



ARTS



Dear Reader:

Litterātus is the official journal of the Howard Thurman Honors Program at Morehouse College. The 2021 issue of Litterātus is a compilation of insightful academic, literary, and creative works by Howard Thurman Honors Scholars.

I hope that you will enjoy the vision and perspectives of our intellectually and artistically gifted students.

Best Wishes,

Leah Creque, Ph.D.  
Director of the Howard Thurman Honors Program  
Professor of English

## **COVER PAGE**

### **THE NUCLEAR FAMILY**

Fidel Davis

## **DIRECTOR'S NOTE**

## **CONTENTS**

### **LETTER FROM THE EDITOR**

Artimus Cunningham

## **BEGINNING**

### **IS IT MORNING OR MOURNING IN AMERICA?**

Alexander Walton

### **A CANDID CONVERSATION WITH MY ANCESTOR**

Cameron Markell Nolan

### **COMPARTMENTALIZATION OF ONE'S IDENTITY**

Christian Terry-Taylor

### **TO BE YOUNG, GIFTED, AND BLACK**

George Pratt

### **THE MEANING OF MANHOOD**

Jaeden Johnson

## **WOMEN**

### **PURPLE PASSION**

Kamahl Grant

### **DAY AND NIGHT**

Kamahl Grant

### **A THOUGHT: WOMEN**

Amietee Fuondjing

### **BLUSH**

Kamahl Grant

### **AMOUR**

Kamahl Grant

## **MEDITATION**

### **OLD LOVE**

Christian Terry-Taylor

### **A THOUGHT: DEATH**

Amietee Fuondjing

### **A THOUGHT: SOLITUDE**

Amietee Fuondjing

### **ALKEBULAN STILL LIFE**

Kyle Walker

## **SPIRITUALITY**

### **DESIGN ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD**

Johari Dean-Lindsey

### **A THOUGHT: ADAM AND EVE**

Amietee Fuondjing

### **ROYALTY**

Kamahl Grant

### **THE PROGENITOR OF DECEPTION**

Artimus Cunningham

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This year's edition of the *Litterātus* is an invitation to hear the voices of the Howard Thurman Honors Program student body in conversation. In this issue we celebrate the voices of these young black men as they grapple in conversation the themes of: Beginning, Women, Meditation, and Spirituality. For many years, the *Litterātus* has been a beacon of light, highlighting the literary and creative genius of our students. This year, we are honored to amplify the reach and exposure of our student body by presenting the 2020-2021 edition of the *Litterātus* in digital form.

It has been a long journey, but I am honored to work with such a dedicated and talented group that has committed themselves to restoring and continuing this staple tradition of the Honors Program at Morehouse College. We spent many days reading submitted works to present the issue you see before your eyes. The respect I have for my fellow contributors and their love of images, words, and literature, so clearly conveyed in these pages, is indeed deep. Our themes arose naturally as the submitting artists used their voices to enter conversations about themselves, others, and the world around them. This past year has undoubtedly been the catalyst for many necessary conversations and these young men have committed themselves to using their creative voices to speak truth to power.

As you read, I am sure you will see the power of the creative mind as these students grapple with their unique position and situation in the world. The *Litterātus* is our signature publication, and we are overjoyed to present its return. May you be empowered and inspired to continue the conversation in your own special way just as these brilliant young men have done.

Yours in Service,

Artimus Cunningham '21  
Editor-in-Chief

**BEGINNING**

## **Is it Mourning or Morning in America?**

Alexander Walton '23

My brothers, it was only a few days ago that we celebrated the life and work of our greatest alumnus, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Like many of you, I scrolled Instagram and Twitter, and was happy to see that many seemed to be observing the holiday, at least perfunctorily, in a way I had not observed in years prior. However, I noticed that most of the quotes of those I follow, from former Presidents to my past AAU teammates were taken from King's "I Have A Dream" speech, and his "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

It is to the credit of our excellent philosophy department that my first thoughts went instead to a sermon delivered by King at Ebenezer Baptist Church titled, "The American Dream." I feel that this sermon is especially relevant to today's topic. In this piece, King reflects on what he calls the "schizophrenic" strain in American society, and what is the needed response from contemporary Americans. It was King's observation, one with which I strongly agree, that America was founded upon the theological belief in the Imago Dei, that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, that all human beings are of intrinsic and equivalent moral worth, and that all laws should be passed to complement the flourishing and personality of all human beings. In addition, any law which degrades the personality of a human being is an unjust law.

The American regime has both affirmed the dignity of human beings through constitutional amendments and Civil Rights Acts, and denied it, through Slavery, Jim Crow, and all other forms of unjust discrimination. This schizophrenic strain is highly distressing to those who share King's concern for the disinherited and downtrodden, and those within America who wish for it to fulfill its creed and become the great country it is meant to be. It is my belief that this schizophrenic nature leads to two discrete emotions when people view the American regime; expressions of optimism analogous to a sun rising, representing 'morning' in America, or a feeling of overwhelming despair and frustration, a dark emotion of grief that gives one a feeling of 'mourning' in America.

When the question is put to me, what is the best summation of our American story, I

would turn to those great words found in the Negro spiritual of our ancestors:

Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around  
Turn me around, turn me around  
Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around

I'm gonna keep on a-walkin',  
keep on a-talkin'  
Marchin' down to freedom land

The progress of all classes of people who have been denied the full personality of humanity in the American regime has been secured through their belief in the American dream, made possible by the emphasis on human equality in the Declaration of Independence. The American regime created a context in which even those who were the most reviled could assert their rights since our rights do not come from the government, do not come from our fellow citizens, and do not come from the constitution. Our rights come from God, and because of that no human power can take them away.

My brothers, the progress of our ancestors is the result of endless toil and constant vigilance, of an indefatigable disposition that has made our modern celebration of equality possible. In short, it is morning in America because of our continued belief in the American project, which is itself a product of providence.

*(This speech won first place in the 2021 Otis Moss Jr. '56 and Otis Moss III '92 Oratorical Contest)*



## A CANDID CONVERSATION WITH MY ANCESTOR

Cameron Markell Nolan '21

One day I had a candid conversation with my ancestor. She was battered and bruised, but more so confused as to why I was smiling. She told me that my greatest sin to this earth will be that I am the light of the world, and I refuse to shine it. She then asked me, "What is the wealthiest piece of real estate in the world?"

I responded casually and said it must be somewhere where they drilled oil.

She laughed in my face and said, "The wealthiest piece of real estate is a cemetery. The number of books, inventions, and ideas that people could have created would have changed the world, yet all those fantasies are six feet deep."

She told me, "It's nothing new under the sun, son. Constitutional slavery ended four hundred years ago, and yet, here you are, the new slave. I picked the cotton for that Gucci T-shirt you have on that you cannot even afford; you are a slave to greed. I nearly lost my mind running from canines and it pains me to know that you don't go vote because you're too lazy to go stand in a line, that is pathetic. You're a slave to sloth. I had a whip cracked across my neck and back, but when you have an issue with someone, you're so quick to grab a strap. You are a slave to envy. I nursed Massa's son from my own bosom while you'll layup with anyone with a heartbeat. You have become a sex addict; you are a slave to lust. I cried tears of joy when I saw my friends marching into freedom when I knew I had the opportunity to but let one of your brothers get the internship you didn't get. Now you pray, Father God please let my brother fail, if it sends me to heaven then absolutely send that man to hell. You are a slave to envy. You see, your issue is that you are a slave to deadly sins, that feels quite the sensation, huh."

