

## Liberty, License, and Virtuous Self-Government in John Milton's Writings\*

*David V. Urban*  
*Calvin College*

Throughout his writings, John Milton addressed the idea of genuine liberty or freedom over against the self-indulgence that he sometimes called *license*, a self-indulgence that inevitably leads to tyranny from within and from without. Indeed, Milton's understanding of license inevitably includes the idea of abusing freedom to pursue some sort of fleshly indulgence, whereas his concept of genuine liberty focuses on the freedom for the moral person to live a virtuous life and pursue virtuous goals under the strictures of his own conscience in spite of the temptations and roadblocks offered by intemperate persons, stifling custom, or an interfering state. Significantly, Milton's explicitly Christian ideal of genuine liberty emphasizes the need for virtuous self-government to characterize the truly free individual. Although Milton does not always employ the specific terms *liberty* or *license*, these concepts as well as the ideal of self-government can consistently be seen, implicitly or explicitly, with remarkable consistency throughout his four and a half decades of published writings.

As pollster Scott Rasmussen has recently emphasized, the impulse toward self-governance is a cherished ideal of the American republic that persists to this day despite the machinations of the political class.<sup>1</sup> As has often been noted, the American founders recognized that a self-governing republic necessitated a virtuous population. In a 1776 letter to his clergyman cousin Zabdiel Adams, John Adams spoke for many when he wrote,

Statesmen, my dear Sir, may plan and speculate for liberty, but it is religion and morality alone, which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand.... The only foundation of a free constitution, is pure virtue, and

if this cannot be inspired into our people in a greater measure than they have it now, they may change their rulers and the forms of government, but they will not obtain a lasting liberty. They will only exchange tyrants and tyrannies.<sup>2</sup>

On the other side of the Atlantic, the Irish-born British parliamentarian Edmund Burke wrote in 1791, “Men are qualified for civil liberty, in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites.... It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.”<sup>3</sup>

Adams’ and Burke’s convictions and concerns were anticipated in the seventeenth century by the English poet and republican pamphleteer John Milton. Throughout his writings, Milton addressed the idea of genuine liberty or freedom over against the self-indulgence that he sometimes called *license*, a self-indulgence that inevitably leads to tyranny from within and from without. Milton’s juxtaposition of and contrast between these two concepts is perhaps seen most explicitly in his 1649 defense of Charles I’s regicide, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, in whose opening paragraph he writes, “For indeed none can love freedom heartily, but good men; the rest love not freedom, but license.”<sup>4</sup> For Milton, *license* fits these definitions from the *Oxford English Dictionary*: “Excessive liberty; abuse of freedom; disregard of law or propriety,” and “Licentiousness, libertinism.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Milton’s understanding of license inevitably includes the idea of abusing freedom to pursue some sort of fleshly indulgence, whereas his concept of genuine liberty focuses on the freedom for the moral person to live a virtuous life and pursue virtuous goals under the strictures of his own conscience in spite of the temptations and roadblocks offered by intemperate persons, stifling custom, or an interfering state. Significantly, Milton’s explicitly Christian ideal of genuine liberty emphasizes the need for virtuous self-government to characterize the truly free individual. Although Milton does not always employ the specific terms *liberty* or *license*, these concepts, as well as the ideal of self-government, can be seen, implicitly or explicitly, with remarkable consistency throughout his four and a half decades of published writings.<sup>6</sup> In this study, I will divide Milton’s career into three periods: his early poetry and prose, ca. 1628–1640; his middle and most explicitly political period, ca. 1641–1660, seen in his political prose and his sonnets; and his later phase, from the May 1660 Restoration to his 1674 death, seen primarily in his three major long poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*.<sup>7</sup>

In explicitly distinguishing liberty from license, Milton stands in the line of Cicero, who, in *De Domo Sua* (*On His House*), denounced Clodius’ statue of Liberty, calling it *simulacrum non libertatis publicae, sed licentiae* (“an image not

of public Liberty, but of licentiousness”); and Livy, who in his *History of Rome* criticized corrupt young aristocrats who “preferred their own freedom from all restraints to the general liberty.”<sup>8</sup> But for Milton, the distinction between liberty and license is first and foremost a theological matter, for true liberty comes from Christ giving believers freedom from sin and its attendant licentious indulgence. Such liberty, once gained, frees the believer to live according to a mature, self-regulating Christian conscience. Milton articulates this explicitly in *De Doctrina Christiana (On Christian Doctrine)*, his posthumously discovered theological treatise,<sup>9</sup> where he states:

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY means that CHRIST OUR LIBERATOR FREES US FROM THE SLAVERY OF SIN AND THUS FROM THE RULE OF THE LAW AND OF MEN, AS IF WE WERE EMANICIPATED SLAVES. HE DOES THIS SO THAT, BEING MADE SONS INSTEAD OF SERVANTS AND GROWN MEN INSTEAD OF BOYS, WE MAY SERVE GOD IN CHARITY THROUGH THE GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH.<sup>10</sup>

As the above quotation indicates, Milton’s understanding of Christian liberty emphasizes the individual Christian’s ability to self-govern by exercising liberty of conscience according to the Spirit’s guidance within the context of obedience to the Word of God. At the same time, this quotation also implies Milton’s parallel warning against the slavery of sin, a slavery brought about, as Milton indicates throughout his writings, by the perverted exercise of liberty that he considered to be license.

## Milton’s Early Writings

Milton’s early dedication to the liberty of virtuous self-rule can be understood more clearly in the context of two significant factors: his practice of setting himself apart from the licentious behavior of many of his Cambridge University peers, and his youthful ambition to be a writer of epic poetry.

During his time as an undergraduate at Cambridge, Milton’s peers gave him the derisive nickname “The Lady of Christ’s College” for both his fair, handsome appearance and, very likely, his choice not to indulge in the sexual escapades “common to the male college student.”<sup>11</sup> Even at an early age, Milton made clear that his moral self-restraint afforded him a genuine freedom that his libertine classmates did not enjoy. In his sixth prolusion, an often-humorous oration to his classmates, likely given in the summer of 1628 before his senior year at Cambridge, the nineteen-year-old Milton turns the tables on his derisive peers to poke fun at both the nickname they have given him and their attachment

to lewd behavior.<sup>12</sup> At one point Milton says, “Some of late called me ‘the Lady.’ But why do I seem to them too little of a man?” The answer, he says, is “perhaps because I never showed my virility in the manner these brothellers do.” Their sexual license, however, is not freedom; rather, Milton suggests, it traps them in the bad character they have formed for themselves, in contrast to the freedom he enjoys in his chastity: “But I wish they could leave playing the ass as readily as I the woman.”<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere in the same speech, Milton argues that those who give themselves over to childish behavior—who fail to practice proper self-governance—lose their ability to be productive persons: “I consider that a man who can be so given up to foolish jests as altogether to neglect for them his serious and really useful work, is incapable of distinguishing himself in either ... serious work [or] ... wit.”<sup>14</sup> According to the young Milton, failure to self-regulate entraps a person to a life of mediocrity or worse.

