

**“Fondly Overcome”:
Revisiting the History of the Liberal Subject**

Victoria Kahn

Este artículo reconsidera los debates del siglo diecisiete inglés sobre el deber político, analizando el diálogo implícito entre el *Leviatán* de Hobbes y el *Paraíso Perdido* de Milton. En contraste con los historiadores del pensamiento político que interpretaron los debates del siglo diecisiete en términos de una enervada concepción protoliberal del sujeto político autónomo, este trabajo plantea que el intercambio entre Milton y Hobbes realza la dimensión poética y afectiva de las tempranas narraciones modernas del deber político. Una vez que empezamos a leer las primeras narraciones modernas a través del lente de la poética y de las pasiones, en lugar del de la razón y de los intereses individuales, podemos apreciar también lo que este período moderno temprano tiene que ofrecer a los debates contemporáneos entre liberales y comunitarios.

This article reconsiders seventeenth-century English debates about political obligation by analyzing the implicit dialogue between Hobbes's *Leviathan* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In contrast to historians of political thought who read seventeenth-century debates as anticipating an enervated, proto-liberal conception of the autonomous political subject, I argue that the exchange between Milton and Hobbes highlights the poetic and affective dimension of early modern accounts of political obligation. Once we begin to read early modern accounts through the lens of poetics and the passions, rather than reason and self-interest, we can also see what the early modern period has to offer contemporary debates between liberals and communitarians.

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Everyone agrees that seventeenth-century England saw the beginnings of liberalism, with its twin ideals of autonomy and equality. These are the characteristics of the Hobbesian and Lockean individual in the state of nature, who then consents to a political contract, and by consenting confers political legitimacy on the sovereign. It’s one of the ironies of the history of liberalism that Hobbes described the state of nature or *prepolitical* life in the state of nature as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”; and that critics have been saying the same thing of liberal *political* life under liberalism ever since. According to its critics, in short, the liberal remedy—the invention of the autonomous subject of contract theory—was as bad as the problem it was designed to solve. In the seventeenth century, opponents of Hobbes complained that the isolated, self-interested subject of *Leviathan* would have no reason to keep his promises, including his promise to abide by the political contract. And, in the late twentieth century, Michael Sandel objected in a similar fashion to John Rawls that the subject who enters into the liberal political con-

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tract is an abstract, decontextualized individual with no ties or allegiances, of no particular age, sex, education, or community. According to Sandel, Rawls gives us a socially, even phenomenologically thin subject who has no basis upon which to make relevant political choices. The language of liberalism, its critics say, is an enervated one —the autonomous subject is an unpromising basis on which to build community— in contrast to the embodied subject of communitarianism, which has appealed to critics of liberalism on both the left and the right.

In this essay, I want to provide an alternative account of early modern debates about political obligation. In particular, I want to provide an alternative genealogy of liberalism. In the usual accounts by historians of political thought, liberalism emerges historically at the moment when rational self-interest replaces older forms of political obligation —such as feudal ties, natural social and political hierarchies, filial love of the sovereign and submission to patriarchal authority. Even a critic of liberalism such as Foucault subscribes to this account of the liberal core of contract theory, which he saw as presupposing the autonomous, subject of rational self-interest, one modeled, according to Foucault, on an older notion of the autonomous sovereign. But this usual account is based on a narrow range of texts (Hobbes, Locke, Filmer, and others) —which are also narrowly interpreted to exclude what I would call their poetic dimension. In the alternative account I want to provide, early modern debates about political obligation that take up the new language of contract are characterized by a double focus. On the one hand, early modern thinkers are preoccupied with the poetic dimension of contract theory —the ability of the political contract to bring the sovereign and a new conception of the political subject into existence. On the other hand, early modern thinkers are preoccupied with the passions, that is with the recalcitrant material at the basis of the commonwealth.

Attention to the passions is a signal feature of seventeenth-century accounts of political obligation. Once seventeenth-cen-

tury writers rejected the view that political obligation is a consequence of natural or divinely authorized political hierarchy, once they denied that human beings are naturally political (as Aristotle thought), they needed to provide an account of the motives that would induce individuals to join together in society. Seventeenth-century writers recognized that the passions were powerful sources of motivation but they also saw them as unstable ones. (This is what I mean by calling them the recalcitrant material at the basis of the commonwealth.) The goal of these early modern writers was to locate a benign or dependable passion that could counter the deleterious effects of those harmful passions—such as religious enthusiasm, the desire for glory, or the restless seeking after power—that contributed to civil and religious wars. Thus Hugo Grotius, the seventeenth-century founder of international law, and Hobbes, not to mention many lesser known mid seventeenth-century writers, singled out the desire for self-preservation or fear of violent death as the dependable passion that would induce obedience to the sovereign.