While confused and disrespected, I only had one rebuttal for my ancestor. "How can you sit here like my generation doesn't have issues? Your generation claims that we're lazy and entitled, and I claim that we're hungry and thriving. See I made it out the mud without a father. I would call and tell him the laundry list of all my achievements, but quite frankly I would hate to bother. And I did it without. You're sitting here like I don't know pain. Like Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Eric Gardner, and Sandra Bland are just some random names. You all claim that the depression we face and anxiety we endure is fake news. My mental

health is shot of course I'm confused. I scroll down my Twitter timeline and I see teenage pregnancy and ecstasy. You all say it takes a village to raise a child, but where are you? Where are you? My generation had to find out how to grow up on our lonesome. You think I asked for this? My generation is overflowing self-starters, achieving is my prerogative, and unlike you, I did it without a father."

With passion and anger in my voice I blurted out, "You don't know me."

My ancestor smirked and said, "Baby you don't even know yourself. I stared in the mirror and you and I were the ones that locked eyes. The good Lord protects only babies and fools, so which one are you? Wake up. Black people are the only ethnicity that do not have a flag to represent themselves. You all don't know the culture because you're offset. America has stripped you of your identity but thankfully now you can be whoever you want to be, shoot high king. I want you to use the welts on my back as your road map, trust me, I've been there and done that. To be successful in this world it takes faith, consistency, and hard work; the ball is in your court.

Quite frankly, I do not care whether you are shooting or assisting, but we'll turn these dreams and nightmares into championships because they love to see you go from award shows to prison sentences. Trust me baby, let me help you. Cancel the divide between the generations and finally let love inside. You are the light of the world, now baby it's your time to rise and shine."

Now unfortunately this conversation was not a fairy tale, so wake up!

*(This speech won the 1<sup>st</sup> Place Statesman Orator Award in the 2019 Otis Moss Jr. '56 and Otis Moss III '92 Oratorical Contest.)*

## **COMPARTMENTALIZATION OF ONE'S IDENTITY**

Christian James Terry-Taylor '22

Growing up, I only saw my mom as a mom, a figure that gave birth to me with my father. I expected my mom to care for me, look after me, and treat me correctly. However, when my mom fell short of those expectations, either by picking me up late or missing an important event for me, I felt misunderstood, angry, or upset. In this simple example, you can witness three things at play: relationships, perception, and expectations. All three become essential to understand the idea of compartmentalization of one's personality, and it is a connection to the development of relationships throughout life.

### **Relationships, Perception, and Expectations**

#### **Relationships**

Relationships, platonic or intimate, require communication and dialogue between two or more people. On the contrary, however, the idea of communication is a funny thing. Humans communicate with each other to gain an understanding of one individual with whom they have relations. Do they delve into a more substantial, more in-depth conversation to learn who this person is eventually? What makes them act the way that they do? How did they get to this point of being even able to talk to me, at this moment? These perplexing questions lead to further development by seeing what type of music the person likes, what kind of food they eat, and what they want to do when they have free time. The development of the individual can compare to world building in the context of books and TV shows like the Hunger Games and Avatar: The Last Airbender. Though you are learning a vast amount of information surrounding the individual, one only looks at the individual through the "friend" lens. This is opposed to the other things that individual may be in the world, that you do not see.

## **Perception**

*“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages.”*

*~William Shakespeare*

Only witnessing an individual based upon how they interact with you is akin to looking at the earth and not seeing the whole universe. Grasping this small sliver of an individual is not your fault since the person only offers this little window to you, automatically. Similar to what Mr. Shakespeare said in the quote above, people are beautiful, flawless actors switching between different roles for different people daily. For example, I interact with my family in a goofy way. I will be joking around and pseudo-serious the whole time, and that is my role around them, but around my college professors I am not like that. Around my college professors, I am serious, and on top of all my decisions. If the family Christian were to trade places with the academic Christian, there would be some similarities, but there would be a significant number of differences. Meaning, in a sense, my different roles could be perceived as different people. Moreover, people’s different parts showcased as two different people is not unique to me. It is a phenomenon expressed throughout humanity.

## **Complexity and Obscurity within Perception**

Embracing then one piece of an individual, who is multifaceted and constructed of thousands of parts, leads us to ask the question and hypothesize: Do you ever wholly know someone? At the face of the issue, you would think yes, because I have known them for a certain number of years and experienced their good and bad sides. I would agree, yes, you know their good and bad sides, but the good and bad sides of the one piece of themselves they are showing you. Moreover, just because the single piece has a round personality and is not a flat character, it does not mean you know that whole individual well, just that single piece well. However, not completely knowing someone is beautiful and perfectly healthy. No one is expected to know their friend, spouse, and family through and through like they live within their skin. Plus, learning an individual and experiencing them like a stranger everyday sounds like quite an experience. So, that begs to ask further, why isn’t every healthy relationship so full of adventure, wonder, and continuous growth with the other person? Why

do we get stuck in similar altercations and engagements with other people, following somewhat of a relationship routine? Are these routines the byproduct, jadedness setting in and people taking each other for granted, or is it something deeper? I believe the answer lies within the expectations we develop around our relationships and the comfortability that comes along with the expectations.

## **Expectations**

*“When you stop expecting people to be perfect, you can like them for who they are.”*

*~Donald Miller*

Like the words of Donald Miller, expectations make individuals in a frame of light that is inhuman and on a godly tier. Moreover, not only do most individuals view the people as gods, but they capture the sliver of the individual and idolize that part of themselves. Though some people create expectations to worship friends or families, it makes it easier for people to navigate interactions with their loved ones. With people not having to work on the process of continually learning the individual's new and other fragments. Then, setting expectations on the individual, not only stops the deeper delving into that person's state of being but also places the persons under the expectation within a “personality cage.” By a “personality cage,” I mean a person must stay the same, act the same, perform the same for the rest of their life with this individual. However, this state of stagnancy created in the “personality cage” causes the person to not progress and evolve into the new person based on life and circumstances, but regress into their former selves. The continual regression of one's personality and soul can leave one feeling enslaved spiritually.

## **Coping with Expectations and its Constituted Spiritual Enslavement**

Being in this constant state of regression and one-dimensional performance for a long time causes individuals to pick up coping mechanisms to handle the repression or denial of their full, current selves. Some of the most significant ways I feel people do this is accepting and identifying the regular compartmentalization of their identity. They perform certain character roles based upon the perceived expectations of the other individual. This is how you will act a certain way around your parents, conscious of the do's and don'ts present when interacting with them. However, working inauthentically around your parents can cause an

emotional toll on an individual, in a sense, to have no way to talk with those who matter, genuinely and viscerally. That disconnect can cause one to feel trapped, alone, and misunderstood, similar of the feelings, I addressed within the introduction paragraph. Are these questions leading us to ask: how does one get past the expectations that come from essential relationships in our lives, where do we start? The start, I believe, is realize defined relationships and that aspirations are not necessary and cause more problems than solutions. Recognizing the fact that relationships and their balance are a spectrum, like sexuality, is essential in continuing to experience the infinite vastness of an individual's soul and get out of the environment of toxic expectations. Continually, instead of regarding your family as your family, one should address them as new, strange individuals and explore the universe of their souls.

