especially Satan and his children, Sin and Death. Additionally, Satan's view of Chaos as a "void profound / Of unessential night" (II.438-439) indicates that Satan cannot perceive that he is not discovering a new, unconquered expanse; rather, Satan is simply discovering another, darker facet of God's enormous presence without consciously realizing that the darkness he sees before his eyes is of the same



origin as the blinding light of Heaven. Satan's assumption of parity with God is therefore completely unfounded.

Having successfully traversed Chaos, Satan's line of sight, "full fraught with mischievous revenge, / Accursed" (II.1054-1055), then turns toward Heaven and, ultimately, Eden. Emerging from the darkness of Chaos, Satan is now "at leisure to behold / Far off th' empyreal Heav'n, extended wide" (II.1046-1047), which "far distant he descries / Ascending by degrees magnificent" (III.501) he is once again afforded a view of Heaven, albeit at a distance. Again, this physical distance from Heaven, "far distant" the "far off...empyreal Heav'n" suggests that Satan's separation from God results in a lack of both literal and metaphorical light. Although he has the advantage of height, providing him an "extended wide" view as well as increased illumination, he still demonstrates the limitations of his physical vision as Heaven is yet "illimitable" (III.508). Additionally, Satan's restriction of his focus despite his elevation in altitude again suggests that Satan has failed in his vision, as elevation is often associated with epiphany, as in the case of Oreb and Sinai.

As a result, Satan turns his attention away from "the walls of Heav'n" (III.427) and toward another prospect of "luminous inferior orbs, enclosed / From Chaos and th' inroad of darkness old" (III.420-421), God's "creation, and the wonders of his might" (VII.223) that stand out in contrast to the blinding brightness of Heaven and the equally blinding darkness of Chaos. Earth, as the seat of God's most favored creation, is brightly illuminated by "a passage down to th' Earth, a passage wide, / Wider by far than that of aftertimes" (III.528-529) through which "light shone, and order from disorder sprung" (III.713). However, Satan is not blinded by excessive brightness when he views Earth, unlike when he attempts to view Heaven directly:

Here matter new to gaze the Devil met  
Undazzled, far and wide his eye commands,



However, Satan's more characteristic emotions of pride, avarice, and arrogance remain eclipsed by this "vernal delight and joy" for only a short duration. Satan's wonder, given that it is an "unspeakable desire to see, and know / All these...wondrous works" (III.662-663), is quickly overcome by his despair and greed, and, turning acquisitive, it loses its awe-filled innocence.

Though his view was momentarily clear and without agenda, Satan's visual lens next becomes predatory in nature; he is a "prowling wolf" (IV.183) or "vulture" (III.431) "bent on his prey" (III.441). He sees through his acquisitiveness rather than his initial wonder as "his eye with choice regard[s]" (III.534) these many worlds in order to determine which one is the target of his highly focused vision for revenge, while simultaneously ignoring the limitless possibilities and alternatives to revenge that they present:

but nigh had seemed other worlds,  
Or other worlds they seemed, or happy isles...  
Thrice happy isles, but who dwelt happy there  
He stayed not to inquire: above them all  
The golden sun in splendor likest Heaven  
Allured his eye: thither his course he bends

(III.566-567, 570-573)

Satan's restrictive visual lens then becomes characterized as "sly circumspection" (IV.537) rather than wonder. This leads him to focus obsessively on a single object, the "one fatal Tree there stands of Knowledge called, / Forbidden them to taste" (IV.514-515) as well as "with narrow search; and with inspection deep / Considered every creature which...might serve his wiles, and found / The serpent subtlest beast of all the field" (IX.82-86) rather than the rampant variety and excess that characterizes the rest of the garden.