Milton’s youthful writings also display his belief that an epic poet needs to practice a life of self-denial not necessary for an elegiac poet. Writing, ironically enough, in the elegiac style to his friend Charles Diodati in December 1629, Milton states in his *Elegy 6* that “feasts” and generous use of “aged wine” are the “privilege” of elegiac poets such as Diodati. The epic poet, by contrast, “should live a simple, frugal life,” eating “food that doesn’t upset his system” and drinking “soberly” “the purest of water.”<sup>15</sup> A. S. P. Woodhouse notes that in this Latin verse letter, Milton associates the life of the epic poet with “ascetic discipline” and announces his resolve to practice the requisite “moral and religious preparation for his [poetic] life-work.”<sup>16</sup>

Similar sentiments regarding self-regulation are implicit in Milton’s 1631 companion poems, “*L’Allegro*” (the happy person) and “*Il Penseroso*” (the contemplative or melancholy person). In these poems, Milton’s speakers celebrate, respectively, the carefree, raucous life of “*L’Allegro*” and the contemplative life in “*Il Penseroso*.” In the end, however, the contemplative life wins out, with the pleasures of “*L’Allegro*” being dismissed as “vain deluding joyes” in the opening lines of “*Il Penseroso*,” where Milton’s autobiographical speaker resolves to join with the goddess Melancholy in “calm Peace, and Quiet, / Spare Fast, that oft with gods doth diet, / And hears the Muses in a ring, / Ay round about *Joves* Altar sing” (1, 45–48). Using the pagan “*Jove*” as a metaphor for the Christian God, Milton affirms that such a spare, self-regulating lifestyle will afford the prophet-poet spiritual insight, a lifetime process that will, eventually, “Dissolve me into extasies, / And bring all Heav’n before mine eyes / ... / Till old experience do attain / To something like Prophetic strain” (165–66, 173–74). For the aspiring epic poet, the jollity, merriment, and implicit licentiousness offered in “*L’Allegro*” is declined in favor of a more exalted reward.<sup>17</sup>

Although the pleasures of “L’Allegro” are arguably portrayed with some sympathy and as only potentially dangerous if indulged in to excess, Milton’s 1634 *A Mask Presented at Ludlow-Castle* (often known as and hereafter called *Comus*), portrays a stark contrast between the destructive deceptiveness of license and the virtuous freedom of genuine liberty. *Comus* portrays a virtuous virgin Lady—generally recognized as an idealized autobiographical figure of Milton himself<sup>18</sup>—and her two brothers’ journey to their father’s house through a dark woods, an allegorical journey to God interrupted by the Lady being deceived and captured by the evil demigod Comus, the son of Bacchus and Circe. While he holds her captive, Comus, who desires the Lady to be his queen, tries to seduce her by convincing her to willingly drink from a potion that will transform her into a member of his entourage. Comus’ followers have voluntarily enslaved themselves to Comus because of their failure to restrain their fleshly desires. They drank Comus’ potion because of their “fond [foolish] intemperate thirst” (67), and as a result, “their human count’nance, / Th’ express resemblance of the gods, is change’d / Into som brutish form of Woolf, or Bear, / Or Ounce, or Tiger, Hog, or bearded Goat” (68–71). Like those who, to paraphrase St. Paul, professed themselves wise but became fools,<sup>19</sup> Comus’ transformed followers do not “perceive their foul disfigurement, / But boast themselves more comely then before” (74–75), and choose to live a life in which they “roule with pleasure in a sensual stie” (77). The bestial license that now characterizes Comus’ followers is all the more disquieting because, having originally entered into a lifestyle of hedonism by their own choice, they are now enslaved to such behavior even as they think themselves free. They resemble the immoral man who, in the words of the Lady’s Elder Brother, “Himself is his own dungeon” (385). Significantly, scholars have postulated that Milton based Comus and his followers on his licentious classmates at Cambridge.<sup>20</sup>

Upon his entrance, Comus makes clear his commitment to license as he praises the freedom he and his followers allegedly enjoy. Celebrating the wine-drenched “revelry” (103) of nighttime, Comus proclaims:

Rigor now is gone to bed,  
 And Advice with scrupulous head,  
 Strict Age, and sowre Severity,  
 With their grave Saws in slumber ly.  
 We that are of purer fire  
 Imitate the Starry Quire....  
 Come let us our rights begin,  
 Tis onely day-light that makes Sin.

(107–12, 125–26)

For Comus, liberty is freedom from “Rigor,” scrupulous “advice,” “Strict age,” “sowre Severity,” and the “day-light” that exposes—or, in his words, “makes”—sin. Comus’ celebration of license as liberty is accompanied by his blatant self-deception, proclaiming that he and his entourage “are of purer fire” and “Imitate the Starry Quire,” suggesting that he and his followers are refined and even angelic rather than victims of their own undisciplined self-degradation.

Comus’ self-congratulatory diction is contrasted by the discerning words of the Lady, who, hearing Comus’ band’s revelry, states, “me thought it was the sound / Of Riot, and ill mangag’d Merriment” (171–72), a noise resembling loose persons who praise Pan “In wanton dance . . . / And thank the gods amiss” (176–77). The Lady recognizes the excess of such celebration, but when Comus commands his followers to be silent and hide themselves while he disguises himself as a harmless villager, he deceives and captures the Lady. Significantly, as Rosemund Tuve has observed, at this point of her journey the Lady’s virtue does not give her the ability “to see through to the true nature of that which . . . simply says it is other than it is.”<sup>21</sup>

Despite being captured, the Lady, clad with what her Elder Brother calls the “hidden strength” of “chastity” (418, 420), is able, by means of her commitment to self-regulation and her accompanying ability to distinguish between liberty and license, to resist Comus’ subsequent temptation to drink of his potion. Frozen by Comus’ magic in an enchanted chair, the Lady’s opening words to Comus reveal why he cannot seduce her:

Fool do not boast.  
 Thou canst not touch the freedom of my minde  
 With all thy charms, although this corporal rinde  
 Thou hast immancl’d, while Heav’n sees good.