## **“TO BE YOUNG, GIFTED, AND BLACK”**

*A Journey to Manhood, Mediating Middle-class Status and Masculinity at Morehouse College*  
George Anthony Pratt '23

Black college men, in pursuit of social and professional advancement, often suppress authentic expressions of their identity because of America's white middle-class hegemonic concept of masculinity. When attempting to reflect normative behaviors of white heterosexual men, while maintaining a sense of authenticity, young Black men often exist in states of double-consciousness. Young Black men often modify their behaviors and stifle feelings that reflect their genuine nature because professional and academic success has long been associated with whiteness. Consequently, a college education has continuously served as the primary cultural marker of upward mobility for Black men.

Saida Grundy in her ethnographic study, “‘An Air of Expectancy’: Class, Crisis, and the Making of Manhood at a Historically Black College for Men,” explores the formations of masculinity among students at Morehouse College, a historically Black all-male college, and the implications of the institution's synonymous view with upward mobility for Black men because of its national reputation for consistently producing substantial numbers of distinguished professionals (46). As a result, Morehouse has become “The College Choice for Black Men,” attracting young men of the Black middle and elite class, as a steppingstone to achieving their “American Dream,” a fanciful objective rarely applicable to the experience of Black men in America.

Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays, the college's longest serving and most prominent president asserts, “there is an air of expectancy at Morehouse College...It is expected that once a man bears the insignia of a Morehouse Graduate, he will do exceptionally well.” The “men of Morehouse” must determine for themselves what it means to meet the expectations of an institution defining its mission entirely in the terms of manhood (44). The institution's crafting of manhood is equated with heteronormativity and middle-class status, stifling the comfortable exploration of non-heteronormative identity expressions. Morehouse ought to create an open and inclusive environment, allowing the exploration of all identity intersections, a clarion call made by Danté Pelzer, in his scholarly journal article to all historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), *Creating a New Narrative: Reframing Black Masculinity for College Men*, thereby granting students the opportunity to reconcile

and mediate the multiple expressions of their masculinity.

The Black male experience in America has long been affixed to White supremacy, and society continuously measures Black men against a set of norms based on a middle-class heterosexual model (Pelzer 18). As a means of securing class advancement, Black elites during the Jim Crow era adopted dominant values and behaviors of whites, especially as they pertain to respectability and gender (Collins). The gendered notions that arose from Black elites' emphasis on the patriarchal family as the cornerstone of Black progress and adherence to a bourgeois morality has repeatedly centered Black male leadership as the political vehicle to class mobility and race betterment (Gaines). The trend of class socialization and gender ideologies among the affluent subset of Black people in America, particularly in the South, contextualizes why the "favored sons of the Black elite" are sent to Morehouse, to "[forge] the identities of Black male professionals" (Grundy 47). At Morehouse, Black manhood is mapped onto performances of racial respectability and middle-class identity, thereby reinforcing hegemonic masculinity and social class indoctrination within the campus (West and Zimmerman). As a result of the institution's effort to craft its sons to represent and embody normative Black male respectability, the "men of Morehouse" are unable to construct and negotiate their meanings of race, class, and masculinity.

The institution's cultural emphasis on performative respectability directly stems from America's concept of hegemonic masculinity, subjugating non-heterosexual individuals. Any non-heteronormative expression of sexual identity is disassociated with themes surrounding Black masculinity because of the perception that one is a man when dating and pursuing romantic or sexual relationships with women, a trend found in a qualitative study analyzing Black college men's perception of their masculinity (Harper). At Morehouse, it is encouraged, and in some ways, almost expected its "beaus" will engage in romantic relationships, and perhaps, marry one of the equally yoked "belles" of Spelman College, the unofficial sister institution and a historically Black college for women. The reinforcement of the suggestive patriarchal model is one of the underlying reasons Morehouse fails to consider non-heteronormative sexual identities applicable to the mold of the quintessential renaissance "man of Morehouse."



Morehouse prepares its men to be pillars within their communities and leaders within society, but a non-heteronormative expression of one's sexual identity is viewed as inconsistent with the archetypal successful Black man. The Black community's notion of positive expressions of Black masculinity exclusively includes examples of men, living lives of leadership and service exemplified in prominent or notable career choices possessing wives and children. The pressure to adhere to traditional gender norms to eventually qualify as a true "Morehouse Man" causes "men of Morehouse" to navigate their sexual identity silently. The College must create spaces where it is acceptable to voice struggles of one's sexual identity and employ the use of counter-narratives as a way for the "Men of Morehouse" to begin re-considering and re-authoring the skin they are in, prompting them to discern their life's mission and preparing them to impart meaningful impact in society.

When spaces are created for Black college men to re-imagine, mediate, and restore the multiple expressions of their masculinity, they are emboldened to explore the intersections of their multiple identities, without crafting personas that conform or assimilate to the status quo. As a result, a newfound confidence can be birthed within young Black men, thereby enabling them to become comfortable with writing their narratives, and effectively empowering them to claim their cultural heritages, sexualities, gender orientations, and religious backgrounds in more profound ways than before. The ability to construct identities that are more honest and reflective of one's self leads individuals to distinguish their life's work and contribution to the world, walking daringly in their destiny. This exploration propels one to be more soluble in their identity and affirm their complexities. Morehouse College must allow their "men of Morehouse" to openly and fully explore the varying expressions of their masculinities, including their sexual identities, thereby serving as a source of empowerment, to be content with one being their true and genuine self when seeking upward mobility and attempting to institute positive change within the world.

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## THE MEANING OF MANHOOD

Jaeden C. Johnson '22

What does it mean to *be* a “man”? What violence might this ontological imposition require? How might this violence be forestalled or attenuated? These questions have held me far longer than I have held them. Their prevailing answers have informed my hesitance to hold and structured my reticence to be held. These answers hold like a holding cell. They expand and contract in accordance with hegemonic norms — norms that incessantly ungender, as the performance of white patriarchy’s volatile dance. In this paper, I attempt to loosen that dance’s violent grip in the provision of my own answers. Drawing primarily on feminist and Black feminist scholarship, I endeavor to survey contending conceptualizations of “manhood” and “masculinity” before reflecting on the substantive effects these concepts have had on my own emotional health and well-being.