Once we begin to look at early modern debates about political obligation through the lens of poetics and the passions, rather than reason and self-interest, the early history of liberalism begins to look entirely different. In particular, we begin to see what we might call the dialectical relationship between voluntarism and materialism in early modern accounts of political obligation. Max Horkheimer provided a gloss on this dimension of early modern thought, when he observed that, “In contrast to idealist philosophy, materialism does not trace the interests and objectives that are operative on the part of the subject back to the independent creative activity of this subject, to free will... . [Such an] undialectical concept of the free subject is foreign to materialism. Materialism is also aware of the subject as conditioned.”¹ Hork-

¹ Max Horkheimer, “Materialism and Morality,” *Telos*, 69, 1986, 117. This essay was originally published in 1933. Horkheimer was thinking of historical,

heimer is not arguing that there is no such thing as the creative activity of the subject; rather he is arguing for a conception of creative activity—or what the early moderns would call poesis—that is both enabled and constrained by the subject's material embodiment, as well as the material conditions of existence.

In this essay I want to explore this neglected dimension of early modern debates about political obligation. My particular focus is the implicit dialogue between Hobbes and Milton concerning the role of the passions in motivating the subject of contract. In this dialogue, Hobbes will emerge as an advocate of a new poetics of absolutism. Milton, in contrast, will be seen to make material embodiment and the recalcitrance of the passions the very condition of political resistance to the status quo. Each has an important role to play in the account I am proposing of the origins of modernity. In Hobbes, we find the appropriation of the divine speech act as a model for the secular declaration of rights—a model that is very much with us today, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the rights claims of emerging nations and ethnic groups. In Milton, we find a profound exploration of the body and the passions as obstacles to Hobbes' heroic poetics; but we also find a meditation on embodiment as the source of new secular conception of rights and obligations, one that underwrites arguments for resistance and revolution.

Let me begin with Hobbes. As I've said, Hobbes has been conscripted into the usual history of liberalism with its emphasis on rational self-interest. But this reading of Hobbes begins at the endpoint of Hobbes's argument and so neglects what is to my mind most interesting about him—and that is his attention to the poetic and imaginative dimension of political obligation. In the Introduction to *Leviathan*, Hobbes fa-

social, and economic conditions. But seventeenth-century writers thought of the individual as conditioned, above all, by passions and interests, by one's material embodiment.

mously compares the creation of the commonwealth to God's divine fiat, his creation of the world. This heroic conception of poetics, I argue, is a response to a more fundamental contamination of the passions by the imagination—which is the defining characteristic of Hobbes's state of nature. The state of nature is, by Hobbes's own description, a state of restless seeking after power, or what Hobbes called "vainglory." In modern terms, we would say that the state of nature is one of mimetic desire—the mediation of our desires by our imagination of others' desires. Hobbes's subsequent representation of this state as "nasty, brutish, and short"—and as a place where self-love or self-preservation takes the form of fear of violent death—is Hobbes's attempt to put an end to the endless cycle of ambition and aggression. In less abstract terms, this recasting of the state of nature is Hobbes's attempt to address the crisis of the English civil war—where people did not fear violent death and so were willing to risk their lives on the battlefield. The assertion that everyone fears violent death is Hobbes' creative or poetic fiat—his poetic fiction or Platonic parable about banishing mimetic desire from the commonwealth.

This reading of Hobbes reveals a shared set of preoccupations between writers of political treatises and writers of literary works in the period—above all a shared interest in the role of poetics in constructing the new subject of political obligation. In emphasizing this commonality of interests, I don't mean to minimize the obvious generic differences between a treatise and a poem or any other conventionally literary genre. Instead, I want to call attention to what has been called the linguistic turn of early modern debates about political obligation (and of early modern culture more generally): the widespread preoccupation with the notion that human beings—in Hobbes's words—only know what they make themselves. Hobbes appropriates the divine fiat—let us make man—to authorize a secular account of human agency and political obligation.