Furthermore, unlike the Son, whose creation is bounded by the finite reach of his golden compass, Satan's creative vision requires boundless possibility, underscored when he states "when I behold this goodly frame, this world / Of heav'n and Earth consisting...spaces incomprehensible"

(VIII.15-16, 20). This suggests that he realizes these “spaces incomprehensible” are necessary if he and his fallen angels have any chance whatsoever of creating a kingdom to rival Heaven’s glory. However, when Satan “looks down with wonder at the sudden view / Of all this world at once” (III.540-543) and although he views Earth as a “boundless continent” (III.423), he does not realize that his restrictive focus on revenge has in fact tragically limited his vision. In its pure state, Satan’s “wonder” afforded him a clear, innocent sight of God and the intelligible world once more, but again he exerts his free will to subjugate his sensory perception to his flawed reason. Indeed, Partner suggest that “Satan’s misuse of his eyes is compounded by the restless covetousness of his vision that – in contrast to the static, omniscient perspectives of God...affords him only fragmentary and deceptive knowledge” (Partner 134), and therefore his expansive vision is tainted by the physical frailties of his vision. Unlike Virgil’s Aeneas, Satan is far from establishing a new empire in emulation of his lost homeland. Satan’s belief that his conquest of Earth will be a victory, “Earth be chang’d to Heav’n, and Heav’n to Earth” (VII.160), ultimately proves to be an illusion since Sin and Death will be defeated by the Son.

Similarly, Satan’s initial view of Eden’s human inhabitants, Eve in particular, momentarily clears Satan's agenda from his mind. Her “heavn’ly form / Angelic but more soft, feminine” (IX.457-458) and “graceful innocence” (IX.495) temporarily divest Satan of “his malice” (IX.461):

That space the evil one abstracted stood  
 From his own evil, and for the time remained  
 Stupidly good, of enmity disarmed,  
 Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge (IX.459-466)

However, this wonder is again of short duration:

But the hot Hell that always in him burns,  
 Though in mid-Heav’n, soon ended his delight,

And tortures him now more, the more he sees  
Of pleasure not for him ordained: then soon  
Fierce hate he recollects, and all his thoughts  
Of mischief, gratulating, thus excites (IX.467-472)

Here, Satan's view of humans is even more of a moment of theophany than viewing Eden, given that they are the "image of their glorious Maker" (IV.292) – and thus Satan's envy reaches its zenith; at this point in the narrative, Satan views both Eden and Adam and Eve through his envy and acquisitive pride rather than through innocent wonder. Again, Satan's visual lens is dictated by his poisoned reason, the "unchanged mind" that brings Hell with him wherever he goes, and therefore seeing such beautiful manifestations of the *imago dei* does nothing but further inflame Satan's hatred:

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 Heav'n much worse would be my state.  
But neither here seek I, no nor in Heav'n  
To dwell, unless by mast'ring Heav'n's Supreme;  
Nor hope to be myself less miserable  
By what I seek (IX.119-127)

Satan sees Adam and Eve's dominion of Eden as "sight hateful, sight tormenting!" (IV.505) since he considers them to be unworthy of the Earth and himself and his minions as its true heirs, despite God's absolute assertion to the contrary. Hell, not Eden, is Satan's inheritance. This covetous looking is also what gives him away to Uriel, as Uriel recognizes that no cherub (Satan's disguise while attempting to discern which world is Earth) would have such a predatory view of Earth. Satan's eyes conveyed a look "soon discerned...Alien from Heav'n, with passions foul obscured" (IV.570-571), and therefore his characteristic and unique visual perspective betrays his identity.

Satan's jealous vision during these moments of corrupted wonder also demonstrates his characteristic quality of looking askance. Partner suggests that this "sideways quality of Satan's looking" is indicative of a larger pattern of "obliquity and misalignment" in regard to Satan's sensory discernment (Partner 136). Satan's jealous view, "envy, yet with jealous leer malign / Eyed them askance and thus plained" (IV.503-504) suggests that this obliqueness in Satan's vision results from and further exacerbates his flawed reasoning capabilities, and "therefore suggests the insufficiency of any single physical vantage point to offer an accurate view of the world, and...is simultaneously emblematic of the fallen angel's inability to establish moral or physical coordinates" (Partner 137). Effectively, Satan's jealous view renders him even more susceptible to misinterpretation of sensory information, further estranging him from God and from right reason.

