

# Book VIII

## Adam's questions on astronomy and Eve's departure

- ll.5-38 = “why does the sun apparently revolve around the earth, his apparent ‘inferior’?” Milton’s stately and prolix style weights down these books of exposition.
- Eve departs, though “not, as not with such discourse delighted.”
  - She calls forth a counter-factual desire, at 63, a kind of dissatisfaction. Not unlike later moment when Adam tries to retain Raphael, at 206ff.
  - She is also not uninterested; cf. her earlier question re the stars, 657-58. what is the purpose of lights which are unregarded by humans?
  - Astronomy in particular place where A and E ask questions about the larger order of the universe and their place in it.
  - Because the sun and moon are “gendered” – “these two great sexes animate the world” (151) – R’s discussion at 90 ff (“Great or Bright infers not Excellence”) maps potentially onto how we understand men and women in the poem.
- Raphael refuses to answer the question conclusively, though he advances a number of hypothesis – these are “matters hid”. At 172ff, he suggests that Adam concern himself with more “lowly” wisdom, more relevant to his own being; Adam replies by praising the “easiest way” R has taught him to live.
  - Is R significantly limiting human knowledge and desire to know?
  - Has Adam heard him correctly, is the point to avoid intricacy and perplexing thoughts, and if so why?
  - “Wand’ring thoughts” may bring care (not sin). Note here what Adam says re the “unchecked” roving of the Fancy; cp. Milton’s fear of falling from his winged steed “erroneous ... to wander and forlorn” (VII 19-20). Imagination has its dangers as well as its pleasures; recall here Adam’s explanation to Eve of her troubling dream at V 100-13. When Reason – the governing faculty -- sleeps, Fancy wakes to do “wild work”. Eve’s dream is of waking while Adam sleeps, without him there to restrain her flight, her appetite, her primary reign. (Adam also sees Eve’s creation through “the Cell of Fancy” at 460).
  - “That which before us lies in daily life, is the prime Wisdom”. Do we agree? Agree in this case?

## Adam's memories of creation.

- His motion is to spring up, rather than to lie down, and to look around him. Compare with Eve – Adam too looks at himself 267. But then uses logic to deduce existence of God. Then again lies down and seems to dissolve (rather than contemplative lying down of Eve). Interesting that in his dream of God he remembers how the fruit tempted his appetite to eat – it’s this appetite which wakes him.
- For Adam, a Guide appears, and immediately gives him the one command – it’s the first thing he hears.

- Adam addresses God concerning his loneliness and desire, his defectiveness. “I need an equal.” God, effectively, tests his understanding by disagreeing with him – Adam uses this freedom (434) to disagree and finds that his disagreement wins both God’s approval and also the fulfillment of his heart’s desire.
- Is this interchange potentially misleading? Does God want our disagreement, our kicking against the pricks? Is our reason or desire a trustworthy guide to God’s *real* intent, since we’re advertised here that he may conceal the real nature of what he intends just in order to see if (as with the shape of the universe) we can figure it out?

### **The advent of Eve**

- Adam believes that Eve held back because she wanted to be wooed, knew her own worth and wished it acknowledged (502) – we know that in fact she turned from him because she didn’t want him. (And she has told him this story).
- Adam tells Raphael that with Eve, he is “transported”. This is a dangerous word, a word about movement. (III, 80 “See what rage transports our adversary”) – these sensations change me, I am altered, weak.
- Perhaps Eve is too beautiful, 538: recall “Great or bright infers not excellent”.
- The problem: Eve seems absolute, intended first, rather than “after made occasionally”.
- Raphael: be sure to evaluate correctly and to govern your self and her.
- Adam: it’s not sex and beauty I’m talking about, but the “thousand decencies” of every day – moreover, though I may experience commotion, I am still capable of knowing and doing correctly.