

Free Will and the Diminishing Importance of God's Will:

A Study of *Paradise Lost* and *Supernatural*

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*To my cousins,
the best siblings an only child could ask for*

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Abstract:

This thesis takes a close look at the way in which a person may defy an imposed destiny through the use of free choice. This ability to choose one's own path is often referred to as an individual's free will. But this terminology is not attached to a simple concept. Milton's poem *Paradise Lost* and The Warner Brothers television show *Supernatural* serve as artifacts to study two of the ways in which free will has been conceptualized in different cultural contexts. Whereas *Paradise Lost* and *Supernatural* both stress the importance of free will, the two conceptualizations of free will presented are different. These conceptualizations act as windows into the ideologies popular among the texts' audiences.

Paradise Lost –and Milton's purpose for writing the poem— is rooted deeply in post-reformation Arminianism and this is apparent in its employment of free will. Chapter 1 argues that Milton turns to free will as a tool to justify the actions of God. Freedom of choice is God given and sets up a morality in which right and wrong are dictated by God. Chapter 2 shows that in *Supernatural* free will is not given by a higher power and, in fact, free choice functions as an act of defiance against God's will. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the specific roles of Lucifer, Castiel, and Abdiel, and the way in which they act to further clarify a conceptualization of free will. Chapter 5 notes the way in which characters build their individual moral system and recognizes an inherent rejection of an imposition from a formalized and external religious source. This rejection is a trend which is central to both the ideology of *Supernatural* and that of the Protestant reformation.

Both texts are emblematic of a popular ideological trend which champions unmediated choice. The freedom to make choices without the imposition of an external force allows for an individual to build a moral system based on preferred values. For Milton's readers this was a moral system grounded in an individual's connection with God; whereas, for the viewers of *Supernatural*, morality is rooted in familial bonds.

Key Words:

- Paradise Lost
- Supernatural
- Free Will
- Religious Studies
- Media Studies
- Early Modern Period
- Post-Reformation Protestantism

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Introduction: Free Will and Fate

When growing up I was told by my parents to never let anyone dictate who I am or who I am to become. The ability to exert control over one's own path in life is a belief that is central to many. The concept of free choice is one that has been discussed and readdressed continually throughout history. In 1667, John Milton wrote his epic poem *Paradise Lost*, and in it, he imbued his characters with the ability to make choices. He tied this ability to the term "free will." Almost 350 years later, free will, while still a prominent topic of discussion in its own right, has become an identifier for fans of the Warner Brother's television show *Supernatural* after its use in the designation "Team Free Will." But, both *Paradise Lost* and *Supernatural* do more than simply mention free will. In fact, free will is a major tenet upon which hinges both texts' understanding of humanity's ability to dictate its own fate.

My thesis explores the way in which free will is conceptualized differently in *Paradise Lost* and *Supernatural*. I argue that by looking at the differences between the uses of free will by these texts' characters, one is given a window into the moral system which grounds each text's ideology.

Paradise Lost tells the story of two falls. The first is the fall of Satan and his fellow rebellious angels. Milton gives a detailed account of Satan's rebellion and the war that ensued in Heaven, as well as how Satan came to enter the Garden of Eden. The second is the fall of humanity as rendered by Adam and Eve. Their fall occurs when the pair disobeys God and eats of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Milton extrapolates on these stories from the bible with specific attention to characterization. The reasons for Satan, Adam, Eve, and God's actions are explored. This reasoning is important to Milton because his goal is to "justify the ways of God to men" (Milton, Book I, 26, 295). It is through these reasons that free will enters into the

conversation. In *Paradise Lost* John Milton uses his depiction of free will to provide the lynch pin to his justification of God. He seeks to prove both that God is good and all powerful. Additionally, *Paradise Lost* posits that all those created by God have freedom of choice.

Created by Eric Kripke in 2005, *Supernatural* follows two brothers, Sam and Dean Winchester, as they travel across America living out of their car, a 1967 Chevrolet Impala, hunting down monsters, demons, and ghosts. The show begins with Sam's return to the "family business" after having been away at college. Soon after the death of their father in the season 2 opener, Sam begins to exhibit supernatural powers, which mark him as a type of demonic "chosen one." At the end of season 2, as a result of this status, Sam is killed. Sam's death prompts Dean to sell his soul to a demon for the return of his brother, and Dean is given one year to live before he is dragged to Hell. Season 4 begins with Dean's return to Earth, having been rescued from Hell by the angel Castiel, and marks a shift in the show's focus heavenward. The tone is set with Castiel's promise: "We [the angels] have work for you" ("Lazarus Rising," 4.01, 41:54-41:55). Sam and Dean are unwillingly embroiled in a feud between Heaven and Hell as they attempt to prevent Lucifer from escaping his Cage in Hell and avoid their apparent fate to act as vessels (the angels' physical embodiments on Earth) for Lucifer and Michael during the apocalypse. It is through the characters' resistance to their imposed roles that they utilize their free will. Seasons 4 and 5¹ of *Supernatural* provide a free will which is separate from God or organized religion. Neither the existence of God nor a belief in him is necessary for the determining of one's fate.

¹ For the purpose of this thesis I will only be looking at seasons 4 and 5 of *Supernatural*.

If one is to speak about defying fate through the employment of free will, then it is first important to understand what free will is at a most basic level. Free will has been defined differently by different authors: Hume, Kant, and Nietzsche, to name a few. For the purpose of this paper, the basic dictionary definition is where we will start. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary states that free will is: (1) the ability to choose how to act, (2) the ability to make choices that are not controlled by fate or God. The first definition above is rooted in a person's ability to take action without someone or something forcing the person to take a certain action. The second definition is more specific in that the "someone" controlling the person is a higher power. Within both definitions exists an implicit rejection of a situation in which the ability to choose is taken away from a person and given to another.

The specification of God and fate in the second definition shifts the statement to a rejection of predestination. Predestination is an ideology in which a person's final destiny, and in some cases their individual actions, are pre-decided by a higher power. In this situation, a person's choices are thought to have no effect on the pre-determined ending.

This thesis aims to show the ways in which free will is employed to reject predestination in *Paradise Lost* and *Supernatural*. Chapter 1 is dedicated to the way in which free will is used by Milton in defense of the existence of an all-powerful "good" God. The existence of such a God is challenged by the apparent contradiction of an all-powerful, inherently good-natured God, who still allowed for the creation of evil and the fall of humanity. This chapter offers a close look at how Milton builds a defense for such a God to exist by advocating the existence of free will as a gift given by God. I assert that since free will is given by God, *Paradise Lost* supports an ideology in which God dictates the right and wrong use of this freedom. It is only through using free will in a way that is pleasing to God that humanity may be redeemed from the effects

of the fall. I then ground Milton's argument as distinctly rooted in the tradition of Arminianism. Chapter 1 defines both the ideology of Lutheranism and the ideology of Calvinism, then the way in which Arminianism breaks from this by allowing for a fate defined by a human's choices. This creates a framework for *Paradise Lost*'s depiction of God's role in fate designation.

Chapter 2 takes a closer look at the way freedom of choice is used by the main characters of *Supernatural*, Sam and Dean, throughout seasons 4 and 5 as they seek to defy an imposed destiny. This analysis shows how the concept of free will in *Supernatural* is different than that of *Paradise Lost* because it is not a given gift but something to be fought for and hard won. Sam and Dean do not make their choices based on God's will or his approval. In fact, they actively defy his will. And, unlike in *Paradise Lost*, they are praised for this.

Chapter 3 is a look at the character Lucifer and the way in which he acts as a counter example within each text. Every good story needs a villain, and, in this section, I look at the way that the two Lucifer characters embody the role of villain. I argue that both are an example of a misuse of free will. The Lucifer of *Supernatural* does not believe that choices are made freely and instead subscribes to an ideology of predestination. Throughout the show he attempts to convince Sam and Dean of the hopelessness of fighting against fate, but he ultimately fails. His defeat marks this ideology as wrong within the context of the show. Correspondingly, Lucifer in *Paradise Lost*, referred to as Satan, also misuses his free will. Based on the argument that one ought to use their free will to honor God's mandates, Satan's refusal to repent and obey God is sufficient to mark him as an ill user of free will. However, Satan in *Paradise Lost* isn't as clearly defined as a villain, which has led some critics to believe that perhaps his way was not so incorrect after all. I argue that this ambiguity in Satan's villainy is purposeful on Milton's part and serves a purpose.

Chapter 4 argues that the angels Abdiel and Castiel, from *Paradise Lost* and *Supernatural* respectively, are examples of their text's ideal use of free will. Abdiel is an angel created by Milton with one purpose: to be loyal to God. He is the only angel to listen to Lucifer's arguments and still choose not to rebel against God. Additionally, he employs free choice in his decision to fight for God in the battle against the rebel angels and he shows this in both his words and actions. Contrarily, the angel Castiel from *Supernatural* turns away from God. He uses his free will to defy his angel superiors and fight against the fate determined by God's will. As a result he falls from grace and instead finds new loyalty in and for the Winchester brothers.