Crucially, these moments of wonder culminate in a major moment of choice for Satan. He has the opportunity to exercise his free will to choose an alternative choice of action, but ultimately his corrupted reason proves to be too deeply ingrained, and he continues to choose his ill-fated and petulant plan for revenge. Essentially, Satan cannot escape his unchangeable mind:

horror and doubt distract  
His troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stir  
The Hell within him, for within him Hell  
He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell  
One step no more than from himself can fly  
By change of place: now conscience wakes despair  
That slumbered, wakes the bitter memory  
Of what he was, what is, and what must be  
Worse; of worse deeds and worse sufferings must ensue (IV.18-26)

Satan's ascent from Hell, within the context of the Cave Allegory suggests that, although Satan has again been afforded greater illumination of both the physical and intelligible realms, he fails to improve his visual lens and instead it further calcifies. Satan sees the world as evidence of God's favoritism toward his newest creation, humanity, and as a new world primed for Satan's designs

for destruction and creation *ex deo*. Thus, Satan fails to prove himself worthy of either his prelapsarian *recta ratio* or *imago dei*, and therefore permanently renders himself irreconcilable to God.

### **Fruit that Promised Clearer Sight: The Contagion of Satanic Creation and Vision**

Consequently, all of Satan's creations throughout the epic are manifestations of Satan's corrupted and now solidified visual lens, whether they are physical like Sin and Death, gunpowder, and the bridge between Hell and Earth or simply illusions like Eve's dreams. In particular Satan's children, Sin and Death, are created in Satan's vain image, and are therefore extensions of his self-idolatry. Unlike God with his progeny, the Son and Adam and Eve specifically, Satan does not recognize his own image in his children, claiming "I know thee not, nor ever saw till now / Sight more detestable than him and thee" (II.744-745). Satan's inability to recognize his children is indicative of his staunch refusal to face his own image as well as his infatuation with his imagined self-image of a grandiose, noble figure. Indeed, Sin relates that Satan "thyself in me they perfect image viewing / Becam'st enamored, and such joy thou took'st / With me in secret, that my womb conceived" (II.764-766), resulting in the incestuous birth of Death, "this odious offspring whom thou seest / Thine own begotten" (II.781-782) and Sin's mutilation, rendering her "now in thine eye so foul, once deemed so fair" (II.748). Death is similarly monstrous, and is the dark mirror image of his father:

The other shape,  
If shape it might be called that shape had none  
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,  
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,

For each seemed either; black it stood as night,  
Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell,  
And shook a dreadful dart; what seemed his head  
The likeness of a kingly crown had on (II.666-673)

Here, “seemed” suggests the fallibility of Satan’s visual capabilities. Although Satan is aware that Death is an “execrable shape...Hell-born” (II.681, 687), and although it is clear that the “likeness of a kingly crown” suggests that Death is emblematic of Satan’s aspirations to the godhead, Satan nonetheless finds Death’s physical form indistinguishable.

The appearance of Satan’s children demonstrates their symbolic significance just as their names do; unlike God, Satan is capable only of producing creations designed to destroy rather than produce. Satan’s inventions are likewise tools of destruction and deception designed to “abolish his [God’s] own works” (II.370). Gunpowder is invented to “more forcibl[y] offend / Our yet unwounded enemies” (VI.464-466), since Heaven’s angels are “incapable of mortal injury / Imperishable” (VI.434-435). As in Pandemonium, Satan and his followers use materials from “deep under ground, materials dark and crude” (VI.478), whose darkness and subterranean nature suggests that they are antithetical to God’s bright creations. Within this context, invention and “engines” (VI.484) become synonymous with “devilish machinations” (VI.504), Milton suggests that the inventive vision that arises from corrupted reason produces weapons – “Tartarean sulfur, and strange fire, / His own invented torments” (II.69-70) – which are sacrilegious and can paradoxically create nothing but destruction. Despite the fact that these “deep-throated engines belched” (VI.586) “black fire” (II.67), their destructive capabilities could not and did not bring Satan victory but rather inglorious defeat. Similarly, Satan’s bridge across Chaos – Sin and Death “paved after him a broad and beaten way / Over the dark abyss (II.1026-1027) – is likewise a machination of destruction which ultimately proves a false victory since “following his track...was the will of Heav’n” (II.1025). Unlike Galileo’s telescope and the Son’s golden compass, Satan’s



perverted inventions gunpowder and bridge are manifest deceptive and destructive visions of creation.

