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# "Unspeakable Desire To See, And Know": Paradise Regained And The Political Theology Of Privacy

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# “Unspeakable desire to see, and know”: *Paradise Regained* and the Political Theology of Privacy

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Eric B. Song

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**ABSTRACT** In this essay, Eric B. Song considers the artistic, religious, and political value of privacy in *Paradise Regained*. The topic of privacy condenses Milton's thinking about gender and sexuality, domesticity, the fraught work of publishing intimate truths, and the relationship between Christian and Hebraic modes of religious polity. The depiction of privacy in *Paradise Regained* relates not only to Milton's earlier poetry and prose but also to twentieth-century theories of private and public life that contrast classical and modern societies. The productive friction between Milton's religious convictions and his advocacy for personal liberty speaks to controversies that persist in present-day American politics. **KEYWORDS:** privacy and domesticity; Milton's treatment of privacy; Athenian model of public discourse; religion and the public sphere; *oikos/polis* separation

☞ IN *PARADISE REGAINED*, the Son and Word of God seeks to “[p]ublish his godlike office.”<sup>1</sup> Even after receiving public confirmation of his identity at his baptism, Jesus struggles to find the proper way to spread his message and thereby to begin his redemptive mission effectively. The bulk of the epic takes place in a desert wilderness, where Jesus rejects modes of public action as satanic temptation. Despite Jesus's triumph, the poem famously ends with him returning to his mother's house “private” and “unobserved” (4.639, 638). This essay aims to show how *Paradise Regained* distills Milton's thinking about public and private realms. Milton's writings give voice both to an intense longing for privacy—the seclusion of mental freedom and of domesticity—

1. John Milton, *Paradise Regained*, in *The Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey, rev. 2nd ed. (Harlow, U.K., 2007), 1.188. Quotations from *Paradise Regained* are taken from this edition, cited by book and line number; quotations from *Paradise Lost* are from John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (Harlow, U.K., 1998), also cited by book and line number.

and the contradictory impulse to sanction its violation. Multiple strands of political and religious thought converge upon these concerns. The Protestant regard for individual conscience underwrites Milton's desire for privacy, whereas his Hebraic model of divinely sanctioned nationhood endorses some intrusive forms of state power. Milton's appeal to the social values of classical antiquity leads him to emulate the Greek citizen emerging from domesticity to offer public knowledge and also to recall the Roman *privatus* achieving heroic fame. As Milton engages with these religious and classical modes, he also articulates an emergent bourgeois subjectivity that brings domestic knowledge into the marketplace of books and ideas.

*Paradise Regained* crystallizes these conflicted ideas. Milton's Jesus confronts the daunting task of establishing a new order of truth and polity as a Jewish prophet living under Roman rule. Jesus's perfection legitimizes Christian privacy, but only by turning him into the victim of a paradox: precisely because he is the sinless subject who uniquely merits privacy, Jesus's most intimate thoughts and experiences must be rendered visible. As this essay will show, the contestation of privacy becomes particularly acute around sex and reproduction—both as bodily acts and as metaphors for creative labors. Privacy becomes the ground of Milton's intensely personal artistry partly by accruing an erotic charge. Milton voices a desire to shield sexual or sexualized experience from gazing eyes, but he also reworks familiar tropes of conception and labor as mediating the transition from private work to public knowledge. In other words, by linking the impulse to remain secret with the obverse desire to see and know, erotic energies both motivate and work against the separation of public and private realms. In *Paradise Regained*, this ambivalence manifests itself not only in Jesus's final return to his mother's home but also in the way that his identity is consistently linked, body and mind, to the person of his mother. The incarnation of the divine Logos redeems publication as a way to transmit truth, but the facts of Jesus's conception in and birth from Mary's womb must be hidden from our view. The Christian poet must thus seek a way to spread Jesus's good news while maintaining the privacy of Mary's body and home.

My analysis aims to take part in the ongoing attempt to excavate the political-theological genealogies of patterns that endure in our values and institutions.<sup>2</sup> The ensuing discussion engages selectively with influential theories of public and private

2. The foundational texts of political theology include Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), and Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, N.J., 1957). Kantorowicz influenced Foucault's genealogical approach. For more recent studies of political theology and its lasting effects, see *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, ed. Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan (New York, 2006); and Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa with Matteo Mandrini (Stanford, Calif., 2011). For examples of literary studies of the early modern period that are informed by political-theological concerns, see Victoria Kahn, "Disappointed Nationalism: Milton in the Context of Seventeenth-Century Debates about the Nation-State," in *Early Modern Nationalism and Milton's England*, ed. David Loewenstein and Paul Stevens (Toronto, 2008), 249–72, and *Wayward Contracts: The Crisis of Political Obligation in England, 1640–1674* (Princeton, N.J., 2004); and Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago, 2005).

spaces and with Feisal G. Mohamed's recent account in *Milton and the Post-Secular Present* (2011) of how Miltonic thought relates to our post-secular culture. The concluding section attends more explicitly to the way in which Milton's writings anticipate present-day political and ideological rifts. Milton's writings locate at a decisive moment in early modernity the tension between personal liberty and divinely sanctioned state control. *Paradise Regained* offers deep-seated reasons why domesticity and sexual privacy should continue to remain sites of conflict between a certain mode of Christian thought and the liberal values at once affiliated with and estranged from it.

### ☞ Milton's Privacy

In the final book of *Paradise Lost*, the angel Michael describes freedom from external coercion as a privilege that will be secured by the Son of God for his followers. This right, however, will be threatened by corrupt members of the church who arrogate to themselves

Secular power, though feigning still to act  
By spiritual, to themselves appropriating  
The Spirit of God [...]   
[...] and from that pretence,  
Spiritual laws by carnal power shall force  
On every conscience[.]

(12.517–22)

In the terms of Milton's theology, this unjust imposition of "carnal power" amounts to a regression from Christian liberty to a Hebraic past. Earlier in book 12, the angel Michael describes the shift from a Hebraic epoch to a Christian one as the transition "[f]rom shadowy types to truth, from flesh to spirit" (12.303). Yet Milton, more than many of his Protestant contemporaries, emphasizes the lived reality of the Israelites in a way that complicates the view that they merely represent a stage to be transcended on the way to spiritual truth.<sup>3</sup> Milton has thus rightly been called "the most deeply Hebraic of English literary writers."<sup>4</sup> This is nowhere more apparent than in his political thinking. Milton frequently urges reformation that would leave behind outdated "Jewish" forms while at the same time appropriating Israel's status as a divinely elect nation for England.

3. See Jason Rosenblatt, *Torah and Law in "Paradise Lost"* (Princeton, N.J., 1994), and Jeffrey Shoulson, *Milton and the Rabbis: Hebraism, Hellenism, and Christianity* (New York, 2001). For the importance of biblical Israel and of the readmission of Jews into England, see N. I. Matar, "Milton and the Idea of the Restoration of the Jews," *SEL* 27 (1987): 109–24, and Douglas Brooks, "'Ill-Matching Words and Deeds Long Past': Englished Hebrew and 'the Readmission of the Jews' in *Paradise Lost*," *Philological Quarterly* 81 (2002): 53–80. For extended analysis of the role of Israel in Milton's conception of nationhood, see Achsah Guibbory, *Christian Identity, Jews, and Israel in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2010), esp. 252–94.

4. Achsah Guibbory, "England, Israel, and the Jews in Milton's Prose, 1649–1660," in *Milton and the Jews*, ed. Douglas Brooks (Cambridge, 2008), 34.

