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The Value of What We Owe God

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The Value of What We Owe God

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John Milton | *Paradise Lost*

In this elaborated re-telling of the biblical beginning of the human race, Milton gives a glimpse of what God expects from mankind through his condemnation of Adam and Eve's first sin. Yet in his examination of this sin, Milton distorts the ignorant state in which it was committed.

Central Aim

To use Aristotle's definition of vice committed in a state of ignorance to appraise Milton's judgment of humanity's first sin, in order to examine what humans owe God and how it is valued.

Evaluation

Adam and Eve had full knowledge of the consequences of God's command to not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – certain death. Yet not only were they unaware of *why* they ought not touch the tree, they also lacked the capacity to fully distinguish good from evil. Their action, viewed by God as sin, was not accompanied by circumstantial awareness, and thus does not qualify as vice under Aristotle's definition.

Implications

God asks that we use our reason to determine how we can live in obedience, even if we cannot always comprehend why the obedient action is the good one. This expectation of humanity may be somewhat ambiguous, but it is not reasonless, nor is it commandeering. Although it may be accompanied by some form of naiveté or maybe something some would call faith, I posit that it is aimed at our moral growth.

References

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by David Ross. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*.
https://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/p1/book_10/text.shtml.



Aristotle | *Nicomachean Ethics*

Ignorant actions driven by principles or passions are not vices, if they are committed without full circumstantial or consequential knowledge. Aristotle's two important qualifications for ignorance: *unawareness of circumstances and unawareness of consequences*.