Chapter 5 recognizes an inherent rejection of external mediation of an individual's choices and subsequent fate. This chapter connects the arguments of *Paradise Lost* with the historical context of the time period and the Protestant Reformation's focus on an individual's internal connection to scripture. The rejection of external influence is similarly present in *Supernatural*. This chapter goes on to outline the ways in which *Supernatural*'s characters act to reduce the power and influence of God and other precepts of traditional western religious orthodoxy: first by removing God from the show, making his existence and power irrelevant; and second through the use of perverse and crude language. By using profane language to describe those things normally treated with reverence, the characters of *Supernatural* (Dean in particular) reduce God's influence. Instead, I argue, they place importance on humanity and familial bonds. Rather than God's will, these relationships are the moral code which guides their free choices.

In the conclusion, I argue that a comparison of these works reveals a trend in which God suffers a loss of influence over choices made. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a glimpse at how Arminianism's concept of fate and free choice allows for a God who does not write one's destiny. *Supernatural* shows that, in contemporary culture, free will has become separated from

the influence of a higher power, allowing for a secular view of morality to exist. This progression is rooted in free will.

Chapter 1: Milton's Free Will Defense

The existence of free will is central to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The ability for an individual to make choices without God's will dictating the action is necessary for Milton and for Milton's representation of God because it is used to explain the rationale behind Adam and Eve's, as well as Lucifer's, fall from grace. Milton uses free will as the cornerstone of his defense of God.

Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* with a purpose in mind. In the second sentence of *Paradise Lost* he states that purpose.

And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
 Before all temples th'upright heart and pure,
 Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first
 Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
 Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss
 And mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark
 Illumine, what is low raise and support,
 That to the heighth of the great argument
 I may assert eternal providence,
 And justify the ways of God to men. (Milton, Book I, 17-26, 295)

And thus, in what is only the second sentence of his twelve book epic poem, Milton outlines for his readers the intent of *Paradise Lost*. Through this poem Milton will justify God to his readers. However, for a reader who is not well versed in theodicy², the question remains: for what does God need to be justified? The answer is: the existence of evil in the world.

² Theodicy is defined by Merriam-Webster online dictionary as: "defense of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil."

The existence of evil in conjunction with the existence of God has been a sticking point in religious morality for a long time. The problem boils down to three tenets:

1. There is a God who is both omnipotent and omniscient.
2. This God is wholly good.
3. Evil exists in the world.

How can (3) be true, if both (1) and (2) are taken as fact. Seemingly, evil can only exist if either (1) or (2), if not both, are false. This implies that either God does not exist, he does not have the power to extinguish evil, or he allows it because he is not truly good. One of the most well-known versions of this fallacy comes from Epicurus. Lactantius summarizes Epicurus's proposal,

God ... either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? Or why does He not remove them? (Quoted in "Milton's Good God", Danielson, 3).

And so we see the contradictions. This paradox is one so powerful that it can cause one to refute the existence of God completely. It is a paradox to which many have sought solutions. What is more, there are heresies³ which one is likely to fall into when attempting to navigate these contradictions. One way is to negate some of, if not all of, God's omnipotence. Another heresy is referred to by Dennis Danielson, in his book "Milton's Good God," as "voluntarism." It frames morality in terms of God's will completely, implying that God is good based on the very virtue that he is omnipotent and he wills it so. It is the equivalent of saying that it doesn't matter that God allows evil in the world; he is still good because he says he is: "God himself is thus made

³ A heresy is a belief which is contrary to orthodox religious (especially Christian) doctrine.

‘good’ by definition alone” (Danielson, 8). If the morality of good and evil can be redefined in this way, it renders morality meaningless since there is no objective right or wrong. Another way to navigate the contradiction attempts to wash out the dichotomy of good and evil. This is a more holistic viewpoint which states that the good and evil parts of the world come together to create the best possible world. Danielson notes that this viewpoint is known as “optimism – not, of course, in the popular sense of a cheery outlook on life but in the philosophical sense of viewing this world as optimus, the best” (9). All these views “solve” the problem by dissolving one of the tenets of the fallacy. The first makes God feeble, the second takes away the meaning of “good,” and the last takes away the “evil” part of “evil.” In *Paradise Lost*, Milton attempts to navigate this contradiction while still giving credence to all three axioms.

Because in *Paradise Lost* he seeks to justify God, Milton intended his work to be taken as more than a work of fiction. In *Paradise Lost* he provides a theological argument which he claims to be the truth. But in order for his work to be taken as such, Milton needs to assert his authority. Even if a reader finds that Milton’s justification is sufficient to allow for a God whose existence is without contradictions, without trusting Milton’s authority, why ought they put any credence in Milton’s proposition? Milton’s attempt to claim authority can similarly be found in the second sentence of the poem. He asks for a spirit to “instruct him” (Milton, Book I, 295). The spirit in question is the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Holy Trinity. We know this because the narration calls this spirit “dove-like,” and the dove is a traditional marker for the Holy Spirit, as seen in the Bible, Book of Matthew: “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straight out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him” (KJV, St. Matthew 3:16, 253) Additionally, Milton cites that the spirit was present at the moment when there was nothing but the “vast

abyss” and what is more, the spirit was responsible for making it “pregnant” (Milton, Book I, 295), implying that it was present at the moment of creation as well. This mirrors the opening lines of the Bible. The Book of Genesis starts with “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. / And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (KJV, Genesis 1:1-2, 1). From this, it is clear that Milton is invoking the aid of the Holy Spirit in his work.

Milton asks the Holy Spirit for illumination and for it to both raise him high and support him (Milton, Book I, 295). The illumination he seeks is access to the truth of what happened during the events of the fall. The height he seeks is the height of Heaven. Milton wishes to raise himself up to God’s level. His writing isn’t just of a human order but that of heaven, much like the Bible itself or Moses’s Ten Commandments. Because readers of the time were highly religious, in invoking the Holy Spirit Milton adds credibility to his work. Milton can now “assert eternal providence” (Milton, Book I, 295). To claim that his hand was guided by the Holy Spirit is to claim there is a truth to be found in his writing.

Once Milton believes that his authority is established, Milton can provide his justification. In *Paradise Lost*, this is found in the form of a Free Will Defense. Free will, as defined in the introduction, is the ability for an individual to make choices without interference or limitation. The God in *Paradise Lost* gives free will to the beings he creates. This is shown in Book III when God explains to Jesus that he has foreseen the fall of man.

So will fall
 He and his faithless progeny: whose fault?
 Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of me
 All he could have; I made him just and right,

Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
 Such I created all th'ethereal Powers
 And spirits, both them who stood and them who failed;
 Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell. (Milton, Book III, 95-99, 363)

The use of the word “will” here is meant to highlight the inevitability of the fall. Because God has omniscient foresight, he knows that the fall will happen. But he clarifies that, despite his omnipotence, it is not his doing. The fault lies with the one who falls. For God made all his creatures, man and angel alike, sufficient to have withstood temptation. They are capable of choosing to ignore the devil, but some don't. He continues, “They trespass, authors to themselves in all / Both what they judge and what they choose; for so / I formed them free, and free they must remain” (Milton, Book III, 122-124, 364), reiterating that any trespasses they do, they do so freely.

This freedom is important for two reasons. The first is that it allows for humanity (and the angels) to love God truly, rather than create a mimicry of love. God explains,

Not free, what proof could they have giv'n sincere
 Of true allegiance, constant faith or love,
 Where only what they needs must do, appeared,
 Not what they would? What praise could they receive?
 What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
 When will and reason (reason also is choice)
 Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,
 Made passive both, had served necessity,
 Not me. (Milton, Book III, 103-11, 363-34)

If humanity were not free to choose to love and obey God of their own volition, but did so because it was mandated by him, he would have no proof that they truly loved him. In the lines

above, God explains that their obedience and praise would be “despoiled” for him if they were offered out of necessity rather than free choice. A person could say that they obey God because they love him; but if God forced them to obey, then there is no proof of this love. Similarly, if he forces them to love him, this is not love either. A mindless automaton cannot really love.

The second reason that freedom of choice is important in *Paradise Lost* is that it absolves God of his guilt in the fall. God states,

So were created, nor can justly accuse
 Their Maker, or their making, or their fate,
 As if predestination overruled
 Their will, disposed by absolute decree
 Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
 Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
 Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
 Which no less proved certain unforeknown. (Milton, Book III, 112-19, 364)

According to God, if humanity is given free choice, there is no way that an individual can accuse him of causing the fall. By taking the power to decide away from God and placing it in the hands of Adam and Eve, God is freed of all guilt of causation. Additionally, he is absolved of accusations that he ought to have stepped in to stop the fall because free will can only exist without God’s intervention. If he were to have stopped the fall, he would have impinged upon this free will.

With freedom of choice promised to individuals, all three of the axioms can exist without contradiction. The first, there is a God who is both omnipotent and omniscient, is met by Milton’s God since he has the power to prevent the fall, but chooses not to. The second, this God is wholly good, is the reason why God chooses not to intervene. He does not intervene because

to do so would be to violate humanity's free will. Thirdly, evil and sin exist in our world, not because God mandates it, but because humanity chooses to let it in.