Milton's final political treatise, *Of True Religion* (1672), argues for toleration in a spirit of reconciliation and freedom among Protestants in post-Restoration England.<sup>5</sup> Catholicism, however, surfaces as a familiar limit to Milton's belief in Christian liberty. "Toleration is either public or private," Milton writes, and in the case of Roman Catholics, "the exercise of their Religion, as far as it is Idolatrous, can be tolerated neither way." While public displays of Catholicism would offend "all consciencious Beholders," private devotion gives "great offence to God . . . though secret."<sup>6</sup> Milton endorses state intrusion for the cause of rooting out Catholic devotion by quoting a passage from the Hebrew Bible that aligns the human beholder with the divine eye through the literal breaching of private space:

*Ezekiel 8.7, 8. And he brought me to the door of the Court, and when I looked, behold a hole in the Wall. Then said he unto me, Son of Man, digg now in the wall; and when I had digged, behold a Door, and he said unto me, go in, and behold the wicked Abominations that they do here. And verse 12. Then said he unto me, Son of Man, hast thou seen what the Antients of the house of Israel do in the dark? (CPW 4.430–31)*

Ezekiel's act of prying is necessary partly because the domestic space that these "Antients" occupy is coextensive with the political realm, the "house of Israel." God impels Ezekiel to expose the truth before "the elders of Judah," figures of religious and political authority (Ezekiel 8:1, Authorized Version). The prophet's ability to pry ushers in a higher mode of power necessary in a time of otherwise inexorable corruption.

Whereas *Of True Religion* speaks of the sin of hidden idolatry, *Paradise Lost* underscores the sexual nature of secrecy and its violation. After eating the forbidden fruit of knowledge, Eve extols experience, who

op'nst wisdom's way,  
And giv'st access, though secret she retire.  
And I perhaps am secret; heaven is high,  
High and remote to see from thence distinct  
Each thing on earth[.]

(9.809–13)

For Eve, experience usurps the role that God plays for Ezekiel, opening a pathway to hidden knowledge. The impropriety of this access to seeing manifests itself almost immediately by turning Eve from a subject to object of vision. This shift is markedly

5. Milton's thoughts on privacy are inextricably bound up with his thoughts on individual conscience and toleration. This essay limits discussions of these related matters as much as possible in order to focus on the topic of privacy. For discussions of Milton and religious toleration, see *Milton and Toleration*, ed. Sharon Achinstein and Elizabeth Sauer (Oxford, 2007).

6. John Milton, *Of True Religion*, ed. Maurice Kelley, in vol. 8 of *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don Wolfe (New Haven, Conn., 1982), 430. Quotations of Milton's prose writings are from the *Complete Prose Works* (hereafter *CPW*), cited by volume and page number.

gendered: the personification of wisdom as a female serves as a turning point for Eve's self-understanding as a secretly sinful being to be detected. Regina Schwartz rightly calls Milton's God the "Transcendental Voyeur" and notes that the desire for secrecy is primarily a trait of those who have something shameful to hide from his eyes.<sup>7</sup>

Even before the Fall, however, the intimacy of sexual union complicates this rule. The very first architectural feature of Adam and Eve's nuptial bower mentioned by the poet is a "roof / Of thickest covert" (4.692–93). The bower thus fulfills a desire for privacy that Milton had expressed in early writings such as *Il Penseroso*: whereas the happy man of *L'Allegro* allows himself to walk "not unseen" (line 57), Milton's thoughtful man seeks to be "in close covert by some brook, / Where no profaner eye may look" (lines 139–40). Adam and Eve's bower cannot block divine omniscience, and their innocence obviates any shame in being seen by God. Even the animals in Eden, however, know not to violate the sanctity of the bower (4.703–5). The poet thus stresses that Adam and Eve's sexual congress is for him an object of speculation rather than of real sight: "Straight side by side were laid, nor turned *I ween* / Adam from his fair spouse" (4.741–42, emphasis added). Sex emerges as the most charged site of a concern that pervades the entire epic—the concern that the human desire to see is aligned not with divine omniscience but with Satan's "[u]nspeakable desire to see, and know" (3.662). After the Fall, Eve's desire for secrecy is undermined not only by God's holy vision but also by satanic voyeurism.

Such ambivalence about secrecy and seeing bears practical consequences. In an analysis of the political-theological significance of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Debora Shuger describes a Puritan model of polity that conjoins spiritual authority with sovereignty and thereby denies any room for private freedom. All actions should be regulated. Shuger traces the intellectual genealogy of this belief to both Hellenic and Hebraic sources, Plato's *Laws* and the Hebrew Bible. The sixteenth-century Reformer Martin Bucer, for example, teaches that Christian nations must adopt Old Testament criminal codes. "Bucer's call to reinstate Mosaic law," Shuger argues, "marks the opening of what would prove to be a century-long Puritan battle to enact legislation punishing adultery 'with the severity commanded by God,' thereby bringing the state back into line with the sacred."<sup>8</sup> Shuger describes the impulse to unite political and spiritual power to regulate all aspects of subjects' lives in the writings of religious polemicists such as Philip Stubbes and Thomas Lupton, and also in James I's conception of sovereignty. As *Measure for Measure* suggests, Puritan authority that seeks to redress moral failings fixates on the sexual lives of its subjects.

Both the boundaries of the term "Puritan" and its applicability to Milton remain contested.<sup>9</sup> The ways Milton converges with and diverges from the Puritan model

7. Regina Schwartz, "Through the Optic Glass: Voyeurism in *Paradise Lost*," in *Desire in the Renaissance: Psychoanalysis and Literature*, ed. Valeria Finucci and Regina Schwartz (Princeton, N.J., 1994), 156.

8. Debora Kuller Shuger, *Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England: The Sacred and the State in "Measure for Measure"* (Houndsmills, U.K., 2001), 30.

9. For a reading of *Paradise Lost* in the context of radical theologies of Adamic perfectionism, see Kristen Poole, *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton: Figures of Nonconformity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000), esp. 147–81. In no simple way does this make Milton a "Puritan." As Poole

become evident when we attend to his treatment of privacy. Whereas the Puritans Shuger identifies urge the discovery and punishment of sexual transgression, Milton's account of Edenic sex locates the possibility of transgression in the one who desires to see.<sup>10</sup> *Of True Religion* thus appeals to the prophetic mode of spying into dark places only in the limited and egregious case of Catholic devotion. Milton admires Martin Bucer as an early proponent of divorce but is far more interested than Bucer in defining the limits of state power in order to protect the individual's personal liberties. An obvious practical problem arises, however: in everyday life, God does not direct prophets to look into the appropriate secret places. Milton knew this very well. In the 1650s, he had signed a warrant to search the home of William Prynne, a critic of the Interregnum government who could, according to most available definitions, be labeled a Puritan. The very logic of the search warrant underscores the fact that the state does not breach a citizen's privacy with God-given certainty of hidden crimes but rather reserves for itself the power to determine when the probability of wrongdoing can justify forcible intrusion.

Whereas late writings such as *Of True Religion* concern themselves with limiting the state's intrusive power, Milton's earlier writings sought models of voluntary exchanges between private and public realms. This shift in focus is unsurprising given Milton's earlier ambitions to spur England toward reform and his subsequent experience of defeat. Feisal G. Mohamed maps Milton's divergent views onto the competition between "liberalism of speech" and "liberalism of faith"—a tension that persists in present-day American politics. Liberalism of faith subordinates both state power and rational discourse to religious convictions. According to Mohamed, Milton's late prose manifests a similar impulse by locating "ultimate meaning in a religious realm defined against worldly politics, urging public officials not to encroach upon an individual's prior obligations," whereas his earlier writings espouse something like liberalism of speech, which values collective reasoning and public discourse.<sup>11</sup> Milton's evolving thoughts on privacy generally bear out the distinction Mohamed draws but, at the same time, reveal meaningful connections between his early and late forms of liberalism. In *Areopagitica*, Milton assumes the role of Isocrates, "who from his private house wrote that discourses to the Parliament of *Athens*, that perswades them to change the form of *Democracy* which was then establish't" (*CPW* 2:489). The "old and elegant humanity of Greece" provides Milton with a precedent for the head of a private house-

notes, the word itself is "so fraught that an introductory definition of 'puritan' has become a standard generic feature of early modern historiography" (4). Poole chooses rather to consider the word itself as a site and a marker of social and theological conflict. For an extended claim that Milton is not a Puritan, see Catherine Gimelli Martin, *Milton among the Puritans: The Case for Historical Revisionism* (Farnham, U.K., 2010).