Something similar, I will argue, happens in *Paradise Lost*. From this perspective, it makes eminent sense to think of Hobbes and Milton as interlocutors on the topic of the new poetics of obligation.

I would go further, however, and insist that Hobbes is uniquely appropriate as the counterpoint to Milton for three reasons. First, Hobbes was a fellow countryman, preoccupied with precisely the same crisis of political obligation that consumed Milton —the crisis of sovereignty that precipitated the English civil war. Second, in the Introduction to *Leviathan* and elsewhere, Hobbes signaled his awareness that the construction of the commonwealth and the new political subject were poetic activities. Third, both Hobbes and Milton were grappling with the recalcitrance of the passions to heroic self-fashioning. As I've argued, for Hobbes poetics conjured up not only the divine fiat but also the dangerous mimetic dimension of the passions, and the restless seeking after power. It was in response to this danger, that Hobbes sketched his minimalist version of the political subject: the radically constructed and therefore socially thin, isolated subject who acts on the basis of the fear of violent death and the rational calculation of self-interest. Against this radically constructed, self-interested subject, we can see Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, proposing an alternative view. Specifically, *Paradise Lost* puts poetics in the service of an alternative account of the role of the passions in relation to political obligation.

Let me now turn to two moments in *Paradise Lost* that take up the relation of the passions to obligation. The first is the separation colloquy in book 9 —the exchange in which Eve argues with Adam about going off and gardening on her own. The second moment is Adam's consenting to fall with Eve. I've chosen the separation colloquy because it's here that Milton appears to engage Hobbesian arguments about self-love and fear of violent death. And I've chosen Adam's fall because

in Adam's soliloquy we can see Milton proposing a nonHobbesian interpretation of self-love as the bond of imaginative sympathy—a bond that underwrites not only human society and the political contract but also the possibility of political resistance. In dramatizing these debates in the dialogues between Eve and Satan, and Adam and Eve, Milton gives a psychological portrait of the motives of the contracting subject that is unparalleled in seventeenth-century literature or political theory. At the same time, this exploration of the motives for contracting emerges as an exploration of the limits of the contracting subject—limits that recall Horkheimer's conception of materialism as an account of human agency which is aware of the subject as conditioned.

In the separation colloquy and Eve's later conversation with Satan, Milton explores the motive of fear of violent death. By the opening of book 9 Adam and Eve have been instructed about God's prohibition regarding the Tree of Knowledge, and the threatened punishment of death. They have been instructed, that is, about their implicit contract with God, according to which Eden is theirs in exchange for their obedience. The angel Raphael has also warned Adam and Eve about the "foe" who "seeks to work ... woe and shame / By sly assault" (9.255-56). So, from the outset, although the Garden of Eden is not the Hobbesian state of nature, and the fear of divine punishment is not the same as the Hobbesian fear of violent death, nevertheless Adam and Eve's fear of death is presented as a possible motive of obedience, a spur to fulfilling their obligations. What I want to suggest by looking closely at the separation colloquy is that this fear can be read in two opposed ways. Although from one (theologically correct) perspective the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, from another Miltonic perspective fear amounts to a kind of Hobbesian coercion. Milton rejects this negative passion of fear. He seeks to locate consent not in what Isaiah Berlin called negative liberty

—freedom from others, including their threats— but rather in the positive exercise of one’s freedom and in what we might call the positive passions of ambition and love. And yet, the passion of love in particular proves to be a constraint as well as a motive. To put it another way, love proves to be a motive because it is grounded in the specific constraints of being human.

In the course of elaborating her arguments for working in the Garden apart from Adam and in her later encounter with Satan, Eve briefly illustrates the problem of the Hobbesian state of nature. Initially, by her own account, she is motivated by both fear and vainglory: she is the Hobbesian individual who, in seeking to be better prepared against the vainglorious aggressor, becomes vainglorious herself. “How are we happy,” she asks Adam, “still in fear of harm?” Immediately after this, however, she rejects her fear and opts for what she calls “honor”: “then, wherefore shunn’d or fear’d / By us? who rather double honor gain / From his surmise prov’d false, find peace within, / Favor from Heav’n, our witness from th’ event” (9.331-34). Here and later in her remarks about the Tree of Knowledge, Eve thinks of faith as a matter of heroic deeds that need to be “approved” (9.1140), both proved to God and appreciated by him.²