In *Concepts in Male Health*, James E. Leone draws a distinction between “man” and “male,” defining the former simply as a “physically mature male,” and conceptualizing the latter as referring to the “biological traits of a person” (4). It is immediately apparent that this essentialist reduction of manhood to biology does violence to queer and trans folks who, by definition, exist outside of binarism, medico-juridical conceptualizations of gender. More than this, Leone’s failure to make even a conventional sociological distinction between gender and sex in his definition of manhood effaces the ways in which these categories persist as dynamic political, social, and cultural constructions. Leone does align, however, with contemporary sociological literature in his description of masculinity as “elusive” and historically contingent (4). This sentiment aligns with social scientific conceptualizations of hegemonic masculinity which we might define broadly, following W. L. Adamson, as “a process of continuous creation which, given its massive scale, is bound to be uneven in the level of legitimacy it commands” (Adamson 174). In this way, Leone rightly identifies masculine norms as existing in a perpetualstate of socio-historical flux that is an invariable function power.

Leone subsequently elaborates his definition of masculinity, correctly asserting that “masculine norms have included being the provider, strong, silent, and practical, as well as *the*

*opposite of the female norm*” (4). This latter stipulation is important because it suggests that, despite its elusiveness, there remains one key means of knowing what form of masculinity is hegemonic in the status quo: the identification of its opposite. Western masculinity is incessantly defined over and against its feminine coeval. Moreover, patriarchy has a decisive impact on the terms and conditions of this differentiation. According to bell hooks, patriarchy is a “political system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right ... to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence” (18). Thus, as a function of what Terrence Real terms “psychological patriarchy,” the line between masculine and feminine behavior is interminably reproduced through a volatile “dance of contempt” in which “half of our human traits are exalted while the other half is devalued” (qtd. hooks, *The Will to Change*, 32-33).

Furthermore, in an article entitled “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt suggest that hegemonic masculinity dominates women *and* other men, subordinating not only femininity but other masculinities. This is evident in the way men and boys signal to others that they are masculine. According to C.J. Pascoe, this signaling appears “through practices of repudiation and confirmation” (Pascoe 177). Repudiation features mocking behaviors considered feminine, as well as taunting, and acting violently towards individuals who perform those behaviors. In studying what she calls “fag discourse,” Pascoe finds that the victims of homophobic slurs are not solely those who engage in same-sex relationships, but those simply deemed unintelligent, weak, or unathletic. Thus, the slur, “fag,” though invariably indicative of homophobia, also serves as a tool of repudiation for any behavior deemed “unmasculine,” and consequently reveals the forms of masculinity hegemonic in a certain context (177). It can also be noted that other insults such as “b\*\*\*\*\*” or “p\*\*\*\*\*” accomplish this same repudiation by invoking femininity directly. The degrading connotations of these words inculcate a general disdain for femininity, even amongst women. Acts of confirmation include what Pascoe calls, following Adrienne Rich, “compulsive heterosexuality” (Pascoe 179). This features objectifying women and engaging in both heterosexual and homosocial behaviors predicated upon dominating femme and feminine persons sexually. Such practices suggest that the only value femininity holds lies in its ability to affirm hegemonic (i.e. patriarchal) masculinity through sexual subordination. This dynamic inevitably contributes to a

culture of sexual assault and harassment, as men and boys constantly seek access to hegemonic masculinity and, thus, power, through the domination of femme and feminine bodies.

While Pascoe limits her study to cisgender males, it is worth noting that patriarchal behavior need not be gender specific. For bell hooks, patriarchy sustains itself through relations of “domination and submission, collusion and manipulation” requiring the participation of both men and women (qtd. in hooks, *The Will to Change*, 33). This can be seen, for instance, in the way discussions of gender equality by liberal feminists tend to idealize women adopting archetypically masculine behaviors and assimilating into powerful, traditionally patriarchal leadership roles and careers, rather than affirming social reproductive labor such as caretaking and sex work. While the former is seen as a progressive marker of gender equity and upward mobility, the latter either goes unconsidered or is indicted as regressive and degrading. This is, in part, what bell hooks attempts to combat in her often recited adage, “patriarchy has no gender” — to say nothing of the way cisgender (principally heterosexual) men and women mobilize transphobic and queer antagonistic rhetoric to reaffirm their gender and sexual identities, or of the way queer, trans, and nonbinary folks reproduce patriarchal gender and sexual norms in their own intimate partnerships and social interactions.

But perhaps we should backtrack a bit. What *is* gender and sex? Thus far, in surveying the sociological literature, Judith Butler might say that I have only mapped “a signification that an (already) sexually differentiated body assumes” — one that only exists in relation to its opposite (13). This, of course, begs the question: what constitutes sexual differentiation? While Leone and other social scientists might point to biology (e.g. chromosomes and genitalia), Butler lodges a post-structuralist critique of the human sciences themselves, contending that even the concepts we consider “natural” or “biological” cannot be isolated from the cultural matrices of language and intelligibility by which they are produced. Following Michel Foucault and Simone de Beauvoir, she posits not only that both gender *and* sex are cultural productions, but that gender “designates the very apparatus of production by which the sexes themselves are established” (Butler 11). Furthermore, she finds that several contending schools of French philosophy and feminism all agree on the notion that sexual difference appears in hegemonic discourse as a metaphysical “*substance*” (25) — and that this appearance conceals the fundamental impossibility of *being* a sex or gender. Following

Foucault, Butler theorizes this substance as an “ontology of accidental attributes” exposing identity itself to be “a regulatory fiction” (32). While she allows that this fictive construction incessantly consolidates itself through the compulsory performance of heterosexuality, she also warns that its coherence is constantly called into question by the “dissonant play of attributes that fail to conform” (32).

I would contend that one such attribute is Blackness. In her landmark essay, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” Black feminist scholar and literary critic, Hortense Spillers, suggests that African captives were “ungendered” in the hold of the slave ship. She posits that, under such conditions, “one is neither female, nor male, as both subjects are taken into ‘account’ as *quantities*” (Spillers 215). In other words, slavery’s “total objectification of the flesh” obliterates any prior notions of African personhood, including that of gender (Spillers 206-208). The “undecipherable” mark of the flesh that follows the womb from generation-to-generation unmakes the Western patriarchal categories of “mother,” “father,” and “family” (Spillers 207). Similarly, bell hooks elaborates on this point in her essay “Reconstructing Black Masculinity” by positing not only that transplanted Africans knew nothing of “the white colonizer’s notions of manhood and masculinity,” but that they were precluded from ever actualizing these patriarchal notions in the context of a “white racist economy” (*Black Looks*, 89-90). Moreover, both hooks and Spillers denote that Blacks were pathologized for being unable to achieve and maintain a coherent nuclear family structure, even as the legacy of forced natal alienation permeates American institutions from the plantation to the prison. To this point Spillers suggests that, for Black women, the “‘reproduction of mothering’ ... carries few of the benefits of a *patriarchalized* female gender, which, from one point of view, is the only female gender there is” (Spillers 216). This is to say that, in so far as Western notions of gender remain tethered to patriarchal notions of maternity and paternity, and in so far as these notions continue to constitute ‘the only gender there is,’ Black people remain ‘ungendered’ well into the present.