But, while God, like a parent, knows it is important to let his creations make their own choices, he doesn't have to be happy with the outcome. God expects humanity to make the right choices and obey his mandates. In *Paradise Lost*, one such mandate is given to Adam and Eve. In the Garden of Eden God has one strict rule: Adam and Eve must not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil; if they do, they will be punished. Adam reminds Eve of this in Book IV:

From us no other service than to keep
This one, this easy charge, of all the trees
In Paradise that bear delicious fruit
So various, not to taste that only Tree
Of Knowledge, planted by the Tree of Life,
So near grows death to life, whate'er death is,
Some dreadful thing no doubt; for well thou know'st
God hath pronounced it death to taste that Tree. (Milton, Book IV, 420-27, 398).

Death is the punishment allocated for disobeying God and eating the fruit from the tree. This rule shows that, even when given the freedom to choose, humanity is expected to obey the will of God or suffer the consequences. Regardless of free will, God's word is law.

However, those who obey will be praised and rewarded. Adam and Eve are rewarded for obeying God by existing in a state of perfection. Adam comments on this, noting how the prohibition on the Tree is "The only sign of our obedience left / Among so many signs of power and rule" (Milton, Book IV, 428-29, 398) and "One easy prohibition, who enjoy/ Free leave so large to all things else, and choice / Unlimited of manifold delights" (Milton, Book IV, 433-35,

398). For these gifts, Adam and Eve are expected not only to obey God but to honor him. Adam proposes, "...let us ever praise him, and extol / His bounty ...” (Milton, Book IV, 436-37, 398). In “*Paradise Lost* and the Modern Reader,” Thomas Wheeler explains “their freedom is valuable only because it makes their obedience pleasing to God.” (Wheeler, 67). Adam and Eve are thankful to God for all he has given them – including free will – so they choose to honor and obey him. And when they choose not to, they are punished and fall from God’s grace.

A system of rewards and punishments is put in place. This threat of punishment defines free will through God’s will. In this way, the actions taken with free will are overshadowed by the will of God. Because of this God’s benevolence is honored as a priority. It is due to God’s mercy that Adam and Eve are given a chance at redemption when they are forced to leave Eden. God promises that,

Man shall not quite be lost, but save who will,
 Yet not of will in him, but grace in me
 Freely vouchsafed; once more I will renew
 His lapsèd powers, though forfeit and enthralled
 By sin to foul exorbitant desires;
 ...
 By me upheld, that he may know how frail
 His fall’n condition is, and to me owe
 All his deliv’rance, and to none but me. (Milton, Book III, 173-77 ... 180-83, 365-66)

When God says that it is “not of will in him, but grace in me,” He explains that it is through God⁴ that humanity shall be redeemed, not through an individual’s choices. And thus God, the great redeemer, is presented as the hero of the poem. In *Paradise Lost*, individuals are free to

⁴ This is a reference to the coming of Jesus.

make their own choices, but will only be saved and rewarded through a commitment to God's will.

This rhetoric is one that is grounded in Protestantism. Protestant belief systems surrounding free will, for the most part, can be broken down by their founders: Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jacob Arminius. Milton makes note of the work of all three.

"Human will interested Luther in so far as it related to God, grace and salvation" (Myers, 29) explains Benjamin Myers in "Milton's Theology of Freedom." Luther believed that:

God does not require the sinner first to make himself holy, before venturing to approach him, but God himself goes towards the prodigal ... It is not the human achievement of good works and merits, but ... ultimately, the sole cause which God can have for accepting us must be himself in his unfathomable mercy. (Pfurtner, 34-5)

For Luther, the actions of individuals affect not their fate but their faith. If they had this faith in God, then their salvation was assured because God has assured his followers of his mercy. This is different from the vision of salvation as painted by Milton since individuals' actions do affect the outcome of their fate. However, Milton acknowledges Luther's belief inasmuch as Milton agrees that the source of salvation isn't an individual's actions but God.

John Calvin agreed that salvation for an individual lay with God, but so did their damnation. "The substance of Calvin's predestination theology was that 'God saves whom he will of his mere good pleasure'" (Myers, 34). In *From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology* Clark Pinnock writes, "Calvin's logic was impeccable as usual: God wills whatever happens, so if there are to be lost people, God must have willed it" (19). Calvin argues that God chooses to save some and not others. Calvin's understanding of fate is deterministic in nature.

These two theologies both hold that a man's will is made irrelevant by the existence of a predetermined end state. For Luther, good Christians are predestined to have salvation. For

Calvinists, some are predestined to salvation and others to damnation. Milton too acknowledges that some individuals are to be saved and others are designated to be damned, but he doesn't agree that an individual has no say in this outcome.

In the late sixteenth and seventeenth century, Jacob Arminius broke from the mold slightly in relation to freedom and predestination and gave rise to the theory of Arminianism. Arminian theology too believes that salvation comes from God. However, where this ideology differs from the previous ideas of predestination is that it 'flipped the script' on fate. Rather than God casting his judgement with no regard for an individual's actions, "God invites humans to share in deciding what the future will be" (Pinnock, 21). Within Arminianism it is God who decides the fate of an individual, but this decision is based on the actions of the individual. This is because of his non-causal definition of foreknowledge. In *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius* Richard Muller extrapolates on this by citing Daneau: "For God nor ordains nothing that he does not foreknow; he foreknows, however many things that he does not ordain" (252-3). That is to say, all of God's orders are based on knowledge of future events and are not made arbitrarily. "In this way, the Arminians grounded predestination in God's foreknowledge of the human response to grace. According to Reformed orthodoxy, individuals believe because they have been elected; according to Arminianism, they are elected because they will believe" (Myers, 44). Rather than a human's choices being based on their fate, a person's pre-determined fate was based on their future choices.

Arminianism matches most closely to the theology built by Milton in which God foreknows what choices Adam and Eve will make, but does not make the choices for them. Adam and Eve's fate, and the fate of future generations of humans, is still mandated by God; but, this fate is based on their independent actions.

Chapter 2: Team Free Will's Defiance of Predetermination

“Team Free Will. One ex-blood junkie, one dropout with six bucks to his name, and Mr. Comatose over there. It's awesome” (“The Song Remains the Same,” 5.13, 38:33-38:41). When Dean spoke these words in the middle of the fifth season of *Supernatural*, he created a brand for the moral of the show's seasons 4 and 5 plot arc. Suddenly, “Team Free Will” was plastered all over the show's merchandise and #TFW became the go to hashtag for anything relating to the show's three main characters (Sam, Dean, and Castiel). I've been wearing proudly a ring with “Team Free Will” embossed on it for over a year. Team Free Will gave the viewers of the show something to root for; as sports fans cheer for their favorite team, so too could the fans of *Supernatural* cheer for their team.

The idea of championing free will is one that was accepted by the audience with little question. Who would root against the heroes of the show and for a belief system in which individuals have no say in their fate or the choices they make? But few casual viewers, or even more serious fans, have taken the time to analyze the way in which *Supernatural* presents free will. The reality is that free will in the show is defined almost entirely by its opposition to a deterministic ideology.

Supernatural is a show about defiance. Two heroes, brothers Sam and Dean – with the help of the angel Castiel – actively fight against an imposed destiny. Utilizing their free will to thwart God's plan and the powers of heaven, Sam and Dean represent a free will which is grounded in self-determination and autonomy. This means that the heroes champion a freedom of choice without external compulsion; their acts of self-direction are grounded in moral independence.

This fight against a predetermined plan manifests through the brothers' confrontations with angels in seasons 4 and 5. The angels are put in opposition to Sam and Dean because they represent the inevitability of predetermined fate. The angels believe that God's will is absolute and that his plan will come to be no matter the actions taken against it. This belief is demonstrated by multiple angels throughout the seasons. The angel Zachariah is one of the first to express this attitude towards God's plan. In the season 4 finale, "Lucifer Rising," he explains to Dean that the angels wanted Lucifer to escape, because God had written that his escape from Hell was destined to happen. "Lilith's⁵ going to break the final seal⁶. Fait accompli at this point. Train's left the station ... The end is nigh. The apocalypse is coming, kiddo, to a theater near you" ("Lucifer Rising", 4.22, 23:28-23:55), Zachariah asserts. He lays out the plan, as the angels understand it: Lucifer will rise, Sam and Dean will agree to be Lucifer and Michael's vessels, the two will fight, and Michael will win. Zachariah, and by extension the other angels, do not care about the human lives that will be caught in the crossfire. "Well, you can't make an omelet without cracking a few eggs. In this case... truckloads of eggs, but you get the picture. Look, it happens. This isn't the first planetary enema we've delivered" ("Lucifer Rising", 4.22, 24:44-25:01), Zachariah assures Dean. The angels believe that the destruction of the apocalypse will allow for a new order to flourish.

The Archangel Gabriel expresses a similar fatalistic belief system in the episode "Changing Channels." In this episode Gabriel traps Sam and Dean in the world of bad television, where the two are forced to play the roles dictated to them in order to move from show to show.