Satan's most insidious inventions, however, are his deceptive illusions and rhetoric through which he orchestrates Original Sin. Taking advantage of Adam and Eve's fallible human senses and manipulating their affinity to wonder about their physical surroundings, Satan effectively "infects" them with his own corrupted reason and visual lens. Indeed, his invasion of Eden is the first time that Adam and Eve have ever had cause to doubt their physical senses, Eve noting that she now perceives "offense and trouble, which my mind / Knew never till this irksome night" (V.34-35). Satan's seduction and transmission of his heretical visual lens is contingent upon subjugating "Reason" to "Fancy," where the latter is synonymous with imagination and, since it is the direct result of wonder, is dependent upon sensory perception:

But know that in the soul  
Are many lesser faculties that serve  
Reason as chief; among these Fancy next  
Her office holds, of all external things,  
Which the five watchful senses represent,  
She forms imaginations, airy shapes,  
Which reason joining or disjoining, frames  
All what we affirm or what deny, and call  
Our knowledge or opinion; then retires  
Into her private cell when nature rests,  
Oft in her absence mimic Fancy wakes  
To imitate her; but misjoining shapes,  
Wild work produces oft, and most in dreams,  
Ill matching words and deeds long past or late

(V.99-113)

As Eve "wond'ring looked" (V.54) at the tree "much fairer to my fancy than by day" (V.53), Satan "solicited her longing eyes" (IX.743) and with "persuasive words, impregn'd / With reason, to her seeming" (IX.737-738) convinced her that eating the fruit would open her eyes to "divine effect" (IX.865). Essentially, Satan's infection of Eve's formerly pure intelligible reason is successful

because he appeals to her voracious wondering, falsely promising that eating the fruit will “make gods of men” (V.70) by increasing her vision of the intelligible realm and elevating her intelligence to a godlike state.

Eve, “whose eye darted contagious fire” (IV.1036), likewise corrupts Adam’s intelligible sight. Though initially Adam’s wondering was characterized by contemplation of God, “straight toward heav’n my wond’ring eyes I turned, / And gazed a while at the ample sky” (VIII.257-258), he just as quickly idolizes Eve on account of her beauty, seeing her as “Heav’n’s last best gift, my ever new delight” (V.19). Adam’s wondering demonstrates that he, like Eve, is susceptible to the limitations of human vision, his “mortal sight to fail; objects divine/Must needs impair and weary human sense” (XII.8-10) since his vision of the “fair angelic Eve” (V.74) is his most important and therefore influential form of theophany.

However, unlike Satan, Adam and Eve recognize almost immediately that their intelligible sight has not been improved through this ill-advised exercise of free will:

each the other viewing,  
Soon found their eyes how opened, and their minds  
How darkened; innocence, that as a veil  
Had shadowed them from knowing ill, was gone,  
Just confidence, native righteousness  
And honor from about them, naked left  
To guilty shame: he covered, but his robe  
Uncovered more (IX.1052-1058)

Although Michael cannot “cure” Adam and Eve’s diseased moral state and restore their innocence, he can however remove the contagion of Satan’s corrupted sight:

but to nobler sights  
Michael from Adam’s eyes the film removed  
Which that false fruit that promised clearer sight  
Had bred; then purged with euphrasy and rue  
The visual nerve, for he had much to see (XI.411-415)

Hence, though Satan has deceived himself, believing that he has gained a decisive victory over God and returns to Hell believing that he has been “successful beyond hope, to lead ye forth / Triumphant out of this infernal pit” (X.463-464), his victory is ultimately hollow.

