The Lonely Creator: Miltonian Metaphysics

When we begin to think about the creation of the universe, the first question we are faced with is: "Did the universe have a beginning in time at all? Or has it existed ad infinitum?"

The Kantian argument supporting the claim that the universe had a beginning in time is as follows: we first assume that the world has no beginning in time and has always existed. Now, if that is true, then for every point in time, an eternity must have elapsed, i.e., an infinite amount of time should've passed before every point in time. Now, Kant rejects the idea of infinity as a magnitude that cannot be added to, rather, he defines infinity as something that cannot be enumerated by the successive synthesis of the units (Craig 553). Thus, if we imagine this infinite amount of time as the set of positive integers being counted backwards, we quickly realise that to say we began counting backwards from infinity and just finished at 0 makes no logical sense. Thus, if that is true, an eternity can't have elapsed before every point in time, and it follows that the universe must have a beginning in time and that it cannot have been eternally existent.

Thus, if it is indeed true that the universe had a beginning in time, what did the instant of creation look like? Why at all was a universe brought into existence, when the other possibility of nothing being created ever was equally probable? What brought about the spontaneous change in the stagnant nothingness that made a colossal existence sprout from it? What was the first cause that set off the chain reaction of violent celestial events that made the world as it is? Can we consider the possibility of a creator God bringing about specific changes in the state of nothingness to create a universe? Can this omnipotent God's desire to create be called the first cause?

We now consider Al Ghazali's view on the creation of the universe, and how the Islamic principle of self-determination fuels his thought. According to the Islamic principle of self-determination, when two different states of affairs are equally possible and out of these two,

only one results, it must be because a personal agent freely chooses that particular situation over the other. Al-Ghazali's view on the origin of the universe is founded on this principle: he argues that while it is true "that no mechanical cause existing from eternity could create the universe in time, such a production of a temporal effect from an eternal cause is possible if and only if the cause is a personal agent who wills from eternity to create a temporally finite effect" (Craig 556). This is because if it was a "mechanically operating" (Craig 556) set of necessary and sufficient conditions then the effects of these would've always existed or remained inexistent eternally. Thus, from a Newtonian view of time (Craig 566), it could only be a personal agent, an eternal being perhaps, who could choose to create the universe as it is, distinguishing the instant of creation from all the other instants preceding that instant. From the perspective of the relational view of time, an eternal being could "timelessly" (Craig 566) create the universe, and time would also be created along with the said creation.

However, is it a good idea to conceive of a creator God to explain the creation of the universe at all? Parfit shows his discomfort over the idea that it is a mere coincidence that the world came into existence in the very specific way that it did. He argues that it is hard to believe that all the dramatic events that were going on during the inception of the universe were a simple coincidence because "the chance of this coincidence occurring would be below one in a billion billion" (Parfit 4). Even though he constructs valid objections to the theory of a creator god, he still denies the coincidence theory and argues that the failing of this coincidence theory, in fact, "revives one of the traditional arguments for belief in God" (Parfit 5).

Even though Al Ghazali affirms the existence of a divine individual who chooses to create the universe, the Nasadiya Sukta problematises this idea of a choice. It negates that the universe began from nothing; it claims that in the beginning, "even nothingness was not, nor existence" (Nasadiya Sukta 2) in the first stanza itself. It then proceeds to give a series of alternative accounts of the origin of the universe, of which I'm most interested in the (kind of)

coherent account that we can interpret from the third and the fourth stanzas. In the third stanza, the Sukta says that enclosed in nothing, there was a certain "One" who "arose at last, born of the power of heat" (Nasadiya Sukta 2). Again, in the fourth stanza, the Sukta says that desire "was the primal seed, born of the mind" (Nasadiya Sukta 2). Whose mind? The One's, perhaps. From these two stanzas, it seems like the Sukta suggests that the creation of the universe happened in the following order: that there was a power of heat which the One was born from, and after the One arose, a desire (perhaps, to create) emerged in the One's mind. This desire could be the desire to create the universe, as it has been referred to as the "primal seed" in the fourth stanza (Nasadiya Sukta 2). This account sounds similar to Al-Ghazali's account but differs from it, as in the last stanza, the Sukta leaves us confused: "he, who surveys it all from highest heaven, he knows - or maybe even he does not know".

Not only is this conception of a supreme being, namely God, radically different from the popular conception of the Abrahamic God, who seems to have a definite plan for His creation, but the God of the Sukta could be as confused as we are when it comes to the marvel of creation! In the last lines, the Sukta wonders aloud that maybe even this omnipotent ever-existing being could be unable to explain how the universe was created. At this juncture, we wonder, what if the Miltonian God is constructed in a way similar to the God of the Nasadiya Sukta? And if this is true, do we get a pair of ideas radically different from their more traditional counterparts? Can a textual analysis of *Paradise Lost* push us to consider a metaphysical explanation of the creation of the universe while providing us with a theological theory on the nature of God?