⁵ Lilith is a demon who was actively working to free Lucifer from hell by breaking the 66 seals to his Cage. She is based on a figure from Jewish Myth.

⁶ The seals are perhaps inspired by the 7 seals mentioned in the book of Revelation which mark the second coming of Jesus.

This is a metaphor for their destined roles as Lucifer and Michael's vessels. "Sam starring as Lucifer. Dean starring as Michael. Your celebrity death match. Play your roles ... You're gonna suck it up, accept your responsibilities, and play your roles that destiny has chosen for you" ("Changing Channels", 5.08, 24:54-25:02...26:09-26:15), he explicitly orders. Gabriel, having run away from Heaven ages ago, isn't particularly rooting for either side, but he still urges the brothers to accept their destinies. This is because he wants the Apocalypse to end quickly. "Look, it's started. You started it. It can't be stopped. So let's get it over with!" ("Changing Channels", 5.08, 25:20-25:26). He too believes that God's plan will come to pass. For him, it is only a matter of *when*. Gabriel discloses that the archangels knew from the moment God "flipped on the lights" ("Changing Channels", 5.08, 36:36) it was all going to end with Dean and Sam. Their roles in the apocalypse have been fated since the beginning.

In "The Song Remains the Same" the archangel Michael explains his opinion on his fated showdown with Lucifer. He doesn't want to defeat Lucifer, or even face him, but he will because "From the beginning, he knew this was how it was going to end" ("The Song Remains the Same", 5.13, 34:55-35:00). God dictated that the pair will possess Sam and Dean and that they will fight. Michael explains:

Think of a million random acts of chance that let John and Mary be born, to meet, to fall in love, to have the two of you. Think of the million random choices that you make, and yet how each and every one of them brings you closer to your destiny. Do you know why that is? Because it's not random. It's not chance. It's a plan that is playing itself out perfectly. Free will's an illusion, Dean. That's why you're going to say yes. ("The Song Remains the Same," 5.13, 35:40-36:26)

Michael, like the other angels, believes that a human's choices don't have an effect on the final outcome. Regardless of the path taken to get there, the end result cannot be altered. Dean rejects this. "I got to believe that I can choose what I do with my unimportant little life" ("The Song

Remains the Same,” 5.13, 35:21-35:29), he argues. It is in defiance of Michael’s message that Dean coins the term “Team Free Will” (“The Song Remains the Same,” 5.13, 38:33-38:41).

Dean, and by extension the entirety of Team Free Will, displays his rejection of the predetermined apocalypse most clearly in Season 5’s “The End.” In “The End,” Zachariah sends Dean forward in time from 2009 to 2014 to a possible version of the future in which Sam has consented to being Lucifer’s vessel but Dean has not consented to Michael. 2009!Dean⁷ finds his future self and comrades barely surviving Lucifer’s destruction of the world and powerless to stop him. The premise of this episode is an exemplar of the angels’ conviction in their belief that Sam will consent to Lucifer. Zachariah’s vision of the future is one in which Dean refuses to let Michael use him as a vessel long enough⁸ for Lucifer to destroy the world. Regardless of Dean, Sam always says yes. Zachariah uses the bleak future presented in “The End” to attempt to convince Dean to say yes to Michael.

To give Zachariah’s plan its credence, there are plenty of reasons why Dean would want to avoid the future presented to him: Sam is the Devil, Castiel is an ex-angel stoner, and 2014!Dean is a cruel and broken man who is willing to sacrifice his friends for the smallest chance of stopping Lucifer. Even 2014!Dean wants 2009!Dean to say yes. He begs Dean to say yes to Michael when he gets sent back to his own time. He argues “Half the planet’s better than no planet” (“The End,” 5.04, 26:15-26:18) when 2009!Dean argues that the fight between Michael and Lucifer would “torch” half the planet.

⁷ This notation is commonly used to affix a modifier to a character name when transcribed, when multiple versions of the character exist. Here I use it distinguish between the future and present versions of Dean.

⁸ 2014!Dean states that he has since said “yes” but with no response.

Lucifer puts most succinctly his and the other angels' fatalistic belief when Dean encounters him at the episode's climax. Upon killing 2014!Dean he informs 2009!Dean, "Whatever you do, you will always end up here. Whatever choices you make, whatever details you alter, we will always end up—here" ("The End," 5.04, 36:37-36:49). The language of this sentiment implies a life predetermined. It doesn't matter what Dean does, Sam will always say yes and Dean will always have to face the Devil.

In the face of what is supposed to be, Dean nevertheless chooses to fight. This episode marks a tipping point for Dean. Just two episodes earlier, in "Free to Be You and Me," Dean had considered saying yes to Michael, but from "The End" on he resolves to find another way. "You better kill me now," Dean warns Lucifer, "Or I swear, I will find a way to kill you" ("The End," 5.04, 36:14-36:19). Dean revolts against the idea that saying yes to Michael is the only way to defeat Lucifer. This is in large part due to what may be considered a small detail in the wake of everything wrong with the future Zachariah presents.

2009!Dean discovers that, in this future, he and Sam haven't talked to each other in approximately five years. This means that Dean and Sam's decision to separate in "Good God Y'All" (5.02) is a permanent one in this version of the future. 2014!Dean accuses his past self of being too unwilling to sacrifice friends and family. "It's one of the main reasons we're in this mess, actually" ("The End," 5.04, 31:34-31:36), he states. But Dean's takeaway from the episode is that he ought to have cared *more* for Sam. His decision to walk away from Sam is one that he can still remedy. After he is returned to his own time, he calls Sam and the two agree to stick together, whatever happens. By altering this fact, Dean proves that Zachariah's future isn't set in stone for them.

Sam and Dean continually reject the idea that their choices are pre-determined. Sam and Dean's family history is often cited by the angels as evidence for a lack of freedom of choice. In "Team Free Will: Something Worth Fighting For," critics Devon Fitzgerald Ralston and Carey F. Applegate outline the series of events which led the brothers to become Michael and Lucifer's vessels:

One such example is Azazel's bargain with Mary over John's life in "The Song Remains the Same." This bargain sets the family on a seemingly inescapable path, first by allowing Azazel to enter Sam's nursery without interference and then costing Mary her own life when she very naturally tries to protect him. This loss pushes John, never a hunter before, to fixate on killing Azazel along with as many evil things as he possibly can. Consequently, John raises Sam and Dean in the life Mary tried so hard to escape, a life she never wanted for any of them. According to Zachariah, this chain of events ultimately led to Sam and Dean being the chosen vessels for the apocalyptic showdown between the archangel Michael and his brother, Lucifer. (38)

In "The Song Remains the Same," Michael even goes so far as to reveal that the brothers are the descendants of Cain and Abel, something which marks them as ideal vessels. At first glance, this series of cause and effect does indeed paint a deterministic picture. However, the paragraph above can be re-written: Mary *chooses* to make a deal to save John's life. John *chooses* to avenge the death of his wife by hunting and raising his sons to fight. Additionally, Dean *chooses* to become a hunter and Sam *chooses* to leave Stanford in the show's first episode and return to the life he left behind.

Just because their choices led them to achieving some aspects of their prescribed fate, does not mean that their fate was the cause of these choices. "Hume's point is that our choices must have causes, but this doesn't mean they're determined" (43) Ralston and Applegate explain succinctly, referencing the work of philosopher David Hume. All choices have a reason behind them. All the choices listed above were made for reasons which were grounded in the individual

rather than the external force of God's plan. "Our choices must come from our characters, what we value, and what we care about. Otherwise, they're not really our choices" (Ralston & Applegate, 43). Whether the reasons for a person's choice are guided by the individual's moral center, sense of loyalty, what they perceive to be the best outcome, or some other internal thought process, for the choice to be free it must be unmediated by an external force. In *Supernatural*, this external force is God's will.

The Members of Team Free Will prove that their choices are made independently of God in the season 5 finale. In "Swan Song," Sam chooses to allow Lucifer to possess him with the hope that, once Lucifer is inside him, Sam will be able to overpower him and send him back to the Cage from which he escaped. "I let him out. I got to put him back in" ("Swan Song," 5.22, 4:43-4:48) Sam explains, taking responsibility for his own actions. Even Dean acknowledges Sam's autonomy in the choice. "That's the thing. It's not on me to let you do anything. You're a grown -- well, overgrown -- man. If this is what you want, I'll back your play" ("Swan Song," 5.22, 3:21-3:32). Sam's decision is his own, uninfluenced by his brother, or Lucifer, or angels, or God's plan for him. And in the end, Sam is successful. The distinction between the consent that the Angels expect from Sam, and that which he actually gives, is the intent behind it. Sam actively chooses to say yes to Lucifer in the hopes of defeating him from within. His consent is not a defeat. It is not an inevitable result of an imposed destiny. When he forces Lucifer back into the Cage, he defies his fate.