10. For an extensive account of the dangers associated with a fallen writer depicting sex in Eden, see James Grantham Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford, 1987).

11. Feisal G. Mohamed, *Milton and the Post-Secular Present: Ethics, Politics, Terrorism* (Stanford, Calif., 2011), 79–80. For definitions of liberalisms of speech and of faith, Mohamed relies upon Paul W. Kahn, *Putting Liberalism in Its Place* (Princeton, N.J., 2004).

hold to participate in useful political discourse. At the same time, Milton rejects the aspect of Greek thinking that underwrites the Puritan political theology described by Shuger: *Areopagitica* deems Plato's *Laws* irrelevant to any real nation (*CPW* 2:522–23).

If an Athenian model of public discourse inspires the title of Milton's treatise, the content is far more concerned with a nascent bourgeois mode of writing. The requirement that writings be approved and licensed before publication is an affront to the rights of the author, whose book is his commodity. In Jürgen Habermas's well-known account, printing and the commodification of writing serve as preconditions for the bourgeois public sphere. For Habermas, news concerning "early capitalist long-distance trade" represents the initial form of publication that matters for the public sphere.<sup>12</sup> *Areopagitica* manifests a conflicted attitude toward the emerging capitalist marketplace of ideas and texts. When Milton declares that "[t]ruth and understanding are not such wares as to be monopoliz'd," he raises a question: Is truth the kind of commodity that should be circulated freely or should it not be treated as a "ware" at all (*CPW* 2:535)? Milton goes on to mock the wealthy man who shirks his responsibility to seek religious truth, hiring an adviser to do it for him (*CPW* 2:544). Later, however, Milton argues that licensing "retards the importation of our richest Marchandize, Truth" (*CPW* 2:548). This confusion about whether truth is a ware can be partly explained by the fact that books, which can serve as mere physical conduits of intangible truth, are precious commodities for authors like Milton. This confusion, in turn, has occasioned a well-known disagreement between Christopher Kendrick and Stanley Fish. For Kendrick, *Areopagitica* is an expression of nascent market ideology, and the "essential argument" of the text is for the circulation of truth, as a commodity that should not be monopolized; this ideology jars with non-commodifying views of the truth.<sup>13</sup> Fish argues strenuously against Kendrick's Marxist reading by claiming that *Areopagitica* leads readers to abandon their interest in books. Truth is a matter of inward illumination, which books are wholly unable to provide. "What Kendrick sees as an aporia . . . in Milton's thought," Fish concludes, "I see as an extension of the strategy I describe him as pursuing throughout."<sup>14</sup> In the context of the present argument, Fish's claim that physical books prove irrelevant to spiritual truth would suggest that Milton adheres to something like a liberalism of faith even in his early writings. Yet Fish's reading cannot account for the importance of books for the author himself—a concern evident throughout *Areopagitica*.

12. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 15. By focusing on *Areopagitica*, Mark Rose has argued that "in England, unlike France and Germany, the public sphere does not, as Habermas suggests, emerge first as a forum for the discussion of art and literature, but instead emerges directly as an arena of religious and political debate." See Rose, "Public Sphere and the Emergence of Copyright: *Areopagitica*, the Stationers' Company, and the Statute of Anne," *Tulane Journal of Technology and Intellectual Property* 12 (2009): 123–44.

13. Christopher Kendrick, "Ethics and Orator in *Areopagitica*," *ELH* 50 (1983): 658–72; see also Kendrick, *Milton: A Study in Ideology and Form* (New York, 1986), 19–51.

14. Stanley Fish, "Driving from the Letter: Truth and Indeterminacy in Milton's *Areopagitica*," in *Re-membering Milton*, ed. Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson (New York, 1988), 249.



Milton's most intense concern as an author is not, however, primarily for his books as merchandise but rather for his books as extensions of his being. As *Areopagitica* signals both the importance and the danger of offering intimate knowledge for public debate, the link between author and book turns vividly carnal. Milton's impassioned defense of books as the lifeblood of the author leads him to conflate the intellectual labor of publishing with the bodily labor of childbirth:

Till then Books were ever as freely admitted into the World as any other birth; the issue of the brain was no more stiff'd then the issue of the womb: no envious *Juno* sate cros-leg'd over the nativity of any mans intellectuall off spring; but if it prov'd a Monster, who denies, that it was justly burnt, or sunk into the Sea. (*CPW* 2:505)

According to Habermas, published texts come to govern the relationship between the private and the public in key ways. This is especially true after the rise of the sentimental novel, which transports familial intimacy into the domain of public communication. Yet Habermas argues that this kind of publication does not, strictly speaking, breach the important separation of private and public: "The opposite of the intimacy whose vehicle was the written word was indiscretion and not publicity as such."<sup>15</sup> For Milton, the danger of "indiscretion" registers far more intensely than Habermas's detached theoretical remark would suggest. Milton's childbearing imagery unsettles the separation of the private and public spheres. Habermas relies upon Hannah Arendt's influential description of the *oikos/polis* division in Greek antiquity. Arendt makes explicit the gendered logic of this distinction, as the Greek household was a site of functions necessary for survival, "the labor of man to provide nourishment and the labor of the woman in giving birth." The *polis*, by contrast, "was the sphere of freedom."<sup>16</sup> For Arendt, the *oikos* can never be a space of freedom because it is dominated by biological necessity. Although male heads of household do play a part in fulfilling bodily needs, they can enjoy freedom, equality, and civic-minded exchange once they depart to the *polis*. Women, however, remain tied not only to domestic duties but also to the labor of childbearing; they are thus relegated to the *oikos* along with slaves and children. In *Areopagitica*, Milton's description of authorship as childbirth denies the role of women in the public sphere by arrogating woman's real labor as a mere metaphor for male work, which remains "intellectual," public, and discursive.

At the same time, however, Milton's imagery suggests that public discourse can never be free of the bodily and biological drives that, according to Arendt, classical political life works to leave behind in the home. Even though Milton takes as his model the Greek citizen Isocrates emerging into public discourse, he nonetheless brings knowledge into the *polis* by likening his mind to a womb. Milton had used the image of publishing as childbirth nine months earlier, in the preface to Parliament in

15. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 49.

16. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, 1958), 30.

the 1644 edition of *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (which, unlike the first printing, bears Milton's name). Truth cannot be soiled, Milton declares, yet in a sinful world

shee never comes into the world, but like a Bastard, to the ignominy of him that brought her forth: till Time the Midwife rather than the mother of Truth, have washt and salted the Infant, declar'd her legitimat, and Churcht the father of his young *Minerva*, from the needlesse causes of his purgation. (*CPW* 2:225)

Here, the weight of the implied pun on intellectual labor becomes even more apparent. By publishing this divorce tract, Milton has rendered himself vulnerable by offering his domestic concerns—his first, humiliating experience of marriage—as grounds for the public good. Milton's imagined maternal function acknowledges the danger of his action while also attempting to return literal reproduction to the confines of domesticity. Between the original and subsequent printings of the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, however, Milton has already been maligned and defamed; he must thus appeal to purification rites adopted from the Old Testament. Just as he will in Sonnet 23, Milton turns to maternal purification to describe the status of being caught between “shadowy types” and Christian fulfillment. Time will reveal that Milton has no need of being “Churcht” because he gives birth to pure truths, but in the imperfect present, Milton must occupy a syncretic mode between Christian liberty and Hebraic purity. The sexual origins of the truth that he brings into public view demand this. By the time of *Paradise Lost*, however, the trope of Minerva's birth serves to describe the most irredeemable form of intellectual production. Personified Sin describes how she sprung as a goddess from the left side of Satan. This act initially amazes “[a]ll the host of heaven,” but Satan consummates the birth of his inner condition by copulating with Sin (2.759). Comparing Milton's earlier and later depictions of mental birth reveals a pessimistic turn: his former description of offering personal truths to his countrymen as the grounds for collective good gives way to an allegorical account of the public emergence of evil.