(662–65)

The freedom of the Lady’s mind—and her accompanying freedom to pursue virtue even while physically entrapped—speaks volumes to Milton’s belief in the virtuous person’s ability to regulate himself. As Louis Schwartz has recently observed, “Comus’ primary interest [is] the Lady’s will.”<sup>22</sup> He desires her to voluntarily exchange her virtue for the pleasure he claims to offer. While Comus continues this temptation, seeking through his rhetoric to convince the Lady that her understanding of goodness, nature, and wisdom are contrary to reality, the Lady stands strong, recognizing him as a “foul deceiver” (696), disdaining his indulgence in “lewdly pamper’d Luxury” (770), berating him for his deception, and resisting him through her powers of self-government:

And wouldst thou seek again to trap me here  
With lickerish baits fit to ensnare a brute?  
Were it a draft for *Juno* when she banquets,  
I would not taste thy treasonous offer; none  
But such as are good men can give good things,  
And that which is not good, is not delicious  
To a wel-govern'd and wise appetite.

(699–706)

Because the Lady is wise, she recognizes Comus for what he is, and because her “appetite” is “wise” and “wel-govern’d,” she remains free, for she is not enticed by the potion which was eagerly drunk by his followers who, as noted earlier, drank it because of their “fond intemperate thirst” (67), thus demonstrating their bondage to license.

Although the Lady successfully resists Comus’ temptation, she must be rescued from Comus by her brothers and is eventually freed from Comus’ enchanted throne by the virgin river goddess Sabrina. Significantly, Sabrina quickly comes to the Lady’s aid because, in her own words, “’tis my office best / To help in-snaresd chastity” (908–9). Sabrina delivers the Lady because of her commitment to assisting virgins in trouble. Indeed, the grace demonstrated by the Christ-like Sabrina<sup>23</sup> can be said to be effected by the Lady’s own virtuous self-government.

The final pages of Milton’s masque reaffirm the victory of self-regulated freedom from vice over and against the license of self-indulgence. When handing over the Lady and her brothers to her parents after the children arrive at their father’s residence, the Attendant Spirit, who orchestrated the Lady’s rescue, sings of the youths’ faithful “triumph . . . / O’re sensual Folly, and Intemperance” (974–75). And in the masque’s final lines, the Attendant Spirit tells the audience:

Mortals that would follow me,  
Love Vertue, she alone is free,  
She can teach ye how to climb  
Higher than the Spheary chime,  
Or if Vertue feeble were,  
Heav’n it self would stoop to her.

(1018–23)

Significantly, the Attendant Spirit proclaims the freedom of “V[i]rtue,” a quality demonstrated throughout the masque by wise self-regulation, and he affirms the notion that virtuous persons in their times of weakness will be aided by heaven itself.

## Milton's Middle Period

Milton's middle period addresses the contrast between liberty and license most explicitly, and his discussion of these matters often concerns the topic of divorce. Having been deserted by his wife, Mary, a month after their May 1642 marriage, Milton began writing a series of tracts advocating the freedom to divorce for reasons of incompatibility. Although Milton was himself accused by his contemporaries of advocating license,<sup>24</sup> and although Milton scholars continue to point out the degree to which Milton's hermeneutic of divorce departs from the plain meaning of Scripture,<sup>25</sup> Milton himself forcefully asserts in his divorce tracts, most prominently in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643, rev. ed. 1644), that he is in fact advocating the proper biblical hermeneutic of charity, promoting liberty against the tyranny of erroneous church custom and canon law, which, Milton argued, wrongly maintained that Jesus had abolished Moses' permission to divorce. Those trapped in unhappy marriages with their ill-matched spouses—whose lives are characterized by “melancholy despair”—are in marriages God never actually ordained.<sup>26</sup>

Significantly, Milton insists that his advocacy of proper freedom to divorce serves to promote virtue because liberating unhappy married persons frees them from despair and to godliness. Milton argues that such persons should be free to divorce so that they can pursue godly Christian lives supported by spouses who will support their pursuit of Christian virtue. Milton is not, he insists, promoting sexual license but rather Christian liberty and the self-government of the individual Christian conscience over and against the interference of the state church and its tyrannical misreading of Scripture. Moreover, Milton argues that those who oppose permitting divorce are actually promoting “dissolute and brutish license” by keeping people in a situation where they, in their marital unhappiness, can be propelled into sexual debauchery or wife beating.<sup>27</sup> In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton writes disparagingly of canon law,

whose boisterous edicts tyrannizing the blessed ordinance of marriage into the quality of a most unnatural and unchristianly yoke, have giv'n the flesh this advantage to hate it, and turn aside, oft times unwillingly, to all dissolute uncleanness, even till punishment it self is weary, and overcome by the incredible frequency of trading lust and uncontroull'd adulteries.

Milton also argues that churches with the “most severe” opposition against divorce are, ironically enough, the “most easie against license.” Along these same lines, Milton argues that some—“men whose creed is custom”—actually prefer tyrannous laws regarding marriage and use such laws as pretext to indulge their

flesh instead of preferring the difficult liberty of pursuing a godly marriage with a godly wife. Such men

wil be still endeavouring to hide the sloth of their own timorous capacities with this pretext, that for all this tis better to endure with patience and silence this affliction which God hath sent.<sup>28</sup>

Milton suggests that for such men, the excuse that they are enduring a difficult marriage can be pretext for adulterous sexual license, a license they excuse because of their ostensible obedience to the tyranny of canon law against divorce.

Predictably, the general contemporary response to Milton's divorce tracts was hostile. However, Milton maintained the rightness of his position and his crusade for what he called in Sonnet 12 ("I did but prompt the age"—written to defend his divorce tracts) "the known rules of antient libertie" (line 2). In this sonnet, Milton explicitly sets up the distinction between liberty and license, opposing both those who wish to continue the legal status quo concerning divorce and those radical sectarians who argued not only for permissive divorce but also for complete sexual permissiveness.<sup>29</sup> Such sexual libertines he calls "Hoggs"

That bawle for freedom in their senceless mood  
And still revolt when truth would set them free.  
License they mean when they cry libertie  
For who loves that, must first be wise and good.

(9–12)

For Milton, those who are "wise and good" are those who exercise a mature Christian conscience through self-regulation, rejecting both the tyranny of custom from without and the tyranny of one's own libido from within. Only such persons can pursue genuine Christian liberty.