The narrator makes it clear that Eve’s seeking approval is the kind of self-aggrandizement Hobbes criticized in *Leviathan*. Out of her sense of lack, her desire for an audience, perhaps even her sense that cooperative gardening was not quite what she had in mind as “proof” of her faith, Eve generates her own vainglorious plot of adventure. Eve’s Christian dem-

² The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us “approve” could mean demonstrate or assent to as good. In support of the first meaning, it cites Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 5: “We demonstrate or approve our reckonings to other men.” “Approved” in the sense of “pronounced good; justified, sanctioned, commended, esteemed,” is illustrated by a quotation from *Paradise Lost*: “To stand approv’d in sight of God” (6.36).

onstration of her faith is touched by elements of emulation and display, rivalry and theatricality, rivaling above all an older, more exciting idiom of chivalric faith and honor. In her musings, this romance plot of adventure eventually encompasses Adam. Specifically, by offering Adam a “glorious trial of exceeding Love” (9.961), Eve tries to get Adam to imitate her own restless seeking after power.

What’s crucial for us is that Milton doesn’t simply condemn this desire for a kind of martial glory as Hobbes does, but also asks us to take it seriously. And he does so by giving Eve his best lines from *Areopagitica* about the necessity of exercising one’s will and of not withdrawing from the contest of virtue. Eve’s arguments are reminiscent not only of the famous passage in which Milton says he “cannot praise a fugitive and cloister’d vertue, unexercis’d & unbreath’d,” but also of his description of reason as uncoerced choosing:

Many there be that complain of divin Providence for suffering *Adam* to transgresse, foolish tongues! when God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificiall *Adam*, such an *Adam* as he is in the motions. We our selves esteem not that of obedience, or love, or gift, which is of force: God therefore left him free, set before him a provoking object, even almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his reward, the praise of his abstinence. Wherefore did [God] creat passions within us, pleasures round about us, but that these rightly tempered are the very ingredients of vertu?³

Milton tells us that obedience has to be freely given, otherwise it is “of force”; and that Adam will be merely “artificial,”

³ John Milton, *Areopagitica* in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, general ed. Don M. Wolfe, 8 vols. (New Haven, 1953-82), 2: 527.

a puppet Adam —an Adam only “in the motions.” He will be the sort of Adam, Milton suggests, that Hobbes had in mind when he set out to recreate man as a creature whose chief characteristic was fear of violent death. In contrast, Milton asks us to take Eve’s desire for glory seriously by questioning the negative motive of fear. First we are told that Eve is not in fact motivated by fear, and then Satan argues that, even if she were, she shouldn’t be.

Satan describes God’s prohibition regarding the Tree of Knowledge as a threat of violent death, and then proceeds to argue that fear of death amounts to illegitimate duress: “your fear itself of Death removes the fear,” he tells Eve (9.702). It’s as though Satan were encouraging Eve by arguing: “You’re right not to fall for that Hobbesian argument about fear of violent death or self-preservation as a motive for obedience, a motive for voluntary subjection to Adam and to God. Fear is coercive, and voluntary subjection prohibits coercion.” According to Satan, in short, God is a Hobbesian tyrant. What I want to suggest now is that this is true in some ways for Milton, speaking through Eve, as well.

Eve repeats Satan’s arguments against the fear of death when she reasons about the Tree of Knowledge. In fact, one might say that Satan’s achievement is to have persuaded Eve to think of the righteous fear of God as a form of servility, or illegitimate coercion. Musing about God’s commandment, Eve tells herself: “Such prohibitions bind not” (9.760). Here Eve is obviously trying to make sense of the way in which God’s prohibition does bind and she responds to her own question with a kind of Hobbesian literalism: she is not physically constrained and so, she concludes, not actually bound. But, Eve reasons, although she is not physically bound, she *is* unfairly coerced by the threat of death: “if Death / Bind us with after-bands, what profits then / Our inward freedom?” (9.760-62).