For bell hooks, this continued preclusion from the attainment of patriarchal gender norms is not entirely negative. This is namely because “patriarchy,” she posits, “is the single most life-threatening social disease assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation” (*The Will to Change*, 17). She argues that because Black men had to be taught patriarchal masculinity — because their sense of manhood has not always been defined by the “will to dominate and

colonize” others — that part of their healing is simply a matter of refusing the roles Western society has always imposed in bad faith (*We Real Cool*, 2). Without romanticizing the past, she challenges Black men to refuse the suicidal path that white bourgeois patriarchy has long refused to them, assuring that “in every segregated black community in the United States there are adult black men married, unmarried, gay, straight, living in households where they do not assert patriarchal domination and yet live fulfilled lives” (*Black Looks*, 93).

As someone both Black and assigned male at birth, I am constantly unlearning the toxic, domineering attitudes that have been inculcated in me from a young age. I have been so well trained to embrace stoicism and emotional distance that I can hardly remember the last time I cried. I played sports for so long and internalized so much of the degrading rhetoric and injunctions of my coaches that I now find it hard to dissociate working out from being punished. I have suffered so much emotional abuse at the hands of men that I experience difficulty maintaining friendships and being intimate and vulnerable with the people closest to me. I have been so influenced by my father’s demands for a protestant work ethic that I have often precluded myself from being more social and prioritizing basic self-care practices such as eating and sleeping over schoolwork. Furthermore, the entanglements of masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality have frequently scared me into silence regarding my queerness. However, the more adept I have become at naming these harmful behaviors the better I have become at addressing them and doing the work necessary to bring about my own healing. While I remain unsure what this healing may look like, I realize for now that the first step resides in articulating the desire to hold and be held differently.

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**WOMEN**



**PURPLE PASSION**  
Kamahl L. Grant '22



**DAY AND NIGHT**  
Kamahl L. Grant '24

## **A THOUGHT: WOMEN**

Amietee Fuondjing '22

I love women. I live and breathe women. Women are the reason why I bother to look presentable. Women are the reason why I move with the sort of professionalism I move with. Women are the reason why I push myself every day to be a better man than I was yesterday because I know I am not worthy of their company, and to even come close would be something special.

It has reached a point where my infatuation for women has surpassed any sexual means and now solely lies in honest admiration. Hearing a woman speak, watching her at her work, gazing at her strut is the most humbling experience a man could ever dream, and we men need to be humbled. Even as I write this, I am committing the greatest folly against the woman, for she does not need to be told how amazing she is for her to know it. In both cases we intentionally or unintentionally treat women as objects. As men we either delegate the woman to roles and responsibilities far beneath her capability or we, wholeheartedly believing we are doing the gentlemanly thing, overprotect the woman to the point where she feels she is of no use. But this is quite the contrary because women are in fact the strongest beings on earth. Women are the ones who beget spiritual and physical life in the universe. Women were the muses of the greatest thinkers and artists to ever inhabit this earth. Even Adam, who stood tall amongst all the subsidiary species on God's earth, recognized only a woman, Eve, could make him complete.

Only a woman can inspire a man. Only a woman can successfully tame the brute within man. When a woman has faith in you, it feels like any task is conquerable. Women love hard. Women are sources of love, energy, tenderness, warmth, knowledge, and safety. It may be a man's world, but women are definitely the ones that make it go round. And when men eventually destroy the world, women will be the ones to revive it.

Despite of all this, we hurt our women. We impose our masculinity on the woman and strike down her confidence. We assume a twisted level of entitlement to every aspect of her being. We tear away at her comfortability and mold it into insecurity. A woman can absorb so much pain and not even bat an eye, something we men cannot even come close to

comprehending. A woman's reservation is her ultimate defense mechanism, and her self-worth is her greatest treasure. A woman's intuition is unmatched, I have never gone wrong when I have taken a woman's advice.

I am a man, the inferior specie between the two. I will continue to make mistakes. I will continue to slip up and mistreat my queen. I am still learning every day. But women are more forgiving and patient than they need to be, and even though I won't deserve it, she'll take me in her arms along with all my faults. Thank you, women, for being beautiful and strong. For being your amazing selves. I will always appreciate you. I am forever indebted.



**BLUSH**

Kamahl Grant '24



**AMOUR**  
Kamahl Grant '24

# MEDITATION



## **OLD LOVE**

Christian James Terry-Taylor '22

Hatred was his solace, and love was his devil. Hatred held him tight as a young boy holds on to a kite. The angry demon consumed him, making the man feel safe in a state of melancholy. Love, on the other hand, seemed to visit him in his daydreams like a whimsical fiend. Love soaked into his being taking him over like blood on a white shirt. His body bounced and reverberated sounds of happy emotions and words to love's beat. The heart racing, the eyes dilating, the heat rising, the lips pressing seemed to be the man's addiction. Having someone in his corner to speak to him when he was down was as good as a pull of the blunt.

The more care, the more honest support given, the more intense his cravings grew. The hotness of passion grew in him, greeting his partner with kisses tasting succulent as passion fruit. His fingers gripped his partner's body like keys unlocking the secrets of their soul. Likewise, the partner's soul accepted the invitation of opening, resounding melodies of happiness, yet sorrow, alike. The space their two bodies intermingled and communicated through touch became sacred land. The arc of the covenant was their bodies, and the holy spirit was the space in between their eyes where they held each other's gaze.

However, when the colors of his love revealed themselves, the man's feelings of rosy intimacy distorted itself into a frenzy of restless vipers. The airy feeling he once felt was greeted with a crash onto the suffocating ground. His spirit shattered upon impact, hearing only the perverted echoes of once beautiful memories. The succulent passion fruit he gave became rotten and bitter with worms of despair swallowing the whole of the remains. Toxic sugar fumed out of the decrepit fruit, pouring into the air, an aroma of confusion. Love fled his eyes, finding solace under the dark soul of hatred.

Hatred festered in his soul while cockroaches of fury burrowed within his insides. His zenith drug turned into a forcible dose of depression, coercing him into a state of volatility and calamity. Vibrant colors of love were replaced by monochromic black and whites of his bruised soul. His tears were fire, and his screams were war cries. Every step was a part of a run, a marathon, to outrun old emotions, old heartache, old love.

## A THOUGHT: DEATH

Amietee Fuondjing '22

Death, in theory, is simple. Everything that lives must die, or else the life itself would have no value. I am not afraid of death. I have grown to accept death. Death is natural. Death is necessary. I think of death as something distant but inevitable, like a giant who lives in the hillside waiting to unleash its terror down on the towns people. That, to me, is what death is.

It is true everyone will encounter death at some point in their lifetime. Whether it is the death of a pet or a parent, until it happens to you -- you essentially feel invincible, and it is easy to drift into this delusion. Naturally, humans feel as if everything that happens in the universe happens in relation to themselves. This is why we find it difficult to empathize with victims who are thousands of miles away. We are either too physically or consciously removed to care, and if we are not the primary participants in the matter then we resort to the “things happen” scapegoat and carry on with our lives. “That could never happen to me, right?” Well, with all this being said, death now sounds ludicrous. How can one *die*? We are the main characters of each of our unique stories. None has ever heard of the main character dying in a piece of literature so why does it have to start with us?