Milton's emphasis upon liberty and its relationship to self-government is seen acutely in his 1644 *Areopagitica*, a tract he wrote in response Parliament's June 1643 Licensing Order that banned publication of books or pamphlets not licensed by Parliament. In *Areopagitica*, subtitled *A Speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicensed Publishing*, Milton chafes against the idea that government censors should decide what can and cannot be published, and he again appeals to the ideal of the hard work of self-regulated Christian liberty in favor of his position. Arguing that the mature, discerning Christian can gain wisdom from even "bad" books, Milton quotes St. Paul's declaration that "To the pure, all things are pure."<sup>30</sup> Significantly, Milton in *Areopagitica* fully acknowledges that, as Parliament fears, many people will read bad books for licentious

reasons. Milton is more than willing to accept the moral hazards of such a situation, which, he claims, is in line with God's view of Christian liberty. Even as Adam had freedom to choose right from wrong, Milton argues, so should British citizens. Moreover, "God sure esteems the growth and compleating of one vertuous person, more then the restraint of ten vitious."<sup>31</sup> For Milton, the liberty to pursue self-regulating Christian virtue is worth the inevitable license of what he here suggests is the self-indulgent majority. At the same time, as Blair Hoxby has noted, Milton's insistence that books be published with their authors' and publishers' names, and his belief that anonymously published books deemed "mischievous and libellous" ought be destroyed by "the fire and the executioner," demonstrates his concern that publishing liberties not lead to haphazard license.<sup>32</sup> Milton's preference, however, is that problematic books be judged unworthy by the opinions of a wide body of readers and not the currently employed small group of ignorant censors.

As noted in this essay's introduction, Milton's discussion of liberty, license, and self-regulation is perhaps most acute in his regicide tract, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, written just before the January 30, 1649 execution of King Charles I. In this tract's opening paragraph, Milton asserts, "For indeed none can love freedom heartilie, but good men; the rest love not freedom, but license; which never hath more scope or more indulgence then under Tyrants."<sup>33</sup> According to Milton, "bad men" are "all naturally servile," they desire "to have the public State conformably govern'd to the inward vitious rule, by which they govern themselves," and they "colour over thir base compliances" with "the falsifi'd names of *Loyalty*, and *Obedience*."<sup>34</sup> In sum, Milton argues that tyrants and bad men get along quite well because bad men, loving license, governed by vice, and incapable of self-regulation, do not threaten tyrants but are content to let them rule over them as long as these tyrants do not disturb their self-indulgence. By contrast, tyrants "feare in earnest" those men "in whom vertue and true worth most is eminent."<sup>35</sup> Such virtuous men—the "godly minority" whom Milton represents and exemplifies<sup>36</sup>—are subject to those tyrants' "hatred and suspicion."<sup>37</sup> Self-regulating, virtuous persons constitute a threat to tyrants because, loving liberty and virtue, they recognize that tyrants obstruct the freedom to live according to one's conscience.<sup>38</sup> Significantly, the license Milton warns against most explicitly in *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* is not the obvious fleshly vices but rather the "double tyranny of Custom from without and blind affections from within," both of which cause men to be unreasonably sympathetic toward kings and tempt such men to "be foolishly softn'd from thir duty and perseverance."<sup>39</sup>

Five years later, Milton continued to defend the regicide of Charles in the *Defensio Secunda* (1654), in which he also defends Cromwell's commonwealth

to greater Europe. The tract also addresses both Cromwell and Milton's fellow citizens, urging them to work toward being a nation characterized by the liberty of virtuous self-government. As Laura Lunger Knoppers observes, Milton encourages Cromwell to set up "structures of church and state that would enhance the liberty of the people and foster self-discipline and temperance."<sup>40</sup> As his tract concludes, Milton tells his English countrymen that "to be free is precisely the same as to be pious, wise, just, and temperate, careful of one's property, aloof from another's, and thus finally be magnanimous and brave"; moreover, "to be the opposite to these qualities is the same as to be a slave." Addressing them in the second person, he tells them that those who do not want to fall into slavery must "learn to obey right reason and to master yourselves."<sup>41</sup> Once again, Milton's message is clear: Godly self-regulation brings liberty, whereas license leads to bondage.

Some eleven years after Charles I's execution, with Cromwell having died a year and a half earlier, the Commonwealth of England crumbling, and the Restoration of the British monarchy seeming increasingly likely, Milton published in spring 1660 *The Readie & Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*, his desperate plea to prevent the Restoration of Charles II and to persuade his countrymen that a free commonwealth is the form of government closest to the Christian ideal. In this tract, Milton assumes the posture of an Old Testament prophet, set apart from his people, linking the English to "backsliding Israel," and warning them not to return to a self-inflicted slavery.<sup>42</sup> Throughout this tract, Milton champions the rightness of self-government over and against the danger of monarchical rule and its attendant "regal bondage."<sup>43</sup> Milton's emphasis on self-government is such that a particularly salient passage is worthy to be quoted at length:

The happiness of a nation must needs be firmest and certainest in a full and free Council of thir own electing, where no single person, but reason only swaies. And what madness is it, for them who might manage nobly thir own affairs themselves, sluggishly and weakly to devolve all on a single person ... [who] will not be thir servant, but thir lord? how unmanly must it needs be, to count such a one the breath of our nostrils, to hang all our felicity on him, all our safetie, our well-being, for which if we were aught els but sluggards or babies, we need depend on none but God and our own counsels, our own active vertue and industrie.<sup>44</sup>

The consequence of relying on a king and failing to govern themselves, Milton warns throughout his tract, is the loss of liberty. He states that when any nation that allows "any man to pretend hereditarie right over them as thir lord ... they

conclude themselves his servants and his vassals, and so renounce thir own freedom.”<sup>45</sup>

Not surprisingly, Milton has choice words for those persons who would welcome the Restoration, describing them with images of license. He calls the “infernal pamphlets” of the supporters of Charles II “the spue of every drunkard, every ribald; nameless, yet not for want of license, but for very shame of thir own vile persons, not daring to name themselves.”<sup>46</sup> And Milton expresses disgust toward “the new royaliz’d presbyterians” who, having previously opposed monarchy, now welcome it, forming an unholy alliance with Charles II’s other supporters:

Let our zealous backsliders forethink now with themselves, how thir necks yok’d with these tigers of Bacchus, these new fanatics of not the preaching but the sweating-tub, inspir’d with nothing holier then the Venereal pox, can draw one way under monarchie to the establishing of church discipline with these new-disgorg’d atheisms: yet shall they not have the honor to yoke with these, but shall be yok’d under them; these shall plow on their backs.<sup>47</sup>

Significantly, Milton here pictures the Presbyterian royalists as linking themselves with the licentious and, consequently, becoming, worse than their fellows, their slaves. Deceiving themselves that they retain their virtue and their religion, such dupes will lose their ability to exercise religious liberty, having already thrown away their liberty of virtuous conscience. Milton’s warnings went unheeded. On May 30, 1660, Charles II was restored to the throne.