This episode also heavily features the Prophet Chuck. Chuck, introduced in season 4's "Monster at the End of this Book," is a writer with the power of prophetic visions of the lives of

Sam and Dean, who has been writing their story in the form of *Supernatural* novellas⁹. And, as a prophet, he has the most direct link to God's plan. He represents not only the writers of the show and their dominion over the characters they write, but also God's supposed plan. "He's a mouthpiece – a conduit for the inspired word" ("Monster at the End of this Book," 4.18, 26:29-26:32), Castiel explains. Chuck's visions of the future are portrayed as a glimpse at God's plan for the Winchester brothers. This means that Chuck's visions ought to be absolute. And yet, when Dean shows up at Chuck's house in "Swan Song," Chuck is surprised. "I didn't know that you'd call" ("Swan Song," 5.22, 23:17), he says, and later he admits that his clear vision of the future isn't so clear anymore. When Dean asks what is going to happen next, Chuck answers that he has no idea. This indicates that the future isn't determined as the angels would have Sam and Dean believe, since clearly the outcome has yet to be decided or Chuck would have already known the result.

This isn't the first time that Team Free Will defy the prophet's ability to see the future. "You guys aren't supposed to be there. You're not in this story" ("Lucifer Rising," 4.22, 35:00-35:02), Chuck complains, confused, when Dean and Castiel come to him in the season 4 finale. He, as a prophet, did not foresee their appearance at his house. They are not meant to be a part of the "story" that God has planned. Dean and Castiel defy God's plan in this moment, explaining to Chuck "We're making it up as we go" ("Lucifer Rising," 4.22, 35:04). Making it up as one goes along is the life of a self-determinist, free of external influence or predetermined fate.

⁹ This is not the first, nor the last time, that *Supernatural* breaks the fourth wall.

Chapter 3: Lucifer: The Great Adversary

Presented so far have been the heroes of their respective works: Adam and Eve, from *Paradise Lost* and Sam and Dean in *Supernatural*. These heroes represent the ideal by which the members of the audience ought to model themselves. The counter example is the villain. In both *Paradise Lost* and *Supernatural*, the villain is Lucifer (called Satan by Milton). In both texts this character represents an incorrect belief system: a model of what not to believe.

Lucifer is the perfect villain for the viewers of *Supernatural* to root against because Lucifer subscribes to the theory of predestination. He, like all the other angels, believes that God's will is preordained and inescapable. He has known since he was imprisoned in the Cage by Michael that one day he would be freed by Sam. He describes Sam as being made for him and admits how long he has been waiting for Sam. The first time that Sam and Lucifer meet, Lucifer tells him: "You're the one, Sam. You're my vessel. My true vessel" ("Free to Be You and Me", 5.03, 38:55-39:02). There isn't a doubt in Lucifer's mind because it is God's plan.

The certainty with which Lucifer speaks is apparent in not only the language of the script but the way the actor, Mark Pellegrino, delivers the lines. Even after Sam vehemently denies that he will ever agree to allow Lucifer to use him as a vessel, Lucifer remains calm and certain. He promises Sam, "I'm sorry, but it will [happen]. I will find you. And when I do, you will let me in. I'm sure of it" ("Free to Be You and Me", 5.03, 39:14-39:26). He never raises his voice or threatens because he doesn't feel he needs to. "It had to be you, Sam," Lucifer explains, "It always had to be you" ("Free to Be You and Me," 5.03, 40:28-40:35). He is positive that Sam will consent, because Sam is fated to be Lucifer's vessel. He believes that there isn't any escape from God's plan.

It is clear that belief is not merely a method of deception for Lucifer, but that Lucifer actually believes it. “A part of me wishes we didn't have to do this” (“Swan Song”, 5.22, 26:19-26:21), he laments to Michael when they finally meet face-to-face. What is more, because he believes God is responsible for everything he has become, Lucifer holds severe animosity towards God. He expresses this to Michael, “Think about it. Dad made everything. Which means he made me who I am! God wanted the Devil... No one makes Dad do anything. He is doing this to us” (“Swan Song”, 5.22, 26:39-26:49 ... 27:50-52). Lucifer believes God is to blame for all the evil things he has done, because God created him. He says this of God: “There are only two rational answers, Nick—either he's sadistic, or he simply doesn't care” (“Sympathy for the Devil”, 5.01, 35:19-35:26). For Lucifer, not only is God guilty of creating the Devil, but he is responsible for all evil in the world because he doesn't care enough to intervene.

Supernatural's Lucifer is built out of a rhetoric of hopelessness. His power is in making others believe that fighting is a useless endeavor since there is no way to escape destiny. When Sam threatens to kill himself to avoid his fate, “I'll just bring you back” Lucifer rebuts him in a bored tone (“Free to Be You and Me”, 5.03, 39:35-39:37). He goes on: “Sam. My heart breaks for you. The weight on your shoulders, what you've done, what you still have to do. It is more than anyone could bear. If there was some other way...but there isn't. I will never lie to you. I will never trick you. But you will say yes to me” (“Free to Be You and Me”, 5.03, 39:42-40:14). In this moment Lucifer is very careful with the words he chooses. He begins by expressing a false sympathy, which serves to remind Sam of how he ought to be feeling: guilt for all the things he has done, responsibility for having freed the Devil, anguish for having been hurt so much in life, anticipation for the worse things that are yet to come¹⁰. Such misfortunes are

¹⁰ Lucifer excuses all of these things as not Sam's fault, but the fault of fate.

enough to make the average person wish to just give up and accept fate, and Lucifer seeks to remind him of this. Lucifer's promise to never lie or trick further solidifies his argument that there is no way for Sam to change his destiny. Why would he need to lie or trick if the outcome is predetermined?

Lucifer uses a similar technique when he achieves consent from his temporary vessel, Nick. Lucifer states: "I need to take control of your mind and your body. To be honest, it'll probably be unpleasant for you. But it is necessary" ("Sympathy for the Devil", 5.01, 34:08-34:20). What is more, he makes himself sympathetic to Nick by painting himself as a victim of God's fate also.

You people misunderstand me. You call me "Satan" and "devil", but... Do you know my crime? I loved God too much. And for that, he betrayed me—punished me. Just as he's punished you. After all, how could God stand idly by while that man broke into your home and butchered your family in their beds? (Sympathy for the Devil, 5.01, 34:47-35:17)

As he does with Sam, Lucifer reminds Nick of all the pain that God allows, that God's hand indirectly creates. And Nick gives in easily, accepting his fate per Lucifer's rationale.

The Lucifer that Milton presents to his audience is not as obviously in opposition to the use of free will for which Milton argues. Whereas *Supernatural's* Devil believes in an ordained fate, Satan in *Paradise Lost* recognizes the existence of choice. He questions of himself, "Hadst thou the same free will and power to stand?/ Thou hadst: whom hast thou then or what to accuse,/ But Heav'n's free love dealt equally to all?" (Milton, Book IV, 66-68, 386-7). He first ponders whether he had the same strength as the obedient angels to withstand the temptation to

rebel and decides that he did. But, having the freedom to choose this path also allowed him the freedom to choose to fall. In fact, Satan aware of his own will as the cause of his fall.

God expected his angels to agree to do his will based on gratitude for their peaceful existence¹¹. And Satan resented him for it.

So burdensome still paying, still to owe;
 Forgetful what from him I still received,
 And understood not that a grateful mind
 By owing owes not, but still pays, at once
 Indebted....(Milton, Book IV, 53-57, 386)

Satan acknowledges that he received much from God and that he ought to be grateful. But the fact that the obligation to be grateful is continued (“still paying, still to owe”) Lucifer finds burdensome. He feels that this continued loyalty is unfair and undeserved.

This burden is the reason why Satan rebelled, as he explains in one of his soliloquies:

Yet all his good proved ill in me,
 And wrought but malice; lifted up so high
 I ‘sdained subjection, and thought one step higher
 Would set me highest, and in a moment quit
 The debt immense of endless gratitude. (Milton, Book IV, 48-52, 386)

The supposed gratitude that Satan was meant to feel for being lifted up to a high rank turned to envy of God’s position. He explains that he believed that he was one step away from the highest position. He stopped praising God for all he had given and instead questioned his rule. What is more, he blames God for these feelings of envy:

¹¹ This is no different than what he asked of Adam and Eve.

O had his powerful destiny ordained
 Me some inferior angel, I had stood
 Then happy; no unbounded hope had raised
 Ambition. (Milton, Book IV, 58-61, 386)

Satan believes that if God hadn't given him a high rank, he wouldn't have felt the ambition to rise above his station. In *Milton's God* William Empson agrees. He asks: "But why do the angels have to be organized into an elaborate hierarchy at all? Are they organized to do something, or is it merely what is called a 'pecking order' among hens?" (Empson, 103). Empson questions God's purpose in building a militaristic order in which there are leaders and legions. He compares Heaven to a hospital which is organized to heal the sick but with no sick to heal. "In human experience, we feel this pride in an organization when there is some purpose to be served," Empson explains (108). Since there is no work to be done, the subordinates and the superiors stagnate in the system. The angels are both literally and figuratively "set up" for war. If God hadn't made them this way there might not have been war; it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. "Such a Heaven was forcing-house to develop the pride of Satan" (Empson, 109). This supports Satan's belief that if he had been a lesser angel he would have been less envious and prideful.