Now those who fear and despise death seem to have almost too many questions. We cannot question something back to life, but we try so anyway. Perhaps the connotation that death is the definitive “end” is what gets people. After living for a while, a predetermined end is unfathomable. Living is all we know. We have all heard the “all good things must come to an end” or even the “if you love something set it free” drivel and we just blindly swallow it. Similarly, I learned to swallow the idea of a “higher calling” as justification for one dying, but to this day I am still not satisfied with that answer. Nope! I refuse! Death cannot be the finale! After all, where does all that stuff go? Our thoughts, ambitions, and desires cannot just vanish into thin air once our hearts cease to beat. Once you look through an omniscient lens you begin to think, “Wow that person had a life, too. They had dreams, they had hobbies, they looked forward to things. All things I expend each breath doing.” So I ask myself again, am I afraid of death? Well, yes, I am. I am *terrified*.

## **A THOUGHT: SOLITUDE**

Amietee Fuondjing '22

Today's world houses roughly over seven billion people, and yet we are lonelier than ever. We humans are truly complex creatures. No matter what we have, what we gain, or what we accomplish, we are still never satisfied. And now, in order to find this abstract sense of satisfaction that we desperately long for, we put ourselves on a chase. We work to the point where we do not even recognize the reflection that stares back at us. This non-stop drive prohibits us from forming any substantial relationships, building honest self-worth, and appreciating what the natural world has to offer outside of our mental cubicles. So, in the end, surrounded by our meaningless memorabilia, we are still lonely and unsatisfied.

We have abandoned the joy in interaction. We evade our passionate neighbors because we think they are annoying. We cross the street whenever we spot a stranger from afar just to skip past that awkward salute and grin. We shrink at small talk. We hurry off into our little individual corners though under the same roof. We rather eyeball our devices than look into the eyes of our significant other.

Which brings me to another point: we have forgotten how to love. These days showing someone how much you love them does not require much effort. No action or feeling is authentic anymore. Since when is it strange to be affectionate, romantic, and over-the-top. Love is not meant to be an obligation that hangs over our heads. Every human is born with love and in the face of all the negative qualities we learn along the way love triumphs. But in recent generations, values like love, happiness, and self-confidence have succumbed to the viruses of our ever-changing world. We have become tired, stressed, selfish, ignorant, depressed, unkempt, and emotionless creatures. So, as you see, we are miserable during the day; hence when nighttime arrives, we go to bed with a sadness. No matter where you are in life or how happy you think you are, you will always go to bed with some sad memory, regret, or an impossibly attainable wish looming your conscience. Sure, you have your family, your friends, or your significant other but they can only do so much. There are just some parts within us no one person can fulfill.

You are the only person that knows yourself best. That is when you realize you are all alone in this game called life, and when it comes down to it, we will exit this world the same way we entered, alone. But there is, however, a silver lining in this reality. Even though our loved ones cannot possibly complete every crevice of our complicated spirits they can come pretty darn close, and that right there is beauty. That right there is hope.



**ALKEBULAN STILL LIFE**

Kyle Walker '24

# **SPIRITUALITY**

## DESIGN ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Johari Dean-Lindsey '22

An “argument from design” for the existence of God is an argument for the existence of God or, more generally, for an intelligent creator based on perceived evidence of deliberate design in the natural world (Teleological Argument). Design arguments are popular and multi- conceptual arguments for the existence of God which, again, rely on complex features of the world to generate an inference for the existence of God or some intelligent creator/designer.

Philosopher William Paley has a famous example about a watchmaker, and Philosopher Michael Behe has one about flagellum and bacteria. However, Philip Kitcher gives us an argument against design arguments. Essentially, he has a response that opposes the argument, trying to disprove them basically. In this paper, I’m going to defend arguments from design and stand in my affirmation that Philip Kitcher is wrong in his response, because of the flaws in his perspective against design arguments, where he mistakenly only draws his reasoning from two specific examples to defame the entire concept.

One of the oldest arguments from design that gained popularity is Paley’s watchmaker argument. William Paley's watchmaker analogy is basically a teleological argument, and it played a prominent role in natural theology. Basically, it was the watchmaker analogy that was used, “To support the argument for the existence of God and for the intelligent design of the universe in both Christianity and Deism” (Abersold). Paley went on to argue that the complex structures of living things and the remarkable adaptations of plants and animals required an intelligent designer. He believed the natural world was the creation of God and showed the nature of the creator. Paley pointed out that if you found a watch on a heath, you would naturally assume it had a designer (Abersold). Paley also noted that the human eye was like a sophisticated piece of machinery, so just as you’d know any watch must have had a designer, so Paley argued you ought to recognize that the human eye, “a brilliant piece of biological machinery, must have had an intelligent designer too” (Abersold). One being that was clearly the supremely intelligent eye designer known as God, not just eyes, but human beings in every organism must also have been designed by God. Would we, in this case, believe that the watch

must have been designed by some intelligent watchmaker or other, or would we think that, for example, the watch simply came to be by chance? The answer, Paley thinks, is clear: we would conclude that it must have been designed by an intelligent watchmaker. We have found a whole world of well-designed creatures rather than just a single watch; so if it was reasonable to conclude that a watch must have been designed by an intelligent watchmaker, it is that much more reasonable to conclude that the natural world we find around us must have been designed by an intelligent creator.

In contemporary times, a version of the design argument that is much more popular involves the bacterium flagellum presented by Michael Behe discussed in Philip Kitcher's *At the Mercy of Chance*. In Philip Kitcher's *At the Mercy of Chance*, Kitcher presented a perspective from Michael Behe on the discussion of the bacterial flagellum representing an irreducibly complex piece of machinery that could not possibly have been created through random natural processes. Dr. Michael J. Behe, biochemistry professor and author of the 1996 blockbuster book *Darwin's Black Box*, challenged the reasoning stemming from the classic Darwin explanation that structures of cells arose randomly (Behe). Behe introduces the concept of "irreducible complexity through the example of the bacterial flagellum. "If a structure is so complex that all of its parts must initially be present in a suitably functioning manner, it is said to be irreducibly complex" (Kitcher 544). Because they represent an irreducible complexity, the bacterial flagellum has become an icon in the intelligent design movement. A system that needs multiple interconnected parts present concurrently, where if one fragment is destroyed or lost then the entire system is compromised, is known as an irreducibly complex system. Sever one part and the whole system collapses. The bacterial flagellum has been hailed as the "most efficient machine in the universe" with its self-assembly and repair, water-cooled rotary engine, proton motive-force drive system, forward-and-reverse gears, operating speeds of 6,000 to 17,000 rpm, direction-reversing capability, and hard-wired signal-transduction system with short-term memory" (Gillen). The complexity and coordination must attest to the work of an intelligent designer who designed and perfected flagella in a wondrously interconnected fashion. Truly a prokaryotic wonder is the bacterial flagellum. With there being some things that are overly complex, like the flagellum, that are unlikely to exist, if God does not exist, by natural forces alone. However, they are extremely likely to exist if God exists, therefore God is the best explanation for them and we should



believe the world to be the way our best explanation says it is, therefore God exists.

