Locating the Early Modern Emergence of the Moral Sublime: Kant’s Engagement with Milton’s Poetry and the Book of Job

Sanford Budick

One of the most revolutionary conceptual developments of the early modern period was the fusion of moral feeling with the experience of the sublime. This fusion was made possible by a framework that derived from religious typology, yet in the early modern period, principally through the impact of Kant’s writings, the sublime effect of that typological framework developed an independent aesthetic and psychological status. In the following pages I propose that this fusion first emerged in – and in fact was enabled by – Kant’s engagement with the Miltonic sublime. Locating the details of this emergence is no mere historical curiosity. By describing these details we can begin to understand previously opaque areas both of Kant’s moral philosophy and of Milton’s poetry. We will see that the Book of Job has a unique facilitative role in this emergence.

I begin with an outline of my argument as a whole, already employing the principal terms of the Miltonic sublime and the Kantian sublime. As my argument unfolds, I will present systematic, even if relatively brief, definitions of these terms:

I. In Milton’s poetry we characteristically find
   A. a series of representations leading to an infinitely distant archetype, most notably – but by no means exclusively – in a Christian typology or Imitatio [Nachfolge] Christi
   B. each representation within each such series is a partially eclipsed or deficited image.

II. Kant specifies
   A. the central aesthetic and moral significance of a Miltonic kind of ‘following’ – Nachfolge – of representations in an infinite series
   B. the central significance of the typological progression or infinite series, and the central position of the Nachfolge, in his theory of the moral sublime
C. the need, in the sublime series, for a kind of representation that ‘lets us see its own inadequacy’ to represent.

III The affiliations, in the sublime, of Kant, Milton, and the Book of Job are seen in the facts that

A. Kant’s Miltonic Nachfolge, Miltonic sublime, and Miltonic deficiated image derive from a line of thought about Milton’s sublime that passes through the German aestheticians who reproduced Addison’s and Burke’s analyses of the Miltonic sublime and, most especially, Lowth’s applications of Addison’s and Burke’s ideas to the sublimity of the Book of Job.

B. in Kant’s essay on theodicies he highlights the moral sublimity of the Book of Job, while in the Critique of Practical Reason he engages in a Nachfolge of the moral sublime of Milton’s Samson Agonistes in its Joban line.

C. Milton’s Samson Agonistes not only follows an implicit line of representations of tested Joban agonists, but, at the play’s core, follows the Joban structure of a series of humbling encounters that issues in the power of the sublime. Kant follows this Miltonic following.

D. the Joban character of Samson Agonistes is seen emblematically in the climax of the play where the phoenix of Job is invoked to reach the deepest layers of the moral sublime that Kant followed in Milton and that became one of the richest legacies of the early modern period.

I. Some Characteristics of Milton’s Poetry

IA. Milton’s largest poetic statement, Paradise Lost, is unmistakably framed by his typological poetics. At the end of the poem Michael explains to our first parents that the way to human perfection is in reason ‘disciplin’d / From shadowy Types to Truth, from Flesh to Spirit’ (Paradise Lost, XII.302-3). This change of state directly from solid to vapor, from flesh to spirit, describes the form of the sublime. From the very beginning of the poem this discipline of typology rules Milton’s ways of proceeding. Not only does he announce in his opening

Kant’s Engagement with Milton’s Poetry and the Book of Job

lines that the range of his subject is defined from ‘Man … till one greater Man’ (Paradise Lost, I.1-4), namely, Christ who will sacrifice his incarnate life for spirit, but Milton’s elaborations of natural and mythological images all fall under this heading of series or typologies of progressions that eventuate in the experience of being raised up – erhoben and erhaben – in the sublimation and the sublime that Kant theorizes.

This typological progression towards the sublime characterizes the representational movement of all of Milton’s major poems. In Samson Agonistes the agon or test of Samson beckons the reader to follow an implicit line of representations that includes (among countless others) the test of Job, the test of Abraham and Isaac, the wrestling of Jacob, and the temptations of Christ, in addition of course to the Samson-like test to which the poet is himself put by being challenged to find internal light in physical blindness.

IB. Milton’s typical representation (not least in tests of deprivation) is of individual images which are themselves structured on loss or deficit. In the Laocoön Lessing famously identified Milton’s poetics of deficited images, saying, ‘Milton cannot fill picture galleries, it is true. But if the range of my physical sight must be the measure of my inner vision, I should value the loss of the former in order to gain freedom from the limitations on the latter’.2 Lessing was here citing Milton’s own statement of his poetics of blindness or deficited seeing:

So much the rather thou Celestial light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight. (Paradise Lost, III.51-55)

It would take Kant’s acumen to identify the integral connection between the progression of sublime representations, as well as the ‘freedom’ which it produces, and the deficited representational structure of each representation within the progression that is followed.