## Milton’s Later Writings

Milton’s later years were characterized by a retreat from active politics and are remembered for his publication of his three great long poems, *Paradise Lost* (1667, rev. ed. 1674), *Paradise Regained* (1671), and *Samson Agonistes* (1671). His emphasis on the necessity of exercising virtuous self-government to be truly free, and his association between license and the subsequent loss of liberty, were as acute as ever.

Much can be said about Milton’s emphasis in *Paradise Lost* on the necessity of free will for both mankind and angels. But the epic’s most significant exchange regarding matters of liberty, license, and self-regulation occurs in the confrontations between Satan and the angel Abdiel—loyal to God and generally interpreted as a character with whom Milton specifically identified—at the beginning of Satan’s rebellion against God, a rebellion prompted by Satan’s indignation against God the Father’s exaltation of his Son and his command that the angels worship him.

Satan's rebellious speech to his followers is attractive in its rhetoric, not the least because his words ironically reflect some of the arguments of Milton's own earlier writings against kingship.<sup>48</sup> However, Satan's dispute against God's kingship and his disgust at the Son's exaltation must be read in light of Milton's reference, in *The Readie and Easie Way*, to Jesus—the very Son of God whose kingship Satan rejects—as “our true and rightfull and only to be expected King.”<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, Milton supports monarchy though only the monarchy of God. Those who would set themselves up as kings over their equals—be they Charles II or Satan—must be opposed.

In his second altercation with Abdiel, Satan mocks the loyal angel, seeking to turn on its head the Miltonic distinction between liberty and license, suggesting that those who join his rebellion against God are supporters of “Liberty” (6.164), and calling the angels who remain loyal to God those who

through sloth had rather serve,  
Minist'ring Spirits, train'd up in Feast and Song;  
Such hast thou arm'd, the Minstrelie of Heav'n  
Servility with freedom to contend.

(6.166–69)

Significantly, Satan here describes the loyal angels with various characteristics of license, including “sloth” and the self-indulgence implied in their participation in “Feast and Song.” Presenting a picture of license similar to that which Milton presents in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, Satan argues that those who maintain “Servility” to a tyrannous monarch do so for its ease.

Abdiel's response turns the tables on Satan, distinguishing between legitimate service to God and servitude to an unworthy ruler:

Apostat, still thou errst, nor end wilt find  
Of erring, from the path of truth remote:  
Unjustly thou deprav'st it with the name  
Of *Servitude* to serve whom God ordains,  
Or Nature; God and Nature bid the same,  
When he who rules is worthiest, and excels  
Them whom he governs. This is servitude,  
To serve th' unwise, or him who hath rebelld  
Against his worthier, as thine now serve thee,  
Thy self not free, but to thyself enthral'd;  
Yet leudly dar'st our ministring upbraid.

(6.172–82)

Abdiel's implication is clear: True liberty, not servitude, comes from serving the true God, whereas servitude is to serve the unworthy ruler. Satan's lack of true freedom is accompanied both by Satan's license and his failure, for all his show of liberty, to govern himself rightly. With relation to God, the best self-governance is willing obedience to God, as Abdiel himself exemplifies. Satan is "not free" because he exemplifies "servility to a wicked self";<sup>50</sup> he is "to [him]self enthrall'd," and, consequently, he shall be bound by "Chains in Hell" (6.186). Moreover, the license in which Satan indulges is, in addition to his blatant disdain for the law of God, characterized, Abdiel insinuates, by licentiousness, as Abdiel's adverb "leudly" suggests. Indeed, Satan's rebellion is accompanied by sexual license, a fact that readers learn in book 2 when we meet the character Sin, a once-beautiful angelic figure who, we are told, sprung forth fully grown from Satan's head while he was first conceiving his rebellion against God. Sin reminds Satan that "Thy self in me thy perfect image viewing / Becam'st enamour'd, and such joy thou took'st / With me in secret, that my womb conceiv'd" (764–66). For Satan, sexual license and the rebellion against God's law that effects self-enslavement occur simultaneously.

The connection among license, the failure to govern oneself, and the loss of liberty for the human race as a whole is shown explicitly in the final book of *Paradise Lost*. There, the fallen but now repentant Adam is instructed by the archangel Michael concerning the future of the human race. In a passage particularly germane to this study, Michael speaks to Adam concerning the tyrant Nimrod, who presided over the building of the Tower of Babel and who worked "to subdue / Rational Liberty" in men (12.81–82). Michael tells Adam:

Since thy original lapse, true Libertie  
Is lost, which alwayes with right Reason dwells  
Twinn'd, and from her hath no diuidual being:  
Reason in man obscur'd, or not obey'd,  
Immediately inordinate desires  
And upstart Passions catch the Government  
From Reason, and to servitude reduce  
Man till then free. Therefore since hee permits  
Within himself unworthie Powers to reign  
Over free Reason, God in Judgement just  
Subjects him from without to violent Lords;  
Who oft as undeservedly enthrall  
His outward freedom: Tyrannie must be,  
Though to the Tyrant thereby no excuse.  
Yet sometimes Nations will decline so low  
From vertue, which is reason, that no wrong,

But Justice, and some fatal curse annex  
Deprives them of thir outward libertie,  
Thir inward lost.

(12.83–101)

In this crucial passage, Michael notes that reason and liberty, inextricably joined, are both lost when men give themselves over to license, being ruled by their passions instead of by wise and virtuous self-government. The inevitable result of the failure to self-govern is to be subjected to tyranny, something that, Milton suggests, is the deserved state for those who exchange liberty for license.

This idea that those who fail to self-govern through wise virtue will be subjected to tyranny is seen again in *Paradise Regained* (1671), Milton's poetic retelling of Satan's tempting of Jesus in the desert as recorded in Luke 4:1–13. Late in this brief epic, Satan exhorts Jesus—usually called “the Son” in the poem—to free the Romans from the “servile yoke” (4.102) of the vile emperor Tiberius Caesar and to, with Satan's help, rule them himself. But the Son refuses, stating that God did not send him

to free  
That people victor once, now vile and base,  
Deservedly made vassal, who once just,  
Frugal, and mild, and temperate, conquer'd well,  
But govern ill the Nations under yoke,  
Peeling thir Provinces, exhausted all  
By lust and rapine; first ambitious grown  
Of triumph that insulting vanity;  
Then cruel, by thir sports to blood enur'd  
Of fighting beasts, and men to beasts expos'd,  
Luxurious by thir wealth, and greedier still,  
And from the daily Scene effeminate.  
What wise and valiant man would seek to free  
These thus degenerate, by themselves enslav'd,  
Or could of inward slaves make outward free?