Empson is not the first to find merit in Satan's arguments. In fact, many have found Satan to be so persuasive that they accuse Milton of being in the "Devil's Camp." This means that they believe Milton made Satan so sympathetic because he wanted his readers to agree with Satan. John Carey comments on the division between the Satanists and the Anti-Satanists in "Milton's Satan": "Satanist critics generally emphasize Satan's courage, anti-Satanists his selfishness or folly" (162). Satan has many qualities which complicate a reading of him as a simple villain. In fact, some argue that, because he is given multiple soliloquies typical of a tragic hero which give the audience a glimpse into his thoughts, Satan takes on the traditional role of hero. He is

uncertain and curious, he is intelligent and conniving, he is prideful and stubborn: he is the most human of *Paradise Lost*'s characters.

This sympathy for the Devil is purposeful on the part of Milton. Carey explains, "The correct critical reaction to this dispute is not to imagine that it can be settled" (161). Readers are supposed to recognize themselves in Satan because to do so is to recognize humanity as fallen. Humans are capable of giving in to sin, as Eve is prone to do so. Satan is able to convince Eve to fall quite easily. Satan argues,

Deterred not from achieving what might lead
To a happier life, knowledge of good and evil;
Of good, how just? Of evil, if what is evil
Be real, why not known, since easier shunned. (Milton, Book IX, 696-99, 537)

He posits that it would be easier to avoid evil if they had a more full knowledge of what evil is, and similarly easier to choose good if they have a deeper knowledge of good. This is logical to Eve and, to a lesser extent, the reader. Milton's audience is supposed to find Satan's logic convincing because humans are tempted every day to sin and the Devil is convincing.

God's mercy for a repentant Adam and Eve – and his subsequent punishment of Satan – are meant to convince Milton's readers to deny those parts of themselves that agree with Satan. They ought to not trust Satan and his "serpent-tongue" (Milton, Book IX, 529, 532) because he will trick them into a "bad faith" reading of God's will. Benjamin Myers explains this with a citation of Neil Forsyth, "The attribution of 'bad theology' to Satan has been common in Christian tradition. Already in the early centuries of Christianity, as Neil Forsyth notes, Satan began to serve 'a vital theological function' : 'As the prince of error and the father of lies, he became the arch-heretic'" (Myers, 55). A sly tongue like that of Satan's is meant to lead the

reader astray. The only way for Adam and Eve to be saved is through God and his mercy, not Satan's tricks. The poem is meant to convince readers of this so that they may choose God over the Devil in their own lives in order to reach salvation.

However, Lucifer's beliefs are not always consistent. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan is contradictory. When he says, "Forgetful what from him I still received, / And understood not that a grateful mind / By owing owes not" (Milton, Book IV, 54-56, 386), he acknowledges that if he had been more grateful of all that he had been given then it wouldn't have felt like a chore to please God. Additionally, he refutes his argument that it was his high position which led to his envy of God when he asks: "Yet why not some other Power / As great might have aspired ... But other Powers as great / Fell not" (Milton, Book IV, 61-62 ... 63-64). Michael was of the same position in Heaven, an archangel, but he did not feel the push to rebel. Satan acknowledges this.

In *Supernatural*, Lucifer also contradicts his proposed beliefs of inescapable pre-destination in "Swan Song." Before he faces down Michael in battle, Lucifer asks why they are even fighting if neither of them want to. "We're brothers. Let's just walk off the chessboard" ("Swan Song", 5.22, 27:13-27:17), he pleads. In doing so, he recognizes an alternative option. Despite his ingrained belief that God's will is absolute, he still momentarily hopes for an alternative.

Both Lucifer and Satan acknowledge a potential alternative to their belief system, but refute it. They are not blind to the system of free will which is championed by the other characters of the text. They are obstinate in their decision to believe what they do, because in doing so the culpability for their fall rests with God.

Chapter 4: Abdiel and Castiel

Paradise Lost and *Supernatural* each feature an angel who is not based on traditional biblical references. In *Paradise Lost* this character is Abdiel, who was created by Milton and is not named as an angel anywhere in the Bible. In *Supernatural* the analogous character is Castiel who, though named after a real angel, shares no traits in common with his namesake. These characters break from tradition in order to play a specific role. These characters provide a representation of the work's ideal user of free will.

Abdiel's plotline is buried in Raphael's account of the war in heaven to Adam in books V and VI. Abdiel had been a part of Lucifer's¹² garrison before Lucifer's rebellion. However, when Lucifer convinced the rest of the garrison to wage war against God, Abdiel alone remained faithful.

So spake the Seraph Abdiel, faithful found

Among the faithless, faithful only he;

Among innumerable false, unmoved,

Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified,

His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal;

Nor number, nor example, with him wrought

To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,

Though single. From amidst them forth he passed. (Milton, Book V, 896-903, 444)

Here Abdiel is described as faithful, unseduced, loyal, brave – all positive and desirable adjectives. He, unlike the other members of Lucifer's garrison, chose to fight for God. This is

¹² Pre-fall Satan was known by his angelic name: Lucifer. Thus, though I have already referred to Milton's Lucifer as Satan in the previous chapter, here I use his angelic name since I am speaking about him pre-fall.

equated to the truth and to love. This connotation provides for the reader a clear view of what choices are praised by Milton in *Paradise Lost*: those choices which are loyal to God.

But it is not enough that Abdiel passively remain loyal to God; he takes action to prove his faith. It is Abdiel who begins the battle.

So saying, a noble stroke he lifted high,
Which hung not, but so swift with tempest fell
On the proud crest of Satan, that no sight,
Nor motion of swift thought, less could his shield,
Such ruin intercept: Ten paces huge
He back recoiled; the tenth on bended knee
. . . .

... Amazement seized

The rebel Thrones, but greater rage, to see
Thus foiled their mightiest; ours joy filled, and shout,
Presage of victory, and fierce desire
Of battle. (Milton, Book VI, 189-94 ... 198-202, 451-52)

Abdiel throws the first punch and is able not only to startle, but to physically move a higher-ranked angel. His ability to injure and push back Lucifer is indicative of the angel's coming victory.

This belief that the angels will prevail before the fight even begins is echoed in Abdiel's speech in Book VI. Facing off against Lucifer before the battle, Abdiel condemns him, saying:

Wherefore should not strength and might
There fail where virtue fails, or weakest prove
Where boldest, though to fight unconquerable?
His puissance, trusting in the Almighty's aid,
I mean to try, whose reason I have tried

Unsound and false; nor is it aught but just,
 That he, who in debate of truth hath won,
 Should win in arms, in both disputes alike
 Victor; though brutish that contest and foul,
 When reason hath to deal with force, yet so
 Most reason is that reason overcome. (Milton, Book VI, 116-26, 449)

In this condemnation Abdiel also asserts the surety of the angels' victory. He does so by equating truth, virtue, and loyalty to God with the superior skill in battle. The victor of such a battle isn't the side with stronger physical force but the one with strength of faith and moral conviction. Since Abdiel believes that he and his fellow angels are "in the right" morally, their victory is assured.

Abdiel defends God and condemns Lucifer's rebellion vocally on multiple occasions. In one such moment he asks of Lucifer:

Shalt thou give law to God? shalt thou dispute
 With him the points of liberty, who made
 Thee what thou art, and formed the Powers of Heaven
 Such as he pleased, and circumscribed their being?
 Yet, by experience taught, we know how good,
 And of our good and of our dignity
 How provident he is; how far from thought
 To make us less, bent rather to exalt
 Our happy state... (Milton, Book V, 822-30, 442)

In this speech Abdiel questions why Lucifer would want to dispute with God over his "liberty." He concedes that the angels were made by God, as God pleased, to do what God ordered of them. But, Abdiel argues, their obedience is actually rooted in their choice to honor God. He explains this by listing all the reasons why God is deserving of this loyalty: God has been

providing, he has given them dignity, never makes them less, and he continues to provide them with a good and happy state of being. It is those pleasures that make them bent to exalt him rather than bemoan any lack of freedom.

Abdiel's argument that the angels ought to freely choose to obey God because he is good to them is exemplary of ideal free will in *Paradise Lost*. Their choice to obey is their own. As shown by Lucifer, they clearly have ability to defy God, but they ought not. They should want to obey God for two reasons: (1) Because God treats them well and they should be thankful and show their gratitude through loyalty; and (2) if they are loyal and obey him he will continue to treat them well. The consequences of using free will to disobey God is to fall from his graces, as Lucifer's followers discover.

In *Supernatural*, however, the ideal user of free will, Castiel, is the one who defies Heaven and falls from grace. Castiel originally subscribed to the same ideology as the rest of the angels in the show. He believes that God's will is absolute and ought to be followed. In "It's the Great Pumpkin, Sam Winchester," he explains that the plan is just. "Because it comes from Heaven, that makes it just" ("It's the Great Pumpkin, Sam Winchester", 4.07, 19:17-19:19). Since it is God's will, it is the right course of action morally. His point of view on God's will is clear and resolute. He pulled Dean out of hell "because God commanded it" ("Lazarus Rising," 4.01, 41:47-41:49). Yet, as the show's plot progresses, he begins a shift away from this belief and, as he does so, he becomes a pivotal protagonist for viewers to root for.