We consider Milton's *Paradise Lost* for two reasons: a) we find in this text a metaphysical inquiry into the creation of the universe, the explanation of the creation of the universe found here being very similar to meditations of the Nasadiya Sukta, Al Ghazali, Kant

and Parfit and b) this text provides us with an alternative curious constitution of the biblical God.

Milton's Paradise Lost begins with Satan lying horizontally on a black lake with "head uplift above the wave" (Milton 1.193), along with all the other 'fallen' angels. The imagery of a dark world and the devils lying on black waters invokes a biblical description of the world (if it can be called a 'world') before creation, which is very reminiscent too, of the Nasadiya Sukta, dark waters feature in this Rig Vedic hymn too. It is this darkness in which God was the only one awake, and it is this darkness from which creation sprung when God willed "let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). Could it be that the 'fall' the angels seemed to lament and despise God for was God's design of ejecting the pandemonium into a pre-creation state from where they could create their own world? Had they decided to create a world of their own from the darkness they were cast into, they would not only create it democratically, through collaboration that is, they would also be saved from the loneliness that God must've encountered before the creation of the universe: once upon a time, God was the only one awake. Thus, it is not difficult to infer that perhaps the first impulse to create was an impulse born out of loneliness (both the Sukta and Genesis affirm the existence of a fully conscious individual entity, arguably divine, who precedes the act of creation): the beginning of the universe was fuelled by the sheer sadness of loneliness that arose in God's mind. And a justification of this claim, we find in the plot elements of *Paradise Lost:* even though God never speaks in the text, we can make inferences about His being from how he reacts to the actions of His creations. This feeling of loneliness dictating His actions makes God seem not like an epic Hero (Bakhtinian) but more like a person whose motivations arise from the dumbfounding silence of this nothingness. This is similar to the Nasadiya Sukta; it allows us to conceive of the divine entity as an all-powerful being, albeit one that maybe didn't know what it was doing and may even have created the universe by accident.

Next, when we think of Satan's character in *Paradise Lost*, we find him hoisting himself on a throne in Book 3 (Milton 2.300), and not just that, it is he who commands the pandemonium to stay put in hell while he becomes the first person to leave hell. An obvious question arises: it is a black lake, abyss-like, where they landed, how on earth does a throne pop up in such a doomed setting? This question only makes us think about Satan's inner desires: to be an epic hero, situated high up with the distance between him and the rest of the devils being filled with the Bakhtinian epic distance, this epic distance being a literal and figurative highness, that Satan is a ruler beyond question, that Satan is forever exempted from any scrutiny, that below him lie a faceless crowd, inconsequential and unimportant (Bakhtin 17). What Satan doesn't realise, though, is that however exalted the throne might be, it is also a lonely place. Thus, it makes sense to say that God, having realised Satan's lust for hierarchy, 'exiled' him to a tragic place called 'hell', where 'exile' really is an opportunity to not be a monarch but perhaps be a democratic leader and 'hell' is a dark void, a canvas where a new world waits to be created on. It is plausible that perhaps God thought that the world created by the pandemonium could be better even, for unlike God's case, this creation 2.0 would be carried out by a **group,** a **community,** much like a **parliament** which creates a competent **nation,** and not an **individual,** because an **individual** could only do so much.

Eve's case is an interesting one too: the first thing she does after she wakes up is admire herself, by admiring her reflection in water, which she later realises to be her own self (Milton 4.462-4.464). It is Adam that we find longing for her company as Eve indulges in her beauty. Thus even in Eve, we find the Satan-like characteristic of self-indulgence. And just like Satan Eve refuses to engage with the company she has been provided with, she considers herself the only important presence in the vicinity. Just like Satan, she doesn't seem to understand the peril of individual existence: that one could be lonely, that loneliness isn't as harmless as she considers it to be. This is what makes both Satan and Eve similar to God: both of them, just

like God, find themselves in their own company. But unlike God, who quickly realises the horror of this loneliness, Satan and Eve do not realise the problem and end up actively desiring this poisonous solitude and acting likewise. God thus has to intervene again.

