

Paradise Lost: Discussion  
Questions

Main Question:

What kind of knowledge do Adam and Eve attain through eating the forbidden fruit?

Content questions referring to this main question.

1. In the poem Satan puts the question of why such knowledge is forbidden - what is wrong with knowing good and evil?
2. Is not knowledge essential to human virtue?
3. How can knowledge be a sin?
4. How does Milton comment upon these questions put by Satan?
5. How is it made clear that "knowledge of Good" is "bought dear by knowing ill"?
6. Adam says to Eve that they have come to know "Both Good and Evil, Good lost and Evil got". In your own words try to state precisely what this means.
7. How does the knowledge of "Good lost" and "Evil got" effect Adam and Eve?
8. How does the knowledge of both good and evil accord with the picture of man attaining a happier Eden, after the Fall?
9. Is the prospect of a surer virtue through the experience of evil a better state than that of innocence? (Why or why not?)
10. What is meant by knowledge of evil, in the poem? Is it theoretical, objective knowledge about good and evil, or actual experience of - intimate participation in - evil?

Finally - what parallels can you draw from this discussion, between the story of Oedipus and the account of the Temptation and Fall in Milton's epic?

11. What are the immediate emotional and psychological consequences of the "new" knowledge in Milton's portrayal?
12. Do you believe - or not - that man can know good without knowing evil? (You may care to refer back to Out of the Silent Planet.)
13. Do you agree with Milton that Adam's virtue before the Fall was, "a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed that never sallies out and sees her adversary"?
14. What kind of knowledge of evil does Milton advocate in the above quoted passage - Knowledge through seeing (understanding) or knowledge through doing?
15. Is the journey through a world where moral choices loom at every turn necessary to achieve real human virtue? (Again, you may find it necessary to refer back to Lewis' story, Out of the Silent Planet.)
16. How does Christianity view the Felix Culpa - the happy fault?
17. Does the awareness of evil provide a glorious opportunity for the moral education of man universally?
18. Is man's humanity, seemingly, more perfect in Malacandria than Thulcandra - earth?
19. Must man attain the virtues of the fallen Adam (rational thought, knowledge, and freedom of will in love and obedience) through effort and experience in the everyday world? How?
20. What is your opinion of the freedom expressed in the closing lines of the poem? Is this the same kind of freedom experienced by Oedipus at the close of Sophocles' play?

Finally - what parallels can you draw from this discussion, between the story of Oedipus and the account of the Temptation and Fall in Milton's epic?