(4.131–45)

Here the Son—another character with whom Milton strongly identified<sup>51</sup>—makes clear that the various fleshly indulgences of the Roman empire brought about their subjection to a tyrannical ruler, the deserved result for exchanging liberty for license. There is obvious irony that the Romans, having become lascivious themselves, are subject to the “lawless Tiberius,” an “infamous sexual libertine.”<sup>52</sup> Having rejected the virtuous self-governing that characterized the Roman

Republic, the Romans are now unfit for liberty, and the Son recognizes the illogicality of attempting to free from without those who, like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, are enslaved to themselves.

By contrast, the Son of *Paradise Regained* is free to resist Satan's tyranny because he is himself the ultimate model of virtuous self-rule, exemplifying the principle of self-government he describes as he rejects one of Satan's fleshly temptations: "Yet he who reigns within himself, and rules / Passions, Desires, and Fears, is more [than] a King" (2.466–67). The Son goes on to describe the absurdity of one who aspires to rule over others even as he is "Subject himself to Anarchy within, / Or lawless passions in him which he serves" (2.471–72). Even as the Son is portrayed as the exemplar of faith and self-control, Milton suggests that those who trust, obey, and imitate him will know true liberty.

If the Son in *Paradise Regained* represents Milton's ideal of the liberty of virtuous self-rule, then Samson of *Samson Agonistes* (1671), Milton's final great work, published in the same volume with *Paradise Regained*, represents the man who falls into license, suffers the consequent enslavement, and repents through a renewed obedience to God manifested in virtuous self-government.<sup>53</sup> Significantly, Samson has been called the most autobiographical of Milton's many autobiographical characters.<sup>54</sup> Early in the drama, Samson, blind and prisoner to the Philistines, laments that his fellow Israelites failed to support him as their divinely chosen liberator, fearing reprisals from the Philistines more than they desired freedom from them. Samson classifies Israel with those

Nations grown corrupt  
And by thir vices brought to servitude,  
Than to love Bondage more than Liberty,  
Bondage with ease then strenuous liberty.

(268–71)

Samson here describes the Israelites with language similar to Milton's own description in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* of those who prefer license—and servitude to tyrants—to liberty. It is significant that Samson's description of the Israelites closely resembles the Son's above description of the Romans under Tiberius.

Samson also acknowledges that his own imprisonment is the result of his own fall into license, specifically the uxoriousness brought about by his unlawful marriage to the Philistine Dalila.<sup>55</sup> He laments and chastises himself that he succumbed to Dalila's repeated requests that he reveal to her the secret of his strength, recognizing with grief that his failure was directly brought about by his own sensual indulgence:

I yielded, and unlock'd her all my heart,  
Who with a grain of manhood well resolv'd  
Might easily have shook off all her snares;  
But foul effeminacy held me yok't  
Her Bond-slave; O indignity, O blot  
To Honor and Religion! servil mind  
Rewarded well with servil punishment!  
The base degree to which I now am fall'n,  
These rags, this grinding, is not yet so base  
As was my former servitude, ignoble,  
Unmanly, ignominious, infamous,  
True slavery, and that blindness worse then this,  
That saw not how degeneratly I serv'd.

(407–19)

If Samson's previous description of his fellow Israelites resembled Milton's critique of his countrymen in *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, then Samson's description of his relation to Dalila resembles even more closely the Son's aforementioned description of the effeminate, self-enslaved, and justly tyrannized Romans. Indeed, Samson admits that his own love of pleasure held him captive before the Philistines ever did, and he recognizes that his self-inflicted sensual bondage to Dalila was more degrading than his current imprisonment, in which he grinds for the Philistines.

It is Samson's recognition that the prison of sensual license is worse than the prison he currently endures that enables him to gain liberty by the drama's end. Significantly, Samson's final triumph of destroying Dagon's temple is preceded by his resisting Dalila's offer that she appeal to the Philistine leaders to allow her to take the blinded Samson from prison to her home, where she says she could care for him "in leisure and domestic ease / ... where my redoubl'd love and care / With nursing diligence ... / May ever tend about thee to old age" (917, 922–24). Dalila desires, as she noted earlier in their conversation, to "enjoy thee [Samson] day and night / Mine and Loves prisoner" (807–8). But Samson recognizes that to accept Dalila's offer would be to move backward into greater bondage. He tells Dalila, "This Gaol I count the house of Liberty" (949) compared to her home of sensual pleasure. He understands that to "live uxorious to thy [Dalila's] will / In perfet thralldom" (945–46) would degrade him far worse than his current imprisoned state in which, he notes elsewhere, he at least engages in "labour / Honest" (1365–66).

Samson's rejection of Dalila's offer of the easy bondage of license is an act of righteous self-government that coincides with his renewed dedication and

obedience to the Mosaic Law. This obedience, as I have written elsewhere, enables Samson to once again discern rightly the “rousing motions” of God’s Spirit (1382), motions that lead him to destroy Dagon’s temple and his Philistine enemies.<sup>56</sup> Significantly, Samson suggests early in the play that, in his original justification for why he unlawfully married the Philistine Dalila, he mistook his own libidinous urges for her as tantamount to the “intimate impulse” from God (223) that led him to marry his first wife, the unnamed woman of Timna. Although Samson was obeying the Spirit in the case of his marriage to the woman of Timna, in the case of Dalila, Samson’s unlawful sexual license prompted him to conflate his sexual urges and the promptings of the Spirit and to violate the Law of God by marrying Dalila.<sup>57</sup> Even so, Samson’s aforementioned rejection of sexual license is accompanied by his rededication to obeying the Law, an obedience that once again makes him a fit vessel for the workings of God’s Spirit and the divine promptings that lead him to wreak God’s judgment upon the Philistines.

Although many contemporary readers are highly uncomfortable with and even disgusted by Samson’s violent final act,<sup>58</sup> we may recognize, without endorsing vigilantism, that Samson’s successful acts of self-government merit thoughtful application to our present individual and corporate Western situations. First, Milton’s Samson suggests that the mistakes of licentious choice can be redeemed through a renewed commitment to the liberty of virtuous self-rule. Second, he suggests that virtuous self-government is possible and profitable in spite of the general lack of such self-government in one’s surrounding environment. Finally, he suggests that individual virtuous self-government can have positive ramifications for the larger society, indeed, for the nation as a whole.