#### “I no more should live obscure”

In *Paradise Regained*, Jesus, as both the Son and Word of God, must redeem the publication of truth that has initially been born in humble obscurity. He thus seeks a way to transition from private life to the public display of his person and redemptive mission. Only then can he sanction the work of future Christians both in guarding and in declaring private truths. The publicity that Jesus seeks is not merely textual or communicative—the establishment of the good news of salvation—but also political, the assumption of David's throne.<sup>17</sup> In *Paradise Lost*, as we have seen, the angel Michael

17. Habermas introduces *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* by seeking to explain the confusion that inheres in uses of the word “public,” as evidenced by phrases ranging from “public sphere,” “public building,” “public authority,” and “public opinion” to “publicity” (1–2). Whereas Habermas attempts to sift through the various textual, spatial, and political meanings of “public,” *Paradise Regained* describes Jesus as attempting to unify these modes and to fulfill them.

foretells the Son's triumph but also predicts the corruption of religious authority after his departure from the world. This sobering lesson about the encroachment of corrupt religious and secular forces upon the conscience certainly points toward the liberalism of faith that Mohamed discerns in Milton's later writings: truth can only maintain a defensive posture against political power until Christ returns to unite the religious and the political in his unending kingdom.

Whether *Paradise Regained* teaches the political lesson of quietism, pacifism, or patient militancy has been debated frequently.<sup>18</sup> Most pertinent to the present argument is that Jesus must somehow secure a future order of liberty and free conscience without inhabiting it fully himself in his present moment. It has been noted often that *Paradise Regained* never refers to Jesus as Christ, and this silence underscores the distinction between Christian liberty and Jesus's own experience as a faithful Jewish subject who nonetheless seeks a regime of truth and polity spreading to all the nations. Jesus prefers to publicize his work through reason and discourse; he has rejected youthful ambitions of conquest and now holds "it more humane, more heavenly first / By winning words to conquer willing hearts, / And make persuasion do the work of fear; / At least to try" (1.221–24). Milton registers his own pessimism with Jesus's qualification ("At least to try") and the subsequent insistence that the stubborn will be subdued. Yet Jesus may not realize the full extent of humanity's resistance to rational truths. As he seeks a mode of universal power that renders obsolete all other forms of sovereignty, Jesus seems not to know whether his mission calls for persuasion or force. In the final book, Jesus likens his future kingdom both to a spreading tree that provides shelter and to "a stone that shall to pieces dash / All monarchies besides throughout the world" (4.149–50). The organic outgrowth of the tree and the violence of the stone both remain in the realm of possibility. Satan expresses bafflement over the nature of the kingdom Jesus awaits: "Real or allegoric I discern not" (4.390).

Jesus does agree with Satan on the need to leave behind his initial condition as an "obscure, / Unmarked, unknown" figure popularly deemed the son of Joseph (1.24–25). Their chief disagreement lies over the proper mode of publication. Jesus can establish a new Eden in the wilderness by rejecting as satanic all available vehicles of publicity only because his heroism lies not in his actions but in his person. Stanley Fish has described plot itself as the temptation of *Paradise Regained*, a poem in which nothing must happen; Barbara Lewalski has described the "identity motif" that constitutes the true kernel of the poem's meaning.<sup>19</sup> The key question that Satan asks, "In what degree or meaning thou art called / The Son of God," has generated protracted debate about Milton's Christology (4.516–17).<sup>20</sup> Within the poem, however, the question of Jesus's

18. I have borrowed the formula from John Coffey, "Pacifist, Quietist, or Patient Militant? John Milton and the Restoration," *Milton Studies* 42 (2002): 149–74.

19. See Stanley Fish, "Things and Actions Indifferent: The Temptation of Plot in *Paradise Regained*," *Milton Studies* 17 (1983): 163–86; and Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Milton's Brief Epic: The Genre, Meaning, and Art of Paradise Regained* (Providence, R.I., 1966), esp. 133–63.

20. For an overview of this debate, see John Rogers, "Paradise Regained and the Memory of *Paradise Lost*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, ed. Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford, 2009), 589–612. For a concise argument in favor of Milton's Arianism, see John P. Rumrich, "Milton's Arianism:

identity is posed as a concrete, empirical one: Satan wishes to see, test, and taste in what sense Jesus is the Son of God. This matter becomes abstract and abstruse only because the location of Jesus's truth must be occluded from our view. Jesus prevails over Satan as Son of God and man; the angels who greet his victory hail him at the end of the epic as "Son of the Most High, heir of both worlds" (4.633). Jesus's birth as a sinless man fully distinguishes the publication of God's Word from satanic parthenogenesis. Yet Jesus's identity remains fraught because he assumes his nature in the most secret of places, his mother's womb.

In *De Doctrina Christiana*, the long chapter "Of the Son of God" argues that the scriptures describe the Son neither as eternally begotten nor as sharing the "total essence" of his divine Father (CPW 6:211). In making these heterodox claims, Milton urges confidence in examining scriptures in logical fashion, free of the grammatical confusion he sees in Trinitarian teaching. At one point, Milton describes the impropriety of applying the titles of Father and Son to eternal beings who fully share the same essence, and then adds, "But perhaps I shall have more to say about this when I deal with the incarnation of Christ" (CPW 6:264). The later chapter on Christ justifies this cautious phrasing, for Milton does not have a great deal to say about the incarnation. Milton emphasizes that the scriptures call the incarnation a mystery, and urges against "making any rash or hasty assertions" (CPW 6:421). After quoting the Italian Protestant Zanchius (Girolami Zanchi) on the incarnation, Milton accuses him of being "rash enough" to expound upon "curious secrets" that the Bible does not reveal. Zanchius "does so as confidently as if he had been present in Mary's womb and witnessed the mystery himself" (CPW 6:422). Milton's Christology proves divided: the Son's identity is a matter for clear-sighted interpretation, but the incarnate Christ's identity is a mystery situated in Mary's womb, a place that should remain unseen. Whereas Milton's earlier writings use the womb as a trope for the fecundity of the male mind bearing public truths, his later writings insist that the maternal body should remain private and hidden.

This insistence does not merely relegate motherhood to the classical *oikos* of biological needs. In the final books of *Paradise Lost*, the anticipation of Mary, who is repeatedly named the "second Eve," proleptically fulfills Eve's desire for secrecy. At the poem's conclusion, Adam finds Eve alone in their nuptial bower. "Whence thou returnst, and whither wentst, I know," Eve declares, "For God is also in sleep, and dreams advise, / Which he hath sent propitious" (12.610–12). The precise content of this communication between God and Eve remains inaccessible to Adam, the poet, and the reader. Yet the suggestion that this divine contact prefigures the contact between God and Mary is confirmed because the message centers upon "the promised seed" and Eve is immediately called "our mother" (12.623–25). Eve's secrecy allows her to submit to her status as Adam's obedient wife and to depart from Eden without reluctance or delay.

Why it Matters," in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. Stephen B. Dobranski and Rumrich (Cambridge, 1998), 75–92. For a recent argument otherwise, see Russell M. Hillier, *Milton's Messiah: The Son of God in the Works of John Milton* (Oxford, 2011), esp. 178–227.