The argument from design continues to be compelling, and even after exploring an opposing perspective where this philosopher voices his concerns about the motivation and the methods of the intelligent designer argument. Philip Kitcher, a philosophy professor, discusses his complexity arguments at the beginning of his paper. In one section labeled the concrete case argument, he notes that you “do not have the novelty of choosing the intermediates of stages for the bacteria flagellum” (Kitcher 545). Let us play this out in a scenario. Say you have a bacterial cell at an earlier point in time that eventually evolved to a point where it currently possesses a flagellum. Behe argues that to get from the bacteria without a flagellum to one that has one, you need intermediaries, meaning the points in evolution where the flagellum was not as complex as the one used in the example. These intermediaries, as described, are unfavorable in terms of natural selection, and are unlikely to be selected for. Kitcher then says that’s a bad argument because there are all sorts of ways that bacteria can evolve a flagellum, for instance, it can evolve from some protein inside the cell that would perform some function and then in one generation, it moves from the interior to the exterior of the cell (Kitcher 545).

Overall, Kitcher’s concrete case argument objection is that you do not get to pick the intermediaries if you do not have data and then remark at the immense improbability for this condition. Kitcher attempts to explain why the argument from design fails, however, the fault in Kitcher’s objection stems from his focus solely on the flagellum and eye mechanisms, and turns out these were not the best examples, because the Fibonacci sequence, denoted as “nature’s universal design”, comprised of the countless spiral formations found across nature (Tennenhouse). Ranging from galaxy formations to flower formations, to snail shells, The Fibonacci sequence, concept, and theory represents a monumental complex that significantly exhibits a correlation and peculiarity far too precise and exact to occur by random processes, thereby advocating for the existence of an Intelligent Designer.

The presence of order and complexity in the universe is hard to deny. In this argument, the use of metaphor (the watchmaker) renders it understandable for us: this not only advances from something in our experience to try to explain something other than this (the creation of the universe); the logic is simple and concise to observe. Meshing with human logic, it promotes the study of nature, encourages purpose in the universe and ignites faith. Although

the argument is not necessarily incompatible with The Big Bang and evolution, both processes could be part of the design of the universe. The concept of God as a designer reciprocates the concept that God has a part in the universe's history and is therefore omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent.

The design argument increases the probability of the existence of God or some intelligent designer. Rather than remaining in a direction of limited chance/randomness, the design argument gives a purpose to the universe. The universe, in turn, is now given meaning.

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## **A THOUGHT: ADAM AND EVE**

Amietee Fuondjing '22

We are more alike than we choose to admit, no matter how much we subscribe to the stereotypes that constantly divide us. We all feel the same things. We all hurt, we all dream, and our end goal is happiness. We are two sides of the same coin.

Why is it that males and females are at a war? Why are we always butting heads? I believe men and women were placed on this earth for one another. Anatomically, biologically, and emotionally we fit together like puzzle pieces. At some point in time we will seek the love and perspective of the opposite sex. Whether it comes in the form of a romantic partner, father, mother, brother, sister, or friend, we will depend on the other sex to provide us something we cannot produce ourselves. In simple terms, we need each other to survive, but we choose to ignore our destinies and put up walls that keep our star-crossed counterparts out.

This problem is especially pertinent in my generation. We habitually tear each other down instead of building each other up. We employ awful adjectives in our descriptions of the other sex which only helps to polarize us even more. "Men are trash" or "women are whores." This negative tension we've nursed explains why we have developed such little faith in relationships involving the other sex. These days a boy and a girl head into a relationship already expecting the worst, thinking up every possible way why it will not work and preparing their escape plans. It's become so bad we have created this romantic wasteland called the "talking stage" because we are too afraid of totally handing ourselves over to the care of someone, we automatically presume is unsafe. Young men, who have mothers and sisters themselves, are fearful to have daughters of their own. It is simply silly! Our views towards each other have become so polluted and hopeless. It is up to us to do better, to hold ourselves to better standards, to treat each other better, to restore faith in our star-crossed counterparts.

There are so many politics the world throws at us to keep us separated. The key to solving these problems is to momentarily put our differences aside and engage in open, comfortable dialogue about our sexuality and spirituality. When we do this, we eliminate all the made-up awkwardness. We learn more about each other, we learn to empathize, we learn to love, and we learn to become one.



**ROYALTY**  
Kamahl Grant '24

## THE PROGENITOR OF DECEPTION

Artimus Cunningham '21

In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, God is an absolute monarch who seldom interacts with other beings. His laissez-faire approach is strongest when it comes to dealing with humanity. While he often refuses to interfere, he promises that he bestows free will upon every being he created. The severity of his interactions and interference are directly tied to the Great Chain of Being. The Great Chain of Being is a hierarchical structure that ranks everything (celestials, mortals, plants, animals, rocks) by their closeness to God. There are other implications and rules stemming from this structure as well. The Great Chain of Being dictates how much knowledge one is allowed to know, the weight of what is expected of him, and with whom he is allowed to communicate. By creating a hierarchical structure, free will appears impossible since some beings must be placed above others. If a being is ranked below another, then the lowest being is in essence subservient. For instance, while Adam serves God and acknowledges the angels as his betters, Eve is made by God to be subservient to Adam as if he were her God. The Great Chain of Being is founded upon inequality and servitude, yet one may argue that the Great Chain of Being does not destroy the credibility of the God in *Paradise Lost* because the other beings possess free will. While all beings are capable of acting autonomously, God can still punish them. This creates a paradox.

Although God allows free will in beings' actions, his subsequent punishment cancels out free will. If God avoids interfering in other beings' affairs to protect their free will, then God punishing those who resist the Great Chain of Being is in effect eliminating free will. The Great Chain of Being creates a fundamental structure that eliminates the credibility of Milton's God, who claims to have granted all beings free will. The Great Chain of Being creates a hierarchical structure based on assumed mental, physical, and spiritual superiority. Michael D. Terranova posits a simplified answer as to why the hierarchy is ordered in this way. He explains that

Minerals have (or, more precisely, participate in) existence. Plants have existence and life. Animals add sentience to these two perfections. Humans are the crown of the hierarchical chain by having existence, life, sentience, and intelligence. At each

stage there is a higher complexity, but also a higher nobility, for the increasing complexity is an even greater participation in the plenitude of being. (Terranova 207)

The concept of perfections combining in order to form the Great Chain of Being solves issues such as fallen angels ranking above humans and women ranking below men. In an extremely patriarchal society like the one in which the Great Chain of Being originated, women were considered to be both physically and mentally weaker than men. Since women were believed to lack the perfections of knowledge and intelligence according to patriarchal societies, they were placed lower in the hierarchy. On the contrary, fallen angels are considered to be the ultimate evil yet they rank above humanity in the hierarchy. This not only proves that the Great Chain of Being does not take into account good and evil, but it also places fallen angels above mankind because the fallen angels possess greater physical strength, intelligence (knowledge of the cosmos), and life force (they are immortal). Therefore, the Great Chain of Being must not be studied as a hierarchy constructed by an omni-benevolent deity but instead created by a neutral God.