In the 7th episode of season 4, Castiel sits Dean down and explains himself, saying, "I'm not a hammer as you say. I have questions, I have doubts. I don't know what is right and what is wrong anymore" ("It's the Great Pumpkin, Sam Winchester", 4.07, 40:00-40:15). This is a direct response to Dean's previous accusation that Castiel and the other angels are just

instruments with no thoughts of their own. Earlier in the episode he argues: “Of course you have a choice, I mean, come on. What? You’ve never questioned a crap order, huh?” (“It’s the Great Pumpkin, Sam Winchester”, 4.07, 19:04-19:10). Castiel’s rebuttal is his first admittance that he isn’t sure that God’s plan is categorically right. For an angel to admit that he experiences doubt in regards to God’s will as morally correct is radical, to say the least. Rather than relying on blind faith, Castiel is using his free will to question the right and wrong of God’s plan for him and the Winchesters.

Castiel’s loss of surety in God’s plan is noticed by the other angels. “My superiors have begun to question my sympathies... I was getting too close to the humans in my charge. You. They feel I’ve begun to express emotions: the doorways to doubt. This can impair my judgment” (“On The Head of a Pin,” 4.16, 7:28-7:43), Castiel admits to Dean. By getting close to Sam and Dean, he is beginning to sympathize with their belief system, leading him to doubt God’s heavenly orders. What is more, emotions are equated with an impairment of judgement. When told that an order from Heaven will have unfortunate results, he says, “Want it, no. But I have been told we need it” (“On The Head of a Pin,” 4.16, 7:57-8:00). Castiel’s personal beliefs defer from those of the other angels and God.

When the angels capture Sam and Dean’s half-brother, Adam, Castiel carves an angel banishing sigil into his chest and uses it to forcibly send the angels away who are holding Adam. This is his first physical act of rebellion against Heaven; and, as a result of this action, he falls from grace and loses all his angelic powers. His loss of powers disconnects him from Heaven and his relation to God. This further cements Castiel’s role as a protagonist and a member of humanity.

In fact, Castiel rejects Heaven completely and instead chooses to base his actions on the results which would benefit the Winchesters and the rest of humanity. In season 5 he admits to this, saying, “I killed two angels this week. My brothers. I'm hunted. I rebelled. And I did it, all of it, for you” (“Good God Ya’ll,” 5.02, 4:51-4:57). It is clear that Castiel’s priorities have shifted from God’s will to the greater good of humanity. He, like the Winchesters, uses his free will to defy God’s pre-ordained plan. What is more, he shifts from one ideology (the ideology of the angels) to another (that of humanity), showing volitional choice to believe in the existence of free will. Castiel chose to believe in freedom of choice. In this way, Castiel becomes the ideal user of free will in *Supernatural*.

Chapter 5: Rejection of External Religious Dominion and Unmediated Morality

Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* in a post-reformation world. The Protestant reformation brought to religious orthodoxy a rejection of worship of those things external to scripture. Statues of the Virgin Mary were condemned as idolatry and catholic churches' walls white washed. What was emphasized was an individual's unmediated connection with the scripture and God, rather than the trappings and performance of Church prescribed actions. In his letter to Cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto, a Catholic, John Calvin restates his understanding of Sadoletto's argument in order to reject it. He writes:

The best rules for the due worship of God is (sic) that which is prescribed by the Church, and that, therefore, there is no salvation for those who have violated the unity of the Church unless they repent... From this you infer what kind of divine judgement awaits them if they attend not to your admonitions. (Smith, 54)

Protestants believed that it was not the place of the church to make claims about the outcome of an individual's fate since the leaders of the church were not God. Calvin argues, "By false opinions, divine truth is turned into a lie" (59). In general, the leaders of the Protestant Reform believed that the mediation of the leaders of the church could lead to a misinterpretation of God's will. The reformation resulted in a loss of the power given to the dictations of the Church. Instead, this power was returned to the original source: God. It is an individual's relationship with God which guides their actions and decides their fate. Much like the relationship between God and Adam and Eve in Milton's work. God decides to give salvation, and, in return, mankind chooses to honor and obey God.

Post-reformation Protestantism and Milton's work shows a shift of power from external religious power to one that is internalized; *Supernatural* shows a further weakening of orthodox

religion's dominion, going so far as to reject religious influence completely. *Supernatural* borrows religious rhetoric with the intent to deny its power. For the characters of *Supernatural*, a religious higher power dictates neither their fate nor the moral center for free choice. This is shown by the show's protagonists' repeated rejection of God and those institutions regularly associated with religious orthodoxy, such as reverence and respect of the sacred.

In the show God is a non-character¹³. In the season 4 finale, Dean asks of Zachariah: "Where's God in all this?" ("Lucifer Rising," 4.22, 26:40-26:42) to which Zachariah answers that "God has left the building" ("Lucifer Rising," 4.22, 26:46). According to the testimonies of several angels, God hasn't been seen in Heaven for a very long time – so long that very few angels have seen him face-to-face. This is proved over the course of season 5 as Castiel searches for and fails to find God. When Castiel interrogates the archangel Raphael about God's location, he responds, "God? Didn't you hear? He's dead, Castiel. Dead ... There's no other explanation. He's gone for good." ("Free To Be You and Me," 5.03, 27:12-27:24 ... 29:02-29:05). Raphael believes that they are living in what he refers to as a "Godless Universe" ("Free To Be You and Me," 5.03, 29:52). Eventually, Castiel and the brothers give up trying to find God, as is shown through the act of throwing away Dean's amulet which Castiel had been using to search for God¹⁴. In "Dark Side of the Moon" Castiel not only calls the amulet and, by extension, the search for God worthless, but Dean literally throws the amulet in the trash ("Dark Side of the Moon, 5:16, 39:03-39:51). This represents their rejection of God as a major player. God is not involved in their fight against fate and is not a factor in the end result. To place God in the trash and mark

¹³ He is, at least, a non-confirmed character.

¹⁴ The amulet was supposed to burn hot in the presence of God.

him worthless demonstrates the show's denial of religion's power and influence. To deny God is to deny the very root of religion's power.

This abating of the influence of a higher power is written into the very language of the show. Dean, in particular, is continually dismissive of religious authority¹⁵, particularly through his use of crude language. In the second episode of season 4, Dean refers to angels as "dicks" when he states, "I thought angels were supposed to be guardians. Fluffy wings, halos -- you know, Michael Landon. Not dicks" ("Are You There, God? It's Me, Dean Winchester," 4.02, 35:58-36:06). He continues using this terminology, calling them "dicks with wings" (Death Takes a Holiday," 4.15, 23:38) and "bigger dicks" than demons ("The Song Remains the Same," 5.13, 15:22). By referring to angels this way, he diminishes their power because he diminishes the respect that they are given. Even the nicknames given to the angels, such as Cas in place of Castiel and Luci (given to Lucifer by Gabriel), act to undermine the angels' heavenly authority by reducing the respect associated with their angelic names. In the audio commentary to "Lucifer Rising," head writer Eric Kripke points to a line in the episode as representative of the way Dean thinks of religion. Dean uses the phrase "*holy* crap"¹⁶ ("Lucifer Rising," 4.22, 28:49) to refer to the angels and their belief in destiny. Mixing the common expletive "holy crap" with the religious definition of "Holy," he takes the sacred and makes it profane, greatly undermining the power associated with all things holy and godly.

One of Dean's most conspicuous dismissals of a higher power comes near the end of the episode "The End." When face to face with the devil, Dean states: "You're the same thing, only

¹⁵ The angels and their absolute certainty that they are doing God's work, act as representative of religious orthodoxy and of a Higher Power.

¹⁶ Italics added for emphasis.

bigger. The same brand of cockroach I've been squashing my whole life. An ugly, evil, belly-to-the-ground, supernatural piece of crap. The only difference between them and you is the size of your ego" ("The End," 5.04, 35:27-35:45). Dean outright denies that Lucifer is anything special or important to be feared. By calling him a piece of crap Dean rejects any power or influence that Lucifer has and, by extension, rejects the power of all supposed "higher powers" like him.

This rejection of heavenly power is visualized even earlier in the show when Dean purposefully tips an angel figurine off a table, shattering it ("Lucifer Rising," 4.22, 22:32). This is a visual metaphor for Dean's rejection of angels as a higher power to which he must defer. This event takes place in "Lucifer Rising" whilst Dean is trapped in what is referred to as the angelic green room. This room, like a green room in Theater, is an in-between place; but it is also a representation of paradise, like Eden or Heaven. It is lavish, with mirrors¹⁷ and decorations embossed in gold, stocked with all of Dean's favorite foods and comforts, and it is pure with its white walls and lack of clutter. All of these characteristics make it representative of a perfect higher plane, like God and his institution, rather than messy and imperfect humanity. When Dean smashes a pedestal through a wall, Zachariah compares him to a howler monkey "hurling feces" ("Lucifer Rising," 4.22, 22:35-22:57). Though crude, it is an important comparison since it calls attention to the act as an attempt to make imperfect the perfection of the green room. When Dean does escape, it is as a result of Castiel drawing a sigil on the wall with blood, marking up the formerly perfect white walls.