Mary's role, however, must be at once crucial and attenuated in *Paradise Regained*, which centers upon Jesus's desire to depart from his mother's house and to assume his place in his Father's. Even before Satan begins his temptation, the reader witnesses Jesus's confusion about how best to publish himself: "O what a multitude of thoughts at once / Awakened in me swarm" (1.196–97). *Pace* Satan's memorable declaration in *Paradise Lost*, the mind is not its own place—but rather mediates between inward feelings and external knowledge. As we continue to access Jesus's internal monologue, we witness how he moves from reliance upon his mother to increased independence.<sup>21</sup> Mary's voice enters into Jesus's thoughts in order to provide intimate knowledge of his divine origins and virgin birth—knowledge that would be inaccessible through the channels of memory and reason. Mary's embedded speech ends and Jesus's voice resumes when the Son turns from maternal memory to public, textual knowledge: "This having heard, straight I again revolved / The Law and prophets" (1.259–60). Reading allows Jesus to confirm, "of whom they spake / I am" (1.262–63).

Jesus's story conjoins two concerns in Milton's thinking: the relationship between Hebraic "flesh" and Christian "spirit," and the relationship between rational Logos and its physical conduits. As the incarnate Word of God, Jesus should carve the path to universal truths free of markers of bodily difference. Yet the emergence of Jesus's "I" from his mother's memory proves less decisive than it might seem. Mary has already told the story of Jesus's first public appearance at the Temple, where he is met by "Simeon and prophetic Anna" (1.255). Mary alludes briefly to Jesus's circumcision and naming, an episode narrated in the Gospel of Luke. This episode contains a meaningful slippage. According to Luke, Mary completes her period of postpartum purification and presents Jesus to the Lord, "[a]s it is written in the law of the LORD, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord" (Luke 2:23). Whereas the redemption of the firstborn son calls for a monetary offering (Numbers 3:47), however, Luke records Mary sacrificing a "pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:24). The latter are, according to Leviticus 12, the prescribed offerings for the purification of the mother after childbirth. This entire episode in Luke emphasizes a mystery: even after giving birth to the Son of God, Mary must seek ritual purification.<sup>22</sup> This fact may illustrate Milton's argument in his 1644 address to Parliament in the preface to the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, quoted above—that even those who give birth to divine truth must be purified needlessly because of the sinfulness of the world. On the other hand, the potential impurity involved in incarnating even the divine Word may cast a shadow upon the project of bearing truths in this world. Milton does not offer any

21. For a highly suggestive reading of *Paradise Regained* as a narrative of Jesus's individuation, see James Nohnberg, "Paradise Regained by One Greater Man: Milton's Wisdom Epic as a 'Fable of Identity,'" in *Center and Labyrinth: Essays in Honor of Northrop Frye*, ed. Eleanor Cook (Toronto, 1985), 83–114.

22. For the relevance of Mary's purification for Milton's Sonnet 23, see Louis Schwartz, *Milton and Maternal Mortality* (Cambridge, 2009), 166–81.

systematic thoughts on such matters in *Paradise Regained*; rather, Mary's allusion to Simeon and Anna offers only a fleeting glimpse of such issues. True to his word in *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton discreetly blocks Mary's womb—the seat of Jesus's human nature—from our view.

The maternal body accommodates the publication of God's Logos in the world, yet the veiled danger of bodily impurity even in this case means that the facts of Jesus's conception remain an open secret. Eve Sedgwick has described homosexual identity as the exemplary object of this epistemological configuration, whereby we agree to disavow that which remains obvious to us.<sup>23</sup> This tacit arrangement serves as an unstable, precarious mediator between private sexuality and public knowledge. In *Paradise Regained*, Satan seems to understand the potential queerness of Jesus's open secret. Early in book 2, Satan derides Belial's suggestion that Jesus may succumb to the wiles of beautiful women; only "manlier objects" can constitute genuine temptation (2.225). The temptation of the banquet does, however, offer an array of sexual configurations: heroic homoeroticism in the figures of Ganymede and Hylas, Diana's nymphs who solemnly stand "distant more / Under the trees," and Hesperidean ladies fairer than those of chivalric romance (2.353–54).<sup>24</sup> Jesus's open secret, however, concerns his fleshly origins more than his carnal desires; these objects of attraction hardly register at all as genuine temptations.

Yet these objects of temptation do matter in the poem because they reveal how sexual experience can mediate between private and public identities. In this light, the presence of both female and male figures of temptation proves thematically significant. Ganymede and Hylas represent classical objects of homoerotic desire belonging to divine subjects and to their heroic offspring. Such desire should be made public. Jove kidnaps Ganymede and gives him the official duty of cupbearer; when Hylas is kidnapped because of his attractiveness, Jove's son Hercules manifests his sorrow and longing. (Edmund Spenser acknowledges the public nature of heroic homoeroticism but also derides it as effeminate. In a single stanza of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser describes both Jove's love for Ganymede and the way "great Alcides" "wailed womanlike with many a teare" and filled the woods and valleys "with Hylas name.")<sup>25</sup> The nymphs and ladies in the banquet scene, by contrast, must be more coy, offering a heroic mode of erotic experience partly by disavowing their own desires. The nymphs thus remain distant from the scene and the ladies are identified only by their father's name (the Hesperides), or by their chivalrous male lovers (Lancelot, Pelleas, or Pellenore). When Jesus refuses to take part in the banquet, he rejects multiple forms of erotic choice as varied ways to define his heroism publicly.

23. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Calif., 1990), esp. 67–90 and 164–66.

24. For a more extended analysis of this scene, see Gregory W. Bredbeck, *Sodomy and Interpretation: Marlow to Milton* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991), 189–231.

25. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, rev. 2nd ed. (Harlow, 2007), 399 (3.12.7).

The dynamic linking gender, sexuality, and privacy recurs prominently in book 4, as Satan tempts Jesus with visions of Rome and Greece. By “strange parallax or optic skill,” Satan allows Jesus to see from Judaea to Rome; Satan then directs Jesus to “behold / Outside and inside both” (4.40, 57–58). Whereas God breaches a wall in order to reveal sin to his chosen prophet Ezekiel, Satan’s vision of Rome offers Jesus a public gateway to political life: “see / What conflux issuing forth, or entering in, / Praetors, proconsuls to their provinces” (4.61–63). Through Rome, Jesus can leave his private station and assume the glories of heroic life. Kristina Milnor has described the marked changes in the meaning of *privatus* in first-century Roman culture. Whereas, in the Roman Republic, *privatus* “was defined as a man without a political or military position,” in the Roman Empire, the term designated “anyone, regardless of political or military position, who did not hold the ultimate ‘public’ role of emperor.” This change of meaning was prompted in part by Augustan propaganda, which describes Octavian as assembling an army as a *privatus* (technically a crime) out of his desire to “liberate” Rome.<sup>26</sup> In Jesus’s own time, however, the Roman emperorship has become a travesty. Satan reminds Jesus that the emperor has retreated back to privacy, which amounts to a space of illicit sexual encounters: Tiberius

from Rome retired  
 To Capreae an island small but strong  
 On the Campanian shore, with purpose there  
 His horrid lusts in private to enjoy[.]  
 (4.91–94)

Satan has apparently learned from the failures of his earlier banquet temptation. Rather than offering Jesus heroic sexuality, Satan tempts Jesus to restore Roman emperorship from private lusts. Yet just as Jesus rejects the banquet scene based on its giver, Jesus rejects Rome and the devil who has corrupted Tiberius.<sup>27</sup> Doing so allows Jesus to supersede the version of universal rule that Satan offers through Roman power—“no less than all the world” (4.105). Jesus responds by insisting upon both his Jewish legacy and a mysterious form of higher universal rule: Jesus claims that his rightful seat is “David’s throne” (4.147) and not the Roman emperorship. Only by fulfilling Jewish rule will Jesus achieve a universal dominion likened to the tree “overshadowing all the earth” and to the stone dashing all monarchies (4.148).

This simultaneous commitment to Jewishness and to transcendence governs Jesus’s response to the next temptation, Satan’s vision of Greece. The defense against this temptation needs to be more strident because Greek life offers a suppler relationship between seclusion and publicity. Satan directs Jesus to gaze upon

26. Kristina Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus: Inventing Private Life* (Oxford, 2005), 20, 22.

27. For a more extended account of the temptation of Rome in *Paradise Regained*, see David Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Milton to Virgil* (Princeton, N.J., 1993), 325–40.