As I noted in my opening paragraph, the ideal of self-governance remains a popular dimension of the American psyche. But the idea that the freedom of self-governance must be based on virtue now seems largely quaint, and one may reasonably ask if Americans desire not liberty but rather license. It is perhaps disquieting that Rasmussen’s *In Search of Self-Governance* contains numerous railings against the government status quo and the manipulations of the political class but not a single admonition that Americans practice virtue—quite a departure from the belief articulated by American founders such as John Adams that liberty and self-government were dependent upon virtue. From Milton’s perspective, freedom from governmental tyranny was predicated on freedom from the licentious self, even as usurpation of one’s rational virtue by self-gratifying license was the prelude to tyrannical outside rule, a view Milton held consistently throughout his life. Indeed, writing the year before his death in his final prose tract, *Of True Religion* (1673), Milton warned explicitly that England was at risk of falling under the judgment of God through a return to what Milton called “Popish Thralldom”

and its accompanying tyrannous government. This risk, Milton argued, was due in no small part to the moral license so prevalent in the nation: "Pride, Luxury, Drunkenness, Whoredom, Cursing, Swearing, bold and open Atheism," Milton wrote, were "every where abounding." His final admonition to his countrymen to avoid such judgment was straightforward: "amend our lives with all speed."<sup>59</sup>

## Notes

- \* I would like to thank Calvin College, whose Calvin Research Fellowship enabled me to write this essay. Thanks also to the reviewers and editors of the *Journal of Markets & Morality* for their careful readings of earlier drafts of this article.
1. Scott W. Rasmussen, *In Search of Self-Governance* (Asbury Park: Rasmussen Reports, 2009).
  2. John Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Little, Brown, 1854), 9.401. Online Library of Liberty, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/adams-the-works-of-john-adams-vol-9-letters-and-state-papers-1799-1811>.
  3. Edmund Burke, "A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly," in *Further Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Daniel B. Ritchie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1992), 69. Very recently Yuval Levin, *The Great Debate: Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, and the Birth of Right and Left* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), has contrasted Burke's and Paine's respective political philosophies in a way that is somewhat analogous to the distinction between liberty and license in the present study.
  4. John Milton, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, in *The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 1057. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Milton's writings will be from *The Riverside Milton*. Line numbers for all quotations of Milton's English poetry are cited inside my text.
  5. "License," definitions 3a and 3b in *The Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000–).
  6. Throughout this study, I will employ the terms "self-government," "self-governance," "self-regulation," and "self-rule" more or less interchangeably.
  7. Although much has been published concerning various perspectives on Milton and liberty, I am not aware of any study that emphasizes the present subject of liberty, license, and self-government. Important studies on Milton and liberty include the following: Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1977), argues for Milton's political and religious radicalism; Joan Bennett, *Reviving Liberty: Radical Christian Humanism in Milton's Great Poems* (Cambridge:

Harvard University Press, 1989), emphasizes what Bennett considers to be Milton's radical Christian humanism; *Milton and Republicanism*, ed. David Armitage, Armand Himy, and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), examines "Milton's republicanism in the context of the European republican tradition and in the political and literary circumstance of Interregnum England" (frontpiece); *Milton and the Terms of Liberty* (Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2002), ed. Graham Parry and Joad Raymond, a collection of essays which emphasizes liberty in terms of Milton's political thought; Walter S. H. Lim, *John Milton, Radical Politics, and Biblical Republicanism* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006), which emphasizes the role of "scriptural paradigms" in "the shaping of Milton's republican vision" (15); Benjamin Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2006), focuses on Milton's theology of free will; George B. Martin, "Authority, Liberty, and Responsibility in Milton's *Paradise Lost*," in *The Inner Vision: Liberty and Literature*, ed. Edward B. McLean (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006), 1–12, also emphasizes Milton's theology of free will, targeting a general audience; *Milton, Rights and Liberties*, ed. Christopher Tournu and Neil Forsyth (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), is an eclectic collection of essays that addresses Milton and liberty from various perspectives; Barbara K. Lewalski, "Milton on Liberty, Servility, and the Paradise Within," in *Milton, Rights, and Liberties*, 31–53, is particularly germane to the present study; Elizabeth Sauer, "Radical Politics and Milton's Civil War Verse: 'License' and 'Libertie,'" in *Approaches to Teaching Milton's Shorter Poetry and Prose*, ed. Peter C. Herman (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2007), 97–102, addresses matters of liberty and license in Milton's sonnets 11 and 12 in the context of his contemporaneous prose tracts; John Witte Jr., "Prophets, Priests, and Kings of Liberty: John Milton and the Reformation of Rights and Liberties in England," *Emory Law Journal* 57 (2008): 1527–1604, addresses Milton's views on religious and civil liberties, which were often in conflict with the Church of England; Warren Chernaik, "Areopagitica: 'The Known Rules of Antient Libertie,'" *The European Legacy* (2012): 317–31, examines Milton's conflation of classical and biblical allusions in his prose tract on freedom of the press, noting the tract's Christianized classical republicanism.

8. M. Tullius Cicero, "On His House" 51.131, in *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, trans. C. D. Yonge (London: George Bell & Sons, 1891); Titus Livius, *The History of Rome*, vol. 1, 3.37, Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library. Both these references are noted in A. S. P. Woodhouse and Douglas Bush, *A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*, vol. 2: *The Minor English Poems*, part 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 397. Cicero's Latin is quoted from this source.
9. Milton's authorship of *De Doctrina Christiana* has been disputed, most fully by William B. Hunter, *Visitation Unimplor'd: Milton and the Authorship of "De Doctrina Christiana"* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998). Hunter's position was

never accepted by the majority of Milton scholars, and the recent efforts of Gordon Campbell, Thomas N. Corns, John K. Hale, and Fiona J. Tweedie, *Milton and the Manuscript of "De Doctrina Christiana"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), has for most scholars solidified the treatise's place in Milton's canon, although some dissention persists.