For Eve this is a rhetorical question: according to her, freedom cannot coexist with the threat of force. But what does Milton intend for us to understand by Eve's question? I believe that Eve is not only right in a Hobbesian way that nothing physically "hinders" her from eating from the Tree of Knowledge (9.778). (This is how Hobbes defines freedom in *Leviathan* —as the absence of physical constraint, such as chains.) She is also right in a Miltonic way, that is, in terms of Milton's defense of free will: God, Raphael, and Adam all tell us the prohibition is not a tyrant's command but a "sign" of the moral law. The prohibition is in short the sign or seal of a contract to which Eve is supposed implicitly to have consented by virtue of her rationality. But, what kind of contract is it that one may never legitimately break? And what kind of contract is it whose breach is punished by death? These are the questions Eve ventriloquizes for Milton and his contemporaries.

Here we begin to see that Eve's arguments are not simply Satanic and therefore flawed. They don't simply exemplify the Hobbesian and Satanic problem of self-love and self-aggrandizement or the restless seeking after power. They also articulate the insight that consent to the heavenly contract might very well feel like coercion or the Hobbesian fear of violent death. They articulate, that is, the felt antinomy between consent and coercion, or at the very least voluntarism and rationalism, in the heavenly contract.⁴ If this interpretation is right, there are two possible —and antithetical—conclusions one can draw. The first conclusion is that God is an absolute sovereign, but also the only legitimate absolute sovereign in the universe —and the heavenly contract is the only contract which cannot lawfully be rescinded (this would be the theologically conservative reading of *Paradise Lost*). The second conclusion

⁴ We may even detect an anticipation of Adam's plaintive, even resentful reply to God: "thy terms too hard" (10.751).

is that God is not a Hobbesian sovereign, and so he must, by the logic of contract, divest himself of his absolute sovereignty. As God himself says to Christ in book 3 of *Paradise Lost*, “Thou thy regal sceptre ... / ... then no more shall need, / God shall be all in all.”⁵

If Eve’s deliberations raise the possibility that the moral law involves a kind of coercion, Adam’s fall enacts a different drama of coercion and consent. In contrast to Eve’s meditation on fear, Adam meditates on love. In contrast to her musings about the constraints of the divine prohibition, Adam debates about his physical and emotional bond with Eve. In these and other ways, Adam has internalized Eve’s version of adventure and coercion; he has collapsed her heroic “desire of wand’ring” (9.1136) to a simple desire for Eve, which involves a different kind of lack and compulsion: “to lose thee were to lose myself” (9.959).

Adam’s reasoning is self-cancelling. On the one hand, his rhetoric echoes manuals of domestic duties, where the husband is enjoined to love his wife as a second self. Along these same lines, he also marshals biblical arguments about the “one flesh” of husband and wife to imply that he is physically as well as emotionally bound to Eve (9.914, 959). Accordingly, he narrates his fall, while it occurs, as though he were compelled by the “Bond of Nature,” “submitting to what seem’d remediless”

⁵ See William Empson, *Milton’s God*, (London, 1965), 75; Mary Ann Radzi-nowicz, “The Politics of *Paradise Lost*,” in *Politics of Discourse*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker (Berkeley, 1987), 204-29, commenting in part on *PL* 3.341: “God shall be all in all.” More recently, in *The Matter of Revolution*, John Rogers has argued that materialist vitalism and, with it, a decentralized protoliberal cosmos and divinity, is at odds with Hobbesian mechanism and a personal, absolute God in *Paradise Lost* (see, e.g. 113). According to Rogers, Milton briefly entertains the possibility that creation contains an element of inert, recalcitrant matter (130-43; *PL* 2 on chaos, and 7.233-41 on “dregs”). Ultimately, however, Rogers sees Milton’s materialist vitalism as a defense of agency, as against Hobbesian mechanism. I argue below that the agency of the contracting subject is in tension with material embodiment throughout *Paradise Lost*, that Milton focusses on embodiment as a limit as well as a condition of human agency.

(9.956, 919). On the other hand, the very fact of his narration and deliberation undermines his argument for the necessity of the fall. Thus, even more than Eve's, his fall reads as a textbook case (*the* textbook case) of voluntary servitude —voluntary enslavement to the passions and thus to sin. Adam is “Against his better knowledge, not deceiv'd, / But fondly overcome”; his passions move him to choose voluntarily but irrationally to fall with Eve. At least, this is the theologically correct reading of Adam's fall, which glosses “fondly” as foolishly.