Plato's retirement, where the Attic bird  
 Trills her thick-warbled notes the summer long,  
 There flowery hill Hymettus with the sound  
 Of bees' industrious murmur oft invites  
 To studious musing; there Ilissus rolls  
 His whispering stream[.]

(4.245–50)

This vision may tempt Milton as much as it does the Son. Satan's language echoes *Il Penseroso's* longing for sylvan seclusion:

Hide me from day's garish eye,  
 While the bee with honied thigh,  
 That at her flowery work doth sing,  
 And the waters murmuring[.]

(lines 141–44)

This connection reminds us that Milton's pensive man desires to communicate with the spirit of Plato through intensive study. In Satan's temptation, Plato's cloistered study opens onto increasingly public figures of knowledge: Aristotle as tutor to Alexander; tragedians and Homer; and orators, whose "resistless eloquence" sways "fierce democracy" (4.268–69). In distinction from Rome, in which privacy leads to sexual debauchery, Greece seems to offer secluded modes of life that are masculine and contemplative. Milton's divorce tracts and his depiction of Edenic marriage champion the ideal of conjugal domesticity as providing not only bodily comfort but also intellectual and spiritual growth. Satan's vision of Plato suggests a way to achieve this synthesis simply by forgoing familial and domestic life in favor of scholarly seclusion.

Socrates, however, emerges as the key exception. When Satan curiously returns from oratory back to philosophy, he first commands Jesus's ear to hear sage wisdom, but then directs him to see

the low-roofed house  
 Of Socrates, see there his tenement,  
 Whom well inspired the oracle pronounced  
 Wisest of men[.]

(4.273–76)

Much like Isocrates in *Areopagitica*, Socrates represents a figure who can generate public discourse out of his domestic life. Socrates issues forth "streams that watered all the schools / Of Academics old and new"; in contrast to the waters of Ilissus associated with Plato, Socrates's stream of knowledge mediates between *oikos* and public life (4.277–78). Jesus affirms Socrates's unique importance in *Paradise Regained* by praising him earlier



in the poem. Confronted with the temptation of seeking fame and glory, Jesus reminds Satan of

Poor Socrates (who next more memorable?)  
 By what he taught and suffered for so doing,  
 For truth's sake suffering death unjust, lives now  
 Equal in fame to proudest conquerors.  
 (3.96–99)

In contrast to Satan's presentation of Socrates, Jesus understands the philosopher as a figure who gains public approbation passively and posthumously.

The decisive fact is that Socrates neither writes nor publishes. As Arendt describes the contemplative life, she remarks,

It weighs heavily in favor of Socrates that he alone among the great thinkers—unique in this as in many other respects—never cared to write down his thoughts; for it is obvious that, no matter how concerned a thinker may be with eternity, the moment he sits down to write his thoughts he ceases to be concerned primarily with eternity and shifts his attention to leaving some trace of them.<sup>28</sup>

Socrates's rejection of text informs Jesus's response to the temptation of Greece; it is a curious fact of Christianity that the living Word of God, like Socrates, leaves behind no writings of his own. Jesus initially rejects learning, declaring that "he who receives / Light from above, from the fountain of light, / No other doctrine needs" (4.288–90). Jesus goes on to question the usefulness of books, for those who already possess an upright "spirit and judgment" do not need external props (4.324). Such a teaching affirms both the rejection of books that Fish sees in *Areopagitica* and the liberalism of faith that Mohamed discerns in Milton's later writings. Collective discourse is abandoned in the name of inward convictions. Jesus, however, heavily qualifies or even forsakes this position. He transitions rapidly from questioning books to praising Hebraic scriptures. The conceptual hinge is his enjoyment of books not as a public author but as a private reader:

Or if I would delight my private hours  
 With music or with poem, where so soon  
 As in our native language can I find  
 That solace?  
 (4.331–34)

28. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 20.

From the vantage point of an appreciative reader, Jesus declares Hebraic writings superior to the Greek version not only artistically, but also in matters of political theology. Greek “statists” prove inferior to “our prophets,” who teach the “solid rules of civil government / In their majestic unaffected style” (4.354–59). Only this multi-layered assertion of Hebraic superiority can justify Jesus’s rejection of Socrates, the “first and wisest” of the Greeks who nonetheless “professed / To know this only, that he nothing knew” (4.293–94).

Paradoxically, because the readerly Jesus dismisses Socrates, the model of privacy and publicity that Socrates represents—humble domesticity leading to wise speech that achieves posthumous fame through others’ labor—proves useful to the author. The opening invocation of *Paradise Regained* articulates the poet’s curious desire to record “deeds / Above heroic, though in secret done, / And unrecorded left through many an age” (1.14–16). Milton longs for his writing to be a novel and necessary act of publishing Jesus’s truth. Like Plato, the studious Milton can claim to record the lessons of a master who himself declined to write. Jesus’s silence authorizes the Christian writer, whose desire to see and know even secret truths become at least partly speakable.

Jesus’s insistence upon his private status is also an insistence on his pure Hebraic heritage. The Gentile Milton, by contrast, has the freedom to deploy a syncretic mode claiming universal truth. The cleavage between the Jewish Jesus and the Christian Milton appears at the level of style. Most of *Paradise Regained* conforms to Jesus’s preference for the “majestic unaffected style” of Hebraic scriptures. At the end of book 4, however, Milton surprises the reader with a pair of epic similes that compare Jesus and Satan to figures of classical antiquity: Antaeus and Hercules, and the Sphinx and Oedipus. These famous similes grapple with the related topics of maternity and Jesus’s Hebraic purity.<sup>29</sup> The allusion to Hercules, referred to as “Jove’s Alcides,” offers Jesus a way of clarifying his patriarchal lineage at the expense of one who receives strength from his mother—in the case of Antaeus, the Earth itself (4.565). The second simile suggests that Jesus redefines the meaning of Oedipus’s answer to the Sphinx’s riddle, “man.” As Lewalski argues, “Christ defeats Satan because he possesses true self-knowledge and knowledge of the human condition.”<sup>30</sup> Yet the Son embodies this universal solution that redeems all of humanity through his particularity: he is man only by virtue of being a man on his Jewish mother’s side. Maternal origins and cultural identity are intertwined for Jesus in a way that troubles his all-encompassing mission to all the nations. As we have seen, Mary’s voice, embedded in the Son’s memories, alludes to the episode at the Temple in which Jesus receives his name on the day of his circumcision. This allusion must be brief because the episode narrated in Luke’s gospel

29. For some influential treatments of these similes, see Kathleen M. Swaim, “Hercules, Antaeus, and Prometheus: A Study of the Climactic Epic Similes of *Paradise Regained*,” *SEL* 18 (1979): 137–53; and Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, *The Empty Garden: The Subject of Late Milton* (Pittsburgh, 1992), 335–38.

30. Lewalski, *Milton’s Brief Epic*, 319.

hints at the possibility of Mary's postpartum impurity even after giving birth to the Son of God. Such a possibility, in turn, raises questions about how Jesus, born as a Jewish subject bound to the Law, can establish a new covenant between God and all of humanity, one that ostensibly frees the flesh from the need to be purified ritually and underwrites Christian freedom instead.

The oedipal simile also informs the poem's conclusion: after being hailed as the Son of God and Man, Jesus "unobserved / Home to his mother's house private returned" (4.638–39). Oedipus's discovery—that, even after being exiled from home, assuming kingship, and marrying, he never managed to leave his mother—is an obscene one that cannot be presented to the eyes of the audience. Jesus sanctifies this return to motherhood, for it is only by virtue of Mary's body that Jesus can assume and thereby save humanity. Yet even though the news of Jesus's incarnation through Mary must be made universally public, his mother's privacy remains sacrosanct. Although Jesus will do or say nothing obscene, his mother's house must remain *obskena* because it is the site of ineffable coition between God and woman.