10. John Milton, *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 6: *Christian Doctrine*, trans. John Carey, ed. Maurice Kelley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 537.
11. John T. Shawcross, *John Milton: The Self and the World* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 3.
12. For a fuller discussion of Milton's sixth Prolusion and its satire of his classmates and his own nickname, see Michael Lieb, *Milton and the Culture of Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 86–99.
13. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 865.
14. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 863.
15. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 197.
16. A. S. P. Woodhouse, unpublished notes, quoted in Douglas Bush, *A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*, vol. 1, *The Latin and Greek Poems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 113.
17. Gretchen Ludke Finney, *Musical Backgrounds for English Literature: 1580–1650* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962), 166–67, notes that the spiritual ecstasies Milton's autobiographical speaker here celebrates are devoid of "the eroticism implicit" (166) in the celebration of religious love offered by various of Milton's Renaissance predecessors.
18. See, for example, Hanford, *John Milton, Englishman* (New York: Crown, 1949), 63; William Kerrigan, "Gender Confusion in Milton and Everyone Else," *Hellas* 2 (1992): 206; Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton's Peculiar Grace: Self-Representation and Authority* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 63. For a recent and well-developed discussion of Milton's autobiographical connection with the Lady of Comus, see William Shullenberger, *Lady in the Labyrinth: Milton's "Comus" as Initiation* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), 203–25.
19. See Romans 1:22 KJV: "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."
20. See Hanford, *John Milton, Englishman*, 63; and Lieb, *Milton and the Culture of Violence*, 99.
21. Rosemund Tuve, *Images and Themes in Five Poems by Milton* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1957), 128.

22. Louis Schwartz, *Milton and Maternal Mortality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 143.
23. Catherine I. Cox, "The Garden Within: Milton's Ludlow Masque and the Tradition of Canticles," *Milton Studies* 31 (1995): 36, discusses the analogy between Sabrina and Christ.
24. See William Prynne, *Twelve Considerable Serious Questions* (pub. 1644), in *The Divorce Tracts of John Milton: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Sara van den Berg and W. Scott Howard (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2010), 394–95; Herbert Palmer, *The Glasse of Gods Providence* (pub. 1644), in *The Divorce Tracts of John Milton*, 398; and Daniel Fealty, *The Dippers Dipt* (pub. 1645), in *The Divorce Tracts of John Milton*, 450.
25. See, for example, Arthur E. Barker, *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1942), 71; Stanley Fish, *How Milton Works* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2001), 236–37; and David V. Urban, "'Out of His Treasure Things New and Old': Milton's Parabolic Householder in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* and *De Doctrina Christiana*," in *Milton's Legacy*, ed. Kristin A. Pruitt and Charles W. Durham (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2005), 213.
26. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 941.
27. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 975. Paul Sellin, in "Lieuwe van Aitzema and John Milton's *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*: The Marquette Case," forthcoming in *Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies* (2014), suggests that Milton's phrase "brutish license" refers to spousal abuse.
28. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 970.
29. A. S. P. Woodhouse and Douglas Bush, *A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*, vol. 2: *The Minor English Poems*, pt. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 395–96. For a detailed discussion of how in Sonnet 12 Milton portrays his opponents as sexual libertines, see Karl P. Wentersdorf, "Images of 'License' in Milton's *Sonnet XII*," *Milton Quarterly* 26 (1992): 26–42.
30. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 1005; Titus 1:15.
31. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 1010.
32. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 1023. See Blair Hoxby, "Areopagitica and Liberty," in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, ed. Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 234–35.
33. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 1057.
34. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 1057, 1058.
35. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 1057–58.

36. Fallon, *Milton's Peculiar Grace*, 153.
37. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 1058.
38. Stephen M. Fallon, "'The Strangest Piece of Reason': Milton's *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, ed. Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), emphasizing the role of reason in self-government, discusses Milton's rejection of tyrants in the context of his broader rejection, on behalf of self-governing men, of human kings and their laws: "Those who are governed by reason do not need to be constrained by kings and magistrates" (250). I believe that Fallon overstates Milton's position, however, when he says that, for Milton, "There is no place for inherited or communal laws in the self-government of rational men" (250).
39. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 1057, 1059.
40. Laura Lunger Knoppers, "Consuming Nations: Milton and Luxury," in *Early Modern Nationalism and Milton's England*, ed. David Loewenstein and Paul Stevens (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 337.
41. John Milton, *Defensio Secunda*, in *The Complete Prose Works*, vol. 4, pt. 2, trans. Helen North, ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 684.
42. Laura Lunger Knoppers, "Milton's *The Readie and Easie Way* and the English Jeremiad," in *Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton's Prose*, ed. David Loewenstein and James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 217.
43. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 1136.
44. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 1139.
45. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 1140.
46. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 1145.
47. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 1145–46.
48. See *Paradise Lost* 5.772–802.
49. John Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 1143.
50. Barbara K. Lewalski, "Milton on Liberty, Servility, and the Paradise Within," in *Milton, Rights, and Liberties*, ed. Christophe Tournu and Neil Forsythe (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 47.
51. Critics who have identified the Son in *Paradise Regained* with Milton include Hanford, *John Milton, Englishman*, 17, 201; Flannagan, *The Riverside Milton*, 711; and Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 511.

52. Walter S. H. Lim, *John Milton, Radical Politics, and Biblical Republicanism* (Newark: Delaware University Press, 2006), 139.
53. Fallon, *Milton's Peculiar Grace*, suggests that the Son in *Paradise Regained* represents Milton's ideal self-representation whereas Samson depicts "a darker side of Milton's self-conception and self-representation" (250).
54. A. L. Rowse, *Milton the Puritan: Portrait of a Mind* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 255, makes this specific claim.
55. Catherine Gimelli Martin, "Dalila, Misogyny, and Milton's Christian Liberty of Divorce," in *Milton and Gender*, ed. Catherine Gimelli Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 53–74, argues that Samson and Dalila's marriage falls under the classification of an "unfit marriage" as described in Milton's *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*.
56. David V. Urban, "'Intimate Impulses,' 'Rousing Motions,' and the Written Law: Internal and External Scripture in *Samson Agonistes*," in *Uncircumscribed Mind: Reading Milton Deeply*, ed. Charles W. Durham and Kristin A. Pruitt (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2008), 292–306.
57. Some Milton scholars, including John T. Shawcross, *The Uncertain World of "Samson Agonistes"* (Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 8, 83, have argued that Samson's impulse to marry the woman at Timna is also simply a sexual urge. But as Tobias Gregory, "The Political Messages of *Samson Agonistes*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 50, no. 1 (2010): 179–80, wisely notes, Scripture itself in Judges 14:4 backs up the argument that Samson's prompting to marry his first wife was indeed from God.
58. John Carey, "A Work in Praise of Terrorism? September 11 and *Samson Agonistes*," *Times Literary Supplement* (September 6, 2002), 15–16, is perhaps the best-known example of this position.
59. Milton, *The Riverside Milton*, 1151, 1155.