Satan is able to view Original Sin only through his conviction that he is victorious, and therefore fails to recognize that his punishment has increased, “transformed / Alike, to serpents all as accessories / To his bold riot” (X.519-521). In contrast, Satan has succeeded in corrupting only Adam and Eve’s internal *imago dei* rather than their physical resemblance to God, “disfiguring not God’s likeness, but their own” (XI.521). Furthermore, and more importantly, although Sin will be able to prey upon postlapsarian humanity, “I in man residing through the race,/His thoughts, his looks, words, actions all infect” (X.607-608), the Son will ultimately prove victor over both Sin and Death:

In glory of the Father, to dissolve  
Satan with his perverted world, then raise  
From the conflagrant mass...New heav’ns, new earth (XII.546-549)

Thus, the most concrete difference between Satan and Adam and Eve is made clear; redemption is possible for humanity because humans, through their free will and the Son’s sacrifice, are able to divest themselves of Satan’s corrupted visual lens, whereas Satan’s vision is permanent, rendering him permanently blind to God’s love and mercy.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, Milton's decision to utilize Satan's eyes as the gateway to the narrative of *Paradise Lost* serves his larger purpose: educating the reader about the nature of Satan's seduction and, through the gradual erosion of Satan's grandiose image, inoculating the reader against the contagion of Satan's visual lens and corrupted reason. Demonstrating the flaws inherent in Satan's vision allows Milton to caution the reader about the moral detriment of relying too heavily on sensory information, particularly vision as a primary epistemological tool. Milton emphasizes the fact that Satan is blind because he sees only with his eyes, and, in contrast with the narrator who is only blind to the physical realm, has deliberately chosen to reject God's illumination of the intelligible realm and reason, rendering himself ignorant to God's true purpose and nature. Significantly, Satan is blind to all forms of the *imago dei*, having developed a twisted perceptual construct that is antithetical to theophany.

Satan's visual lens therefore symbolizes both his flawed reason and destructive creation, a corrupted "optic glass" (l.288) capable of descrying new worlds but not of viewing them with anything other than avaricious malice. Afforded an expansive view of the infinitely vast universe in addition to the abundant excesses of Eden, Satan's commitment to his diseased reason extinguishes his momentarily innocent wonder and curiosity, choosing instead to deliberately ignore any other possible courses of action in favor of narrowing his focus on those creations that will allow him to manifest his revenge. Consequently, Satan's lens is also symbolic of Satan's creation *ex deo*, the tool through which he builds those machinations intended to further his desire to spite the Almighty, shadowy innovations designed to demolish rather than construct. Just as Satan sees and creates through his emotions – pride and jealousy, specifically – Milton cautions

the reader against likewise allowing emotions and motivations to dictate how and what the limited physical eyes perceive.

Hence, Satan's seduction of humanity is contingent upon manipulating his victim's inborn wonder and reason, promising "clearer sight" (XI.413) of the intelligible realm and increasing the intellect to a near-godlike state, while in reality delivering only a clear view of the extent to which sin separates humanity from God and darkens the soul. Like a virulent disease, Satan's corrupted vision proves only to further cloud the mind's internal eye rather than improve its view of the divine. Thus, Milton's decision to end the epic with Michael's removal of the "film" (XI.412) which Original Sin placed over Adam and Eve's internal vision mimics Milton's reason for writing the epic: alerting the postlapsarian reader not only to the knowledge that Satan's visual lens has infected humanity but, more importantly, to the fact that humanity's intellectual sight can be and will be eventually cured by the Son.

Finally, Satan's vision throughout *Paradise Lost* demonstrates that he is ultimately a tragic rather than a heroic figure. He recognizes, albeit too late, that his perspective has calcified so severely that change, and therefore redemption, are no longer viable options. Satan's myth of self creation is true to the extent that Satan has reinvented himself upon the basis of his complete rejection of the *imago dei*. Since Satan defines himself in terms of his perception, as he looks through his emotions and motivations, to deny his visual lens would be tantamount to denying himself. Ergo, Satan's vision proves that the mind truly is its own place; Satan inhabits a Hell of his own making, seeing only what his corrupted reason has allowed him to see, and thus we as the reader are cautioned not to suffer the same internal blindness.

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