But, as in the case of Eve's fall, there is another reading that coexists with the theologically “correct” one. Here, fondly overcome doesn't mean foolishly overcome, but overcome by affection. Unlike Eve, who reasons that passion—in the form of servile fear of death—is incompatible with obligation, Adam reasons that passion—in the form of his love for Eve—dictates obligation. He is obliged in the literal sense of his being tied (from the Latin *ligare*) to Eve: “Our State cannot be sever'd, we are one” (9.958). Here Adam's appeal to the bond of nature is reminiscent of Milton's *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, where Milton opposes the excessive strictness of reason and the law to the legitimate claims of the flesh, the passions, or what he called “blameless nature.” And, just as in *The Doctrine* Milton urges the reader to have a “conscionable and tender pitty” for those who have unwittingly enslaved themselves to a loveless marriage (2:240), so in *Paradise Lost* Milton urges a similar pity for Adam's fall. Adam's own pity and fear for Eve invite our sympathetic identification with Adam. We are sympathetic because we understand that, as Colin Burrow has rightly noted, Adam's choice to fall with Eve does not represent “a purely voluntary choice of mortal union with a sufferer.” This is because the absolutely voluntary is the prerogative of God.⁶ To put this another way, Mil-

⁶ See Colin Burrow, *Epic Romance*, 285. My reading takes issue with Guilloroy, “Milton, Narcissism, and Gender,” who argues that the difference between

ton seems to be suggesting that the power to create and contract ex nihilo—as though obedience and obligation were matters of pure reason or pure will (the power that Hobbes celebrates in the Introduction to *Leviathan*)—is a power which not even the unfallen Adam and Eve have in paradise. Such a purely rational or volitional Adam, Milton suggests, would paradoxically be the “meer artificiall Adam” of *Areopagitica*, “such an Adam as he is in the motions.”⁷ In making Adam’s fall humanly comprehensible in this way, Milton goes a long way towards imagining a purely secular conception of human fallibility and of obligation—one that is not a consequence of the Biblical fall but of our natural human embodiment. In some ways, this might seem to be close to Hobbes’ own secular account of obligation. Yet, in contrast to Hobbes’ political theology—in which the sovereign takes the place of God, Milton reorients the axis of obligation from a transcendent authority to a fellow sufferer, on the same plane of existence. Moreover, in contrast to Hobbes’s fiction of the state of nature, which constructs isolated individuals so that they can then be properly joined together, Milton’s poetic method facilitates empathy, which is to say the equitable or compassionate judgment of the bond of nature.

As we’ve seen, Adam and Eve together provide a Miltonic alternative to Hobbes. Eve ventriloquizes Milton’s lifelong understanding that genuine consent is incompatible with coercion, and must allow for the possibility of dissent. Adam dramatizes Milton’s hard-won insight that human nature is not an obstacle to consent but its very foundation (fond in this period

Eve’s fall and Adam’s is that the first is shadowed by psychological determinism, while the second is characterized by ethical voluntarism, and this is typical of the gender system of the poem as a whole (226). While there is some truth to this distinction, I believe Milton deliberately complicates it, giving Eve the heroic role and Adam the feminized bond of nature and the passion of pity.

⁷ Milton, *Areopagitica* in *Complete Prose Works*, 2: 527.

could also mean foundation). Eve illustrates the self-assertion of the will, against which the claims of the divine prohibition appear arbitrary. Adam adopts the view that it doesn't make sense to think of himself as a creature of pure volition, but for the same reason he cannot be a creature of pure reason either. Embodiment—in the form of the passions—is the very condition of his rational choices. As a condition, it is both a limit and a motive. Adam's self-love and love of Eve are his motives for consenting to fall.

Milton's representation of Adam does not amount to saying that human beings are fallible, imperfectly or unpredictably capable of Aristotelian virtue, and so one must accordingly lower one's standards or expectations (as Hobbes does). Nor is it the same thing as saying, as Milton sometimes seems to in *Areopagitica*, that the passions are put in our way as stumbling blocks or tests of our Stoic virtue. *Paradise Lost* instead helps us to see that our passions are also reasons—and not just tests, obstacles, or the lowest common denominator of humanity. It's as though Milton were saying through Adam, If there were no God—if Milton didn't have to be responsible to Christian doctrine—human nature would be a good defense of the fall. Such a formulation helps us keep in mind—as Milton did—the competing claims of God and man.