God's neutrality shapes the Great Chain of Being by valuing obedience over moral alignment. Although theologians traditionally describe him as omnibenevolent, God repeatedly shows little care towards a being's alignment (good or evil). The greatest example is the fallen angels' placement and the humans' placement. While both disobey God, only the fallen angels descend (because they refuse to repent). Obedience also proves to be more important than alignment when Milton discusses the creation of Sin. Plotting "In bold conspiracy against Heav'ns King," Satan proves that despite evil thoughts and intentions, God would not alter his rank until he disobeys (2.751). A counter argument is that Satan was not truly evil until he actively sought rebellion. Thus, moral alignment as betrayed by action still plays a role when determining one's rank. Unfortunately, this point does not hold well when considering who is able to sin. Milton states that infants and people with mental disabilities are incapable of sin. This is because, according to Milton, they do not possess the mental capacity necessary for understanding right and wrong. Therefore, if someone belonging to either group were to sin, then that person could not be considered evil despite the act itself being classified as such.

Milton's God promises that he grants both angels and humans free will. Dismissing all responsibility for the actions of others, God claims that they "so were created, nor can justly accuse / Thir maker, or thir making, or thir Fate; / As if Predestination over-rul'd / Thir will, dispos'd by absolute Decree" (3.112-115). God explains how neither man, angel, nor fallen (all sentient entities in the Great Chain of Being) have the right to blame him for their actions because he grants them free will. Predestination, according to him, does not overrule free will. In other words, while all sentient beings are subject to destiny, their ability to decide which choices to make and how to make them are ever present. This is important in punishing mankind because it eliminates Adam and Eve's excuses. Eve questions on multiple occasions whether she has free will because the Great Chain of Being does not allow Eve autonomy. Autonomy is a necessary component of absolute free will. When discussing the relationship between Adam and Eve, the speaker tells the reader that "though both / Not equal, as thir sex not equal seemd; . . . Hee for God only, shee for God in him" (4.295-299). Upon her creation, she is immediately deemed to be not only inferior to Adam but to be subservient to him as well. While Adam follows God, Eve must follow Adam. She is to prepare his food, obey him, follow him, and serve his every desire. As long as she submits to the Great Chain of Being, then she lives a peaceful life. The attempt to alter her position leads to catastrophe and divine punishment. God's interference and the construction of her punishment for attempting to alter the Great Chain of Being eliminates her free will. Under the set hierarchy, Eve's movements and actions are limited by God. Eve's greatest limitation is the worldly knowledge she does not receive. Coupled with an overwhelming force which seeks to punish her, her free will is an illusion.

Raphael warns Adam that to become subservient or even equal to Eve is a mistake that would upset the Great Chain of Being. The Son later reprimands Adam and tells him that "By attributing overmuch to things / Less excellent, as thou thy self perceav'st . . . Thy cherishing, thy honouring, and thy love, / Not thy subjection" (10. 1202-1207). This is the first time a being is warned against descending along the Great Chain as opposed to Satan and Eve who both seek to ascend. The inability to neither rise nor fall illustrates that there is zero room for mobility along the Great Chain of Being. Without a chance of mobility, Adam, Eve, Satan, and every other being is limited in the free will God promises. Eve is never allowed to reign over Adam, Adam is never allowed to be equal to or subservient to Eve, and Satan is never allowed

to rise above his rank and rule over God or the Son. God punishes every being who attempts to alter the hierarchy. Philosopher and theologian Ghazali posit that “Neither animals nor angels can change their appointed rank and place. But man may sink to the animal or soar to the angel, and this is the meaning of his undertaking that “burden” of which the Koran speaks” (qtd. In Truglia 153). Despite his brilliance, Ghazali’s theory does not hold true for the world of *Paradise Lost*.

Satan, who was once an angel, falls into the category “fallen angel” which is a clear change from his previous rank. Despite Death and Sin overtaking Adam and Eve after the fall, they never alter their ranking. Men still preside below fallen angels and above women with women directly below men. Adam is unable to alter his position which negates Ghazali’s theory and proves neither ascension nor descension is allowed in the Great Chain of Being in *Paradise Lost*.

The Great Chain of Being controls knowledge which also leads to injustice. God sends Raphael to warn Adam and Eve about the dangers of knowledge. The conversation occurs between Raphael and Adam. The exclusion of Eve may not have been executed with malicious intent, but the result occurs due to her position within the hierarchy. Holding Eve accountable, despite the warning not reaching her, is an injustice. If God is a being who is the embodiment of justice, then if he is “Not just, [then he is] not God” (8.701). Satan says this to Eve when convincing her to eat fruit from the forbidden tree, but this statement transcends beyond that moment. God, who places himself at the top of the hierarchy, appoints Raphael (who he foresees failing) to speak to Adam and Eve. God knows Adam and Eve are ignorant. Limited knowledge proves to be their downfall when Satan (a being with a higher position) comes to Eve and persuades her. Each instance could have been easily remedied if knowledge had flowed freely throughout the Great Chain of Being. Humanity’s original sin led to divine punishment despite the humans’ disadvantage in a conflict with a supernatural being, Satan. Their descendants are to be punished with death, sin, painful childbirth, subservience to husbands, and countless tragedies. God’s decision lacks justice because he refuses to acknowledge the hierarchical design’s inherent flaw stemming from limiting knowledge.

Obedience and fealty have a surprisingly important role in the Great Chain of Being. Despite both the fallen angels and mortals disobeying God, the fallen angels are still placed above mortals in the hierarchy. Thus, obedience and fealty do not play a role in



deciding one's appointed position. On the contrary, the fallen angels were once at least two major places removed from mortals, but once they fall, they are only one position higher. The reason the fallen angels fall in the hierarchy and the humans do not is because Adam and Eve maintain their faith and repent. Scholar Kristin Pruitt McColgan notes, "The interplay between reason and faith thus involves, paradoxically, both hierarchy and reciprocity" (84). Obedience may appear to have a limited role in hierarchical appointment, but it is obedience and repentance that greatly influences whether one falls or remains in place. This means that the fallen angels theoretically may remain in their assigned positions and receive grace if they kneel before God and repent.

The problem of free will that persists throughout *Paradise Lost* emerges once again. Milton was a Protestant and likely an Arminian. Debora Shuger who studies the theology of *Paradise Lost* dictates that

Were Milton's God an Arminian, this apparently universal offer of grace should be followed by something to the effect that those whom God foresees will accept His grace are His elect, eternally predestined for salvation. However, the Father does not say this, but rather starts off in what would appear to be the opposite direction: "Some I have chosen of peculiar grace / Elect above the rest; so is my will" (3.183–84; Shuger 401).

God's words suggest that it is not the individual's choice to accept his grace but rather it is God's will that determines their choice. If grace may only be achieved through God, and if only God may decide if someone accepts it, then the free will of the individual is nonexistent. This means that it is God's will for Satan and his followers to never repent or accept grace; he takes away Adam and Eve's decision by "[removing] the stonie from thir hearts" (104) which forces them to repent and accept grace. God's decisions betray the promises he makes throughout *Paradise Lost*. God's power forces characters into situations that remove their agency and thus, his own credibility.

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