¹⁷ In the audio commentary for the episode the head writer Eric Kripke notes that a particular shot found at 23:48 places Zachariah in between two mirrors because the never ending reflections are meant to signify the "infinity of angels" (Kripke, "Creator Commentary: Lucifer Rising").

For the protagonists of *Supernatural*, perfection is overrated. “I’ll take the pain and the guilt. I’ll even take Sam as is. It’s a lot better than being some Stepford bitch in paradise” (“Lucifer Rising,” 4.22, 29:41), Dean explains. As Kripke elucidates, “Dean doesn’t want paradise if it means losing what it means to be human” (Kripke, 4.22). The choice to refuse godly perfection in favor of messy and imperfect human tendencies leads to *Supernatural*’s moral: humanity is what is most important, rather than God or any other higher power. Kripke says it himself in the documentary “The Mythologies of *Supernatural*,” “*Supernatural* is a story about Humans” (Kripke). Humans are the heroes of the story, and it is ultimately their humanity which saves the day.

At the end of “The End” Sam and Dean reunite after having separated. Earlier in the episode, Dean stated:

We’re not stronger when we’re together, Sam. I think we’re weaker. Because whatever we have between us—love, family, whatever it is—they are always gonna use it against us. And you know that. Yeah, we’re better off apart. We got a better chance of dodging Lucifer and Michael and this whole damn thing, if we just go our own ways. (“The End,” 5.04, 4:04-4:39)

He believed that his care for his brother actually made him weaker but, after seeing the aftermath of their separation throughout the course of the episode, he comes to the conclusion that the two of them are stronger together. When Sam asks him what changed his mind, Dean responds “Long story. The point is...maybe we are each other’s Achilles heel. Maybe they’ll find a way to use us against each other, I don’t know. I just know we’re all we’ve got. More than that. We keep each other human” (“The End,” 5.04, 40:42-41:11). The two brothers keep each other grounded to their humanity; it is the bonds of human experiences that are most important to the heroes of *Supernatural*.

The most prominent of these human bonds in the show is family. The two protagonists are brothers, and it is their bond that guides the show's moral center. "*Supernatural* privileges values of family and loyalty above all else," (Ralston & Applegate, 40) notes Devon Fitzgerald Ralston and Carey F. Applegate in "Team Free Will Something Worth Fighting For." "Whether one views family loyalty as a strength or weakness, it is the most significant moral guidepost in Sam and Dean's lives. Above everything else they value, it exercises the greatest influence on their will" (Ralston & Applegate, 43). In fact, the very act of "saving people" is defined as part of "the family business."¹⁸ Dean says it himself: "Destiny, God's plan, it's all a bunch of lies ... You know what's real? People, families: That's real" ("Lucifer Rising," 4.22, 28:51-29:07).

It is family ties which allow Sam to overcome the destiny imposed on him by God. In "Swan Song," Lucifer possesses Sam and intends to use his body to bring about the apocalypse. Sam had hoped to overpower Lucifer, but remained trapped inside his own mind until Dean arrived in the Impala blasting rock music¹⁹. Once Dean reaches Sam and reminds him that he is there for him, Sam is able to wrest back control. Dean's attempt to get through to his brother is aided by the presence of the Chevrolet Impala, because the Impala is a representation of their bond. Chuck explains what makes the Impala so special to them in voiceover.

The Impala, of course, has all the things other cars have... and a few things they don't. But none of that stuff's important. This is the stuff that's important. The army man that Sam crammed in the ashtray - it's still stuck there. The Legos that Dean shoved into the vents -- to this day, heat comes on and they can hear 'em rattle. These are the things that make the car theirs -- really theirs. Even when Dean rebuilt her from the ground up, he made sure all these little things stayed, 'cause it's the blemishes that make her beautiful. ("Swan Song," 5.22, 11:42-12:14)

¹⁸ The full quote "Saving people, hunting things. The family business" comes from the second episode of the show: "Wendigo."

¹⁹ Deff Leppard's "Rock of Ages" is an apt choice of music because its line "It's better to burn out than to fade away" is representative of the way in which Team Free Will has been actively fighting against destiny.

And it was those things that helped to remind Sam of what he was fighting for: his family and his home, the most important things to him.

In the end, it is the distinctly human bond of family that guides the choices of Sam and Dean. As Chuck puts it: “Up against good, evil, angels, devils, destiny, and God himself, they made their own choice. They chose family. And, well... isn't that kinda the whole point?” (“Swan Song,” 5.22, 40:17-40:34). Time and again the two choose each other over the will of God. Rather than relying on fate as dictated by God, or choices dictated by a religious moral system, the characters of *Supernatural* make their own fate and ground their choices in humanity.

This moral system is grounded in Humanism. Humanism is an ethical theory which stresses human rationality and capacity for free thought and moral action. It also rejects of theistic religion and the supernatural in favor of secular views of humanity. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research*, Ole Fogh Kirkeby marks the core of humanism as “the right to autonomous expressions of one’s emotions, values and interests” (Kirkeby, 3). Kirkeby further claims, “Humanism has often been seen as a process in which the individual becomes conscious of his powers and dares to pursue his talents and interests in spite of ruling hegemonies of thought and the social hierarches” (4). Essentially, to practice humanism is to acknowledge the individual’s right to make actions based on a chosen moral system rather than on a system imposed upon them.

For the heroes of *Supernatural*, this internal moral code finds its significance in human and familial bonds, rejecting any outside religious influences. It is humanity which is used to guide their use of free will, not God. This is not unlike the users of free will in *Paradise Lost* because, though the system of morals they follow is still guided by the ruling hegemonic belief that God’s will and his mercy are the way to salvation, it isn’t imposed upon them against their

will. “However, a pre-democratic spirit of individual freedom could be found in Protestantism, which manifested itself in the belief that any man or woman is responsible for himself or herself towards God, without any mediation by religious institutions” (5), Kirkeby reminds. That is to say, the ideology employed by Milton can be considered as a recognition of an individual’s freedom to choose a moral system which is based in God’s will but not controlled by it.

Conclusion: Glimpsing a Cultural Moment

Endings are hard. Any chapped-ass monkey with a keyboard can poop out a beginning, but endings are impossible. You try to tie up every loose end, but you never can. The fans are always gonna bitch. There's always gonna be holes. And since it's the ending, it's all supposed to add up to something. I'm telling you, they're a raging pain in the ass (“Swan Song,” 5.22, TIME)

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I was talking to my friend recently about a television show that we had both watched. She noted that she didn't really like the final episode, and, when I asked, why she said that in truth she didn't often enjoy the last season of any shows. She said that, “I think I dislike show endings because the end is when all the crazy stuff happens.”²⁰ This is how I feel about my conclusion. I feel like I have a lot of really ‘crazy stuff’ to manage in these last few pages, a lot of loose ends to try to tie together in a nice little bow.

I've spent the majority of this thesis explaining all the ways in which the show *Supernatural* and the poem *Paradise Lost* act differently. *Paradise Lost*'s moral center is rooted in a personal connection to God and the wish to align oneself with his will. In *Supernatural*, God's will is rejected and the morality of decisions is grounded in human and familial bonds. Rather than trying to please an all-powerful god, the characters in *Supernatural* ‘do right by’ those humans who they care for and are closest to. However, it would be amiss not to acknowledge the ways in which the two works are similar. For one thing, both rely on a similar religious rhetoric and established traditions. More specifically, the ideologies of free will which each text builds, respectively, though different, both act to reject an external imposition of a fate in which individuals have no say in the outcome of their actions.

²⁰ Taken from a Facebook conversation on Feb. 7, 2016

Additionally, *Paradise Lost* and *Supernatural* were each created with a purpose. Milton, in writing the poem, hoped to convince his readers of his justification for God's actions, the fall of man, and the existence of evil in the world. Eric Kripke and the Warner Brothers Studio's purpose was to not only tell a story, but to tell one that would sell to a broad enough audience to keep it on the air. In this way, both texts were written for an audience.

Supernatural, as a television show, is a commodity peddled first by the show's creator to the company which will broadcast it and then by the company to its viewers. In order to gain viewership, the show must appeal to the public. The show is sold, and so are the morals of the show. Thus, free will is sold to the modern audience. The characters may champion free choice, but they do so because they are scripted to do so and they do so because this message is one to which the audience will react positively.

Milton, despite his claim of divine inspiration, is *writing* the story. He is building his truth. His audience was the post-reformation English Protestant reader, and he was aware of this. He built his poem out of the pre-existing rhetoric of the era in order to gain a favorable reaction. Much in the same way, the writers of *Supernatural* were aware of the contemporary western viewer and what rhetoric would be favorable. And... it works. I, as a contemporary human in America, prefer the ideology built in *Supernatural*. Because, as I have mentioned before, who could be against freedom? It is almost a paradox that in our current cultural moment free will is the only choice.

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