In this light, the method of *Paradise Lost* amounts to a kind of baroque anamorphosis, according to which an image—or insight—that is obscured from one perspective is revealed from another. From a theological perspective, as I've said, the choice to fall is wrong (so Eve should have rejected Satan's reasoning and Adam should have insisted on divorce). But Milton seems to be doing everything in his power to suggest that, from a human perspective, the fall is comprehensible. In fact, Milton seems less interested here in justifying the ways of God to man, than in justifying the ways of Adam and Eve to God. And this means justifying the breach not only of the

theological contract but also of the political contract. In book 9 of *Paradise Lost* we can almost see Milton imagining the positive postlapsarian uses of Eve's deliberations and Adam's arguments about why they needed to fall. We can see him rehearsing the arguments not only for divorce but also for revolution and regicide.

If we now return to the history of liberalism, we can see Milton articulating the twentieth-century, communitarian critique of liberalism *avant la lettre* —the critique of Sandel on the left and someone like Mary Ann Glendon on the right, that liberalism is insufficiently attentive to our material, passionate existence, our embeddedness, what Milton might call our creatureliness. In contrast to Hobbes's creative fiat, we don't construct ourselves and our obligations *ex nihilo*. In this contrast, it's Hobbes who is the radical constructivist, the radical poet or "maker," and Milton who insists on the ways in which we come into the world if not fully formed, at least already created. This might seem to be a politically conservative argument. And yet, in Milton's hands and in the drama of the fall, this creatureliness proves to be as much an argument for political resistance as for obedience.

Of course, neither Hobbes nor Milton is central to the usual genealogy of liberalism, as for example Locke is. Each was in some respects conspicuously unliberal by modern standards —Hobbes by virtue of his political absolutism; Milton because of his elitism, his limited toleration for religious differences, and his flirtation with antinomianism. This is to a large extent my point. Although Hobbes and Milton are not as central to the usual history of liberalism as Locke is, each contributed powerfully to the early modern effort to imagine a new subject of political obligation, the new subject of contract. Not only was the analogy between human making and divine making important to both. Equally important was the imagination of a new kind of embodied subject —an "aesthetic" subject

in the root sense of sensory perception— for whom the passions and the imagination were critical faculties in inducing both voluntary subjection and resistance to political authority. Historians of liberalism have neglected both of these dimensions of contractual thinking.

On the one hand, we have left behind Hobbes's sense of the radically creative power of contract. To cite just one example, when John Rawls resurrected the metaphor of contract in his own defense of liberalism, he was forced to point out to his critics that this contract was "a device of representation" —so much do we lack a sense of the relevance of fiction and the imagination to political obligation.⁸ On the other hand, we have left behind Milton's sense of the limits of making —which is also a sense of the link between our passions and our capacity for dissent— so much so that it's left to so called compassionate conservatives to condemn the destructive political consequences of "pure reason" and to reclaim the contribution of the passions and the imagination to political obligation. But the relevance of both not only to the early modern period but also to modern politics should by now be obvious.

In our own time, Hobbes's heroic poetics of the commonwealth is evident in the modern speech act of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other such conventions. On the other hand, the putative subject of rational self interest has everywhere given way to identity politics and ethnic passions, even or especially fabricated ones (think of Rwanda and Bosnia). If the modern discourse of human rights —a descendant of the seventeenth-century discourse of natural rights that was so dear to Milton and Hobbes— is to have any effect, it must be able to reform the passions through an appeal to the imagination as well as to reason. It must recover, as Stuart Hampshire has argued, "the picture of human nature that has sustained

⁸ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York, 1996), xxxi.

liberalism from its inception, ... one in which passion and struggle, not reason and order, are central.”⁹

Mimesis and aesthetics —poetics and the passions— these are the neglected terms in the dry juridical discourse of the later historiography of liberalism. Yet they were crucial to extricating the seventeenth-century subject from the traditional ties that bind, crucial to the very different anatomies of the political subject offered by Hobbes and Milton. To recover the implicit dialogue between *Leviathan* and *Paradise Lost* is to go some ways towards reconstructing a richer sense not only of the history of the liberal subject, but also of a richer sense of the origins of modernity.

⁹ Stuart Hampshire, “Liberalism: The New Twist,” *New York Review of Books* 40 (1993): 45-46.