### What Would Jesus Do?

The cultural particularity of Jesus's body and its maternal origins hinders any easy fulfillment of his desire to publish himself and thereby to establish universal truth. Yet this difficulty carves out the space for Milton's own writing, which respects Jesus's secrecy while exposing him to our view as a figure "unobserved." The dynamic that Jesus shares with his followers ushers in a new configuration of privacy. Milton's brand of Christian liberty insists upon the defense of enclosed spaces (both literal and metaphorical) where intimacy and truth can develop. The appeal of an ostensibly Hebraic mode of polity that breaches the public/private separation does not simply disappear; the desire to violate privacy in exceptional cases persists throughout Milton's political thought. Yet Milton's primary interest lies in defining the limits of the state's right to divinely sanctioned violations of privacy, so that the movement between private domesticity and public discourse can be productive rather than coercive. *Paradise Regained* narrates through a biography of the young Jesus the origins of these political-theological compromises between the individual and the state, and between ostensibly universal rationality and forms of difference impressed upon bodies as well as minds. This essay concludes by suggesting how our own evolving and embattled thoughts on privacy bear traces of the conflicted modes of thought that Milton's seventeenth-century writings manifest.

As a codified right in Anglo-American legal traditions, privacy has a relatively short and contentious history. The majority ruling in the U. S. Supreme Court case *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) describes marital privacy as nowhere explicitly laid out in the Constitution and yet existing in the "penumbra" of the Bill of Rights.<sup>31</sup> This ruling served as an important precedent for the legalization of abortion in *Roe v. Wade* (1973). In Britain, the 1990 *Report of the Committee on Privacy and Related Matters* by the Cal-

31. *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U.S. 479 (1965) at 483.

cut Committee declares that “nowhere have we found a wholly satisfactory definition of privacy” but goes on to offer a provisional legal definition based on the “right of the individual to be protected against intrusion into his personal life or affairs, or those of his family.”<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, as a diffuse constellation of ideas regarding domesticity as opposed to the public realm, privacy has a much longer history—a history spanning classical antiquity, the early modern appeal to Greece and Rome, and twentieth- and twenty-first-century reevaluations of classical values.

As we have seen, Arendt and Habermas contrast the patterns of modern life with the classical *oikos/polis* separation. Habermas, for example, describes how the modern category of “social” life transforms the *oikos* into the grounds of an economy, which is a public concern.<sup>33</sup> As a result, the consensus-seeking rationality of public debate and the personal details of private life prove at once antagonistic and mutually constitutive. At the individual level, familial life lays the foundation for participation in the bourgeois public sphere, as “the public use of reason was guided specifically by such private experiences as grew out of the audience-oriented (*publikumsbezogen*) subjectivity of the conjugal family’s intimate domain (*Intimsphäre*).” Rather than being a site of mere biological needs, domestic life becomes “the source of privateness in the modern sense of a saturated and free interiority” (28). Domesticity and its representation in the novel provide the resources of empathy and collective reasoning necessary for public debate. On the other hand, the *Intimsphäre*’s separation from the public sphere is necessary for the sake of familial privacy and the public sphere’s well-being. Without “the strict separation of the public from the private realm,” genuine consensus-building eventually gives way to the so-called refeudalization of society (175–76). Habermas decries the encroachment of private concerns on public discourse and the related encroachment of the state on social life; the result is a politics of interests rather than of consensus about the common good.

Arendt and Habermas have both been criticized for valorizing a mode of public life that relies upon limited access and strict hierarchies of gender and of class.<sup>34</sup> Arendt acknowledges such facts openly yet still turns to Greek life as a meaningful alternative to the politically corrosive effects of modern “mass society.” Citizens are now equal in the way that members of a family are equal; no longer possible is the “fiercely agonal spirit” of ancient Greek men striving to outdo each other through publicly worthy acts.<sup>35</sup> Attending to early modern writers like Milton underscores the fact that Christian views of faith and polity (articulated through and against a Hebraic legacy) mediate between the classical and the modern; as this essay has attempted to show, Milton’s writings suggest why gender and sexuality remain focal points for such

32. *Report of the Committee on Privacy and Related Matters*, 1990, Cm. 1102, 7.

33. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 19–20. References are given in the text.

34. See, for example, Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” and Seyla Benhabib, “Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas,” both in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 109–42 and 73–98.

35. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 41.

political-theological matters. For Arendt, early Christianity accelerates the changes between conceptions of the private that had begun to arise across Greek and Roman epochs. After citing Augustine, Arendt argues that “Christian morality, as distinguished from its fundamental religious precepts, has always insisted that everybody should mind his own business and that political responsibility constituted first of all a burden, undertaken exclusively for the sake of well-being and salvation of those it freed from worry about public affairs.”<sup>36</sup> While *The Human Condition* registers the historical importance of Christian values (and esteem for the *vita contemplativa*), it is far less interested in Christian systems or theories of polity. The reasons for this limited focus may be traced in Arendt’s earlier writings, in which she grappled with the ways in which Christianity and its vexed relationship to Judaism had figured in the development of modern totalitarianism.<sup>37</sup> *The Human Condition* responds to the horrors of mid-twentieth-century Europe by partially circumventing them.

As Seyla Benhabib has shown, however, the view of Arendt as merely nostalgic for classical antiquity is a distorting simplification. Benhabib offers a way to recover more of the complexity of Arendt’s thought by attending to her linked ideas concerning gender and religious identity. This recovery, in turn, suggests a way to relate Arendt’s thinking about privacy to Milton’s earlier beliefs, grounded in both Old and New Testament forms of religious polity. As Benhabib writes, “Understanding Arendt adequately on questions of women is of one cloth with understanding her properly on the Jewish question.”<sup>38</sup> Benhabib begins by attending to Arendt’s early biography of Rahel Varnhagen (née Levin)—a “German Jewess from the Romantic Period,” according to Arendt’s subtitle. The biography “documents the paradoxes of Jewish emancipation between the breakdown of the Ghetto and the emergence of the nineteenth-century bourgeois-Christian modern nation-state” (7). Jewishness becomes a way for Arendt to investigate the difference that proves inassimilable to Enlightenment universality.

After marrying a Gentile Prussian civil servant, Varnhagen attempts to enter a world that had been closed to her as a Jewish woman. She does so through the mediating space of the salon. Whereas Habermas would later focus on the salon as a space of male bourgeois public discourse, Arendt’s early work studies Varnhagen and her fellow salonnières. Benhabib describes the salon as a site of “sociability and social intercourse” (17), of truly intimate friendship that serves a public function. Varnhagen emerges as a “self-conscious pariah” who “lives with difference and distinctness in such a way as to establish difference in the ‘eyes’ of society” (29). Yet as Benhabib goes on to note, Arendt’s later work seems to lose sight of the constellation of concerns rep-

36. *Ibid.*, 60.

37. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, Calif., 1976). Arendt describes “tribal nationalism” as “the precise perversion of a religion which made God choose one nation, one’s own nation. . . . Fear and hatred were nourished and somewhat rationalized by the fact that Christianity, a religion of Jewish origin, had already conquered Western mankind. Guided by their own ridiculous superstition, the leaders of the pan-movements found that little hidden cog in the mechanics of Jewish piety that made a complete reversion and perversion possible” (242–43).

38. Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Thousand Oaks, Calif., 1996), xxxiv. References are given below in the text.

resented by Varnhagen's life story. Benhabib describes the contradictions involved in Arendt "upholding egalitarian civil and political rights for all citizens while supporting nonconformism and the expression of pariahdom" while also calling "for a recovery of the public world" in an "antistatist" way that might be accused of "state blindness" (30). Benhabib confronts this aporia in Arendt's mature work—an aporia that results from marked tensions between universality, difference, and state power.