In the same way He 'exiled' Satan to 'hell', he 'exiled' Adam and Eve to a dynamic world whose flow is perennially interrupted by birth and death, and where the material foundation is a hostile nature that should be negotiated with inter-human collaboration to survive and reproduce. In this sense, God becomes the Bakhtinian hero (Bakhtin 15) because not only is He high up in heaven seated on His throne from where he does things to people and the world, but He is also a paternal figure who must make hard decisions for His creations to learn a thing or two. Bakhtin characterises the epic hero to be exalted above the plane that the consumers of the epic inhabit, and Milton uses this spatial exaltation of the heaven where God sits on a throne to show that this is a character who quite literally is distant from its creations. Not only that, no one is on the same level as God, He is the most exalted. Since He identifies the problem (self-obsession), which very soon would make both Satan and Eve suffer from the same thing He suffered from (loneliness), and tries to solve the problem because He wouldn't want His children to suffer in the same way as Him. Thus, how Milton characterises the pre-existing figures of Satan and Eve in this text, along with the consequences these figures face, pushes us to think about the idea of loneliness: he proposes that hierarchy not only afflicts the ones below with blatant injustice but also that the ones sitting on the top are also vulnerable to a fate which potentially could be as fatal as the fate of the downtrodden. If we backtrack a few steps from here, we realise that Milton indeed conceives of God as a lonely being: it is God who is "the" most "exalted" entity, who could be lonelier than Him? This very God, who tries to prevent His creations from desiring this fatal loneliness in disguise of charming exaltation, thus attempted to somewhat drive away His own loneliness in desiring to create a universe. This is the heart of Miltonian Metaphysics, as found from *Paradise Lost*: the recurring theme

of the topmost position in a hierarchy always coming together with loneliness suggests to us that the first desire to exist ever, was the desire to create a universe, and this desire was very much rooted in the shackles of solitary confinement.

The real tragedy in Paradise Lost is not that humans were cast out of heaven or that Satan and the devils were condemned to live in hell, it is simply that God remains the most misunderstood character, the forgotten hero, who is not only lonely high up in heaven, with no equal, but is also forever seen as an angry and malevolent being by His creations: devils and humans! Despite his attempts to save both the devils and Adam and Eve some pain, the devils deliberately choose to make the blank canvas, the dark void, into a literal, burning hell and then go on to blame God for their suffering. Humans who are no better than the devils on this aspect choose to forever lament their fall from heaven, paying no heed to the fact that if the fall were not to happen, the human species would be forever stuck in a pathetic and lonely place called heaven, drowning in their self-induced suffering for eternity: the first thing Eve does after her birth is indulge in her own beauty, refusing companionship to Adam. When Milton was writing this, a revolution that was supposed to overthrow hierarchy in England had ended up reinforcing hierarchies: the tyrant Oliver Cromwell had ‘crowned’ himself Lord Protector of England in 1653. Thus, Milton would write of Satan in the way he did: the protectors could easily become tyrants. But it also makes sense for Milton to write God like he did; God is a forgotten hero who, even though is situated high up, is not intoxicated by his position of power. If anything, His throne brings Him ample discomfort. Thus charged by the horror of self-indulgence and self-obsession, He uses His powers to prevent any other tyrants (Satan and Eve as potential candidates for this position) from rising by making the lives of others painful and then eventually falling into aching loneliness, making their own life terrible, too. This is the most important trait of the hero which Milton’s material foundations caused him to want: that the hero would not be blinded by the intoxication of hierarchy but would rather be cognisant

of the horrors of it. Thus, who could be more horrified by hierarchy than the God of Paradise Lost, who is the most exalted being but is also the most pathetic and loneliest entity to exist?

Milton beautifully ties together the ideas of the inception of the universe in time, the existence of an all-powerful God who not only exists before creation but also can command the creation to happen, and the causal explanation of this divine will being rooted in an emotion, which is loneliness, traditionally associated with humans rather than God. Even though it sounds absurd to think of the Abrahamic God, a God with a plan, connotatively related to a strong figure who rules with an iron fist, a king who has it all figured out, Milton does exactly this in his constitution of nature of God in *Paradise Lost.* Even though God never features as a speaking character in *Paradise Lost,* Milton manages to reveal a lot about God's behavioural instincts by incorporating plot details like Satan and Eve's desire for solitude and their consequent fall, which enables us to retrospectively determine what might have caused God to react in the way He did. Milton's God rarely speaks, but the text revolves around his acts, which have far-reaching consequences. Milton's God, then, is also an excellent pathologist: He delivers fates depending on the behavioural instincts of His creation. As we have seen earlier, God is not an angry entity who is blind to reason and rationality: this God is very much benevolent and tries to prevent bad endings from happening to His creation.

In *Paradise Lost*, we encounter two interesting ideas coupled as one. Milton suggests that the universe does have a beginning in time, in contrast to the idea that the universe has existed forever, echoing texts like the Genesis, the Nasadiya Sukta and philosophers like Kant, Parfit and Al Ghazali. Milton also suggests (through the ultimate fates of Satan and Eve) that God was a conscious being who alone was awake in the darkness that preceded creation and that this God felt lonely, a banal emotion every other human feels, and out of this overwhelming feeling of loneliness, the universe sprung into existence. The latter Miltonian idea locks horns with traditional imagery of the Abrahamic God, who is said to have a plan throughout the

biblical literature. Instead, this idea of a God who is afflicted by earthly human emotions is in synchronicity with the idea of a divine entity of the mischievous Nasadiya Sukta, which almost blasphemously suggests maybe even the surveyor from the highest heaven, doesn't have it all figured out. The Sukta and Milton, centuries and continents apart, prefer to think of God as all-powerful, but also human, in some capacity.

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