Milton wrote in a vastly different cultural climate and lived much of his life as the male head of his household. Yet privacy serves as the nexus of related concerns—sectarian identity, gender, and universality versus cultural difference—in his writings. Even more than the Plato–Socrates pairing or the relationship between Jesus and the first-century writers of the gospels, the pairing of Arendt and Varnhagen may suggest some of the complexities involved in Milton's approach to his subject in *Paradise Regained*. In his search for the anchor of truth and liberty, Milton elevates the Jewish messiah as what Benhabib calls the self-conscious pariah, a figure of "difference and distinctness" that must be presented to public view. Whereas Arendt turns to Varnhagen as a writer with complex, mixed views of her own Jewishness, Milton writes as the Gentile inheritor of an offshoot of Judaism that lays claim to universality. Milton audaciously takes upon himself the role of publicizing Jesus, yet Jesus's own lived experience proves resistant to the project of spreading the divine Logos as pure truth to all the nations.

The alternative to grappling with such internal tensions between Western liberalism and Christian values is to downplay religion's historical role in public life. In a sense, it has taken Habermas the entirety of his intellectual career to deal more fully with religion's contribution to the ostensibly secular public sphere. The opening of Habermas's 2006 essay "Religion in the Public Sphere" manifests continued reluctance to acknowledge that the desire to express religious convictions could have been an early motivator of—and not a mere hindrance to—public discourse. Habermas expresses surprise over "the political revitalization of religion at the heart of the United States, where the dynamism of modernization unfolds most successfully."<sup>39</sup> For Habermas, American history provides a distinctive contrast with Europe after the French Revolution, the latter revealing religious traditionalism to be a defensive, counter-revolutionary energy. Such a stance occludes the fact that, for someone like Milton—a century before the American Revolution—religious conviction motivates the simultaneously bourgeois and revolutionary desire for public discourse with limited state constraint.

Renewed attention to religious citizens in this essay leads Habermas to qualify his notion of the public sphere. Habermas seeks a model of consensus-based discourse that does not result in an "undue *mental* and *psychological* burden" for religious citizens whose primary commitments are not to natural or collective reason but to faith-based convictions (9). Habermas argues for "permissibility of non-translated religious

39. Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14 (2006): 1. References to this work are given below in the text.

utterances in the political public sphere” by describing both the moral value of religious thought and the need to avoid asymmetrical demands on believers (10). Even so, because liberal societies must generally depend on statements that can be evaluated through secular reason, the best that can be hoped for is a containment of competing convictions through constitutional principles. Mohamed observes that “Habermas does not entirely solve the problem he seeks to address in that the strong believer he describes cannot be guided by personal ethics while occupying a position in the core institutions of the secular state.” On the other hand, Mohamed expresses sympathy with Habermas, who “goes as far as one can in providing a productive reconciliation of two ultimately irreconcilable givens: the given of a post-secular society and the given of a secular state.”<sup>40</sup> Habermas is explicit about what his compromise seeks to avoid: the “radical orthodoxy” that “takes up the intentions and fundamental ideas of the political theology of a Carl Schmitt and develops them with the tools of deconstruction” and thereby “den[ies] Modernity any intrinsic right” (19).

By privileging faith and divinely inspired truth while at the same time being committed to reason, Milton’s writings may anticipate both Habermas’s liberal compromise and post-Schmittian orthodoxy.<sup>41</sup> Milton’s political thought negotiates a desire for theocracy with a commitment to representative republicanism; the result is a deeply conflicted political theology that awaits the supersession of all sovereignty. In *Paradise Lost*, it is precisely by volunteering to become human and die on behalf of humanity that the Son is confirmed “[b]y merit more than birthright” as God’s proper heir (3.309). The Son’s status as the heir to the immortal, divine sovereign would be wholly gratuitous were it not for the fact that, as the man Jesus, he incorporates human and divine sovereignty. Doing so paves the way for a post-political mode of divine plenitude: “For regal scepter then no more shall need, / God shall be all in all” (3.340–41). Once he arrives on earth, however, Jesus finds that the only acceptable mode of action is to reject available forms of power. In the meantime of history, the best that Milton can hope for is to limit state intrusion into the individual’s constantly beleaguered liberties.



The dynamic between religion, gender, the state, and privacy has recently reemerged at the forefront of American politics. The Obama administration’s attempt to demand that employer-provided insurance cover contraception for female employees raised a

40. Mohamed, *Milton and the Post-Secular Present*, 82–83.

41. After the famous opening dictum, “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception” (5) Schmitt’s *Political Theology* refocuses the theoretical question of whether “God alone is sovereign, that is, the one who acts as his acknowledged representative on earth, or the emperor, or the prince, or the people” (10) onto its application in concrete situations. Later, however, Schmitt turns to the relationship between divine and human sovereignty. He offers another pithy formula: “All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts,” both historically and structurally. Schmitt explains, “The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology” (36).

number of questions about the rights of religious organizations that reject birth control. Yet alongside such concerns about religious freedom arose a number of aggressive legislative efforts to limit women's rights by literally probing their bodies. On March 7, 2012, Virginia governor Bob McDonnell signed into law a bill passed by the state senate requiring all women seeking an abortion to have an ultrasound; the original requirement for a transvaginal ultrasound was excised from the bill. Similar legislation was proposed in Pennsylvania as the perversely named Women's Right to Know Bill (PA HB 1077). Tracing the political theology of privacy and the key role of women in this history reveals the patterns of thought behind such measures; this history also suggests how responses to these pernicious efforts rightly question their most basic cultural logic. As one form of dissent, protestors took to the social media profiles of well-known conservative political figures and posted details from their personal lives, including facts about their gynecological health. A Facebook user named Susan Stella Floyd, for example, wrote on the public profile page of former Texas governor and presidential hopeful Rick Perry: "Governor Perry, I just wanted to let you know I started my period day [*sic*]. . . . Can I engage in penetrative sexual intercourse during this time? What would Jesus do? Can you please ask him for me?"<sup>42</sup> Milton's divided views on privacy may suggest that this deliberately crude query conveys a surprisingly powerful challenge. By focusing on Jesus's embodied experience, Milton divides the messiah's public and private roles: Milton's Jesus seeks an all-encompassing sovereignty that may resort to force to subdue the recalcitrant, yet he is also a single man who retreats to the privacy of his mother's house. What Jesus would do remains a question more opaque than a two-sided political debate would suggest.

The belief that motherhood (and especially Marian maternity) redeems a woman's right to privacy is ultimately complicit with the obverse obsession with peering into the female body. Milton's writings may nonetheless offer some limited but real prescriptions for such problems. At the end of her work on Hannah Arendt, Seyla Benhabib quotes Arendt describing the value of domestic privacy, "the darkness of what needs to be hidden against the light of publicity." Benhabib is careful to distinguish between a home and the patriarchal bourgeois family: "This is a distinction that Hannah Arendt herself did not make, and that is the central reason her affirmation of the private realm so often reads like an ahistorical justification of a specific gender division of labor" (213). Milton was, of course, far more atavistic than Arendt, fiercely maintaining his patriarchal rights. Yet Milton's defense of privacy offers something to contemporary political discourse that Arendt does not: a committed, religious view of polity that looks forward to theocracy and yet, in the imperfect present, seeks to expand individual liberties. Milton himself would have viewed various acts that we defend—non-Protestant religious worship, non-conjugal sex—as sinful license rather than

42. It is difficult to cite or to confirm this quotation because it would have been promptly removed if it did indeed appear on Perry's official Facebook page. A purported screen capture of the comment can be found in the discussion section of the feminist blog and news aggregation site Jezebel; see <http://jezebel.com/5894635/trolling-politicians-facebook-pages-with-vaginal-news-is-hot-new-trend>.



true Christian liberty. Yet just as Milton rightly intuits that some of his radical ideas would be purified by the midwife Time, he also describes how the domain of truth and liberty continually expand. Even if Milton could not have sanctioned certain freedoms we now cherish, his writings continue to show us how wholehearted religious conviction can coexist in a state of generative tension with the values of modernity.

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