II. Kant’s Specification of a Miltonic Moral Sublime

IIA. Kant’s disclosure of freedom and moral feeling in the ‘endless progression’ of the sublime is inseparable from his discovery of ‘aesthetic ideas’\(^3\) in his own following or Nachfolge of the Nachfolge in the Miltonic sublime. Here, first, is Kant’s direct acknowledgment, in his lectures on anthropology, of a Miltonic Nachfolge in the aesthetic ideas of sublime experience:

Aesthetic ideas are those representations that contain a fullness of thoughts which \textit{ad infinitum} draw after it a following [‘\textit{eine Folge ... nach}’] of thoughts. Such ideas draw us into an immeasurable prospect, e.g. Milton’s saying, ‘Female light mixes itself with male light, for purposes unknown’. Through this soulful idea the mind is set into a continuous swing [\textit{Schwung}]\(^4\).

This specification of the indivisibility of the concept of the Nachfolge from the concept of aesthetic ideas is virtually identical with Kant’s

---

\(^3\) Penetrating commentary on Kant’s concept of ‘aesthetic ideas’ (without connection, however, to a Miltonic Nachfolge) has recently been provided by H. E. Allison, \textit{Kant’s Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment}, Cambridge 2001, pp. 256-61.

\(^4\) This is my translation of the following passage from Kant’s lectures on anthropology: ‘Ästhetische Ideen sind solche Vorstellungen, die eine Fülle von Gedanken enthalten, die bis ins Unendliche eine Folge von Gedanken nach sich ziehen. Solche Ideen ziehen uns in einen unabsehbaren Prospekt, z. E. Milton’s Ausspruch: Weibliches Licht vermischt sich mit männlichem Licht zu unbekannten Endzwecken. Durch diese geistvolle Idee wird das Gemüt in einen continuierlichen Schwung versetzt’ (25:1561). All references to Kant’s writings are given according to the volume and page numbers of the \textit{Akademie-Textausgabe}. Citations of Kant in German are from \textit{Kants Werke: Akademie-Textausgabe}, Berlin 1968. Quotations from Kant given in English are from the following texts: \textit{Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals} and \textit{Critique of Practical Reason}, in: I. Kant, \textit{Practical Philosophy}, M. J. Gregor trans., Cambridge 1996; \textit{The Critique of Judgement}, J. C. Meredith trans., Oxford 1973; \textit{Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings}, A. Wood and G. di Giovanni trans. and eds., Cambridge 1998; and \textit{Anthropology from a Practical Point of View}, M. J. Gregor trans., The Hague 1974. Page references are to the \textit{Akademie-Textausgabe} page numbers, which Meredith and Gregor give in the margins of their translations. All page number references to Kant’s texts are given in parentheses immediately after citations. Page numbers of the \textit{Critique of Pure Reason, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, Critique of Practical Reason, Critique of Judgment, and Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason} are (except where noted) preceded by the abbreviations \textit{CPR}, \textit{GMM}, \textit{CPrR}, and \textit{Rel} respectively. If not otherwise indicated, translations are mine.
discussion of this connection in the ‘Analytic of the Sublime’, where his materials of exemplification are also highly Miltonic, so much so that, exactly at this juncture in the Critique of Judgment, Kant has this to say about the poet who is adequate to the tasks of the sublime: ‘the poet essays the task of interpreting to sense the rational ideas of invisible beings, the kingdom of the blessed, hell, eternity, creation, &c.’ (5:314). As every educated German reader of Kant’s time knew, if ‘the poet’ needed to be given a name it could only be Milton (and certainly not Klopstock, as some might mistakenly assume; Kant regularly contrasted Klopstock’s poetic mediocrity with Milton’s exemplary poetic genius).5

In §49 of the Critique of Judgment Kant seeks ‘that whereby’ the ‘faculty of presenting aesthetic ideas’ (‘das Vermögen der Darstellung ästhetischer Ideen’) ‘animates’ the mind; ‘the material which it employs for that purpose’; ‘that which sets the mental powers into a swing [Schwung] that is final, i.e. into a play which is self-sustaining’ (5:313-14). The Nachfolge, Kant explains, creates the condition of this swing of the mind (5:318) which in turn presents the aesthetic ideas that animate the mind. I will briefly explain the matrix of Kantian and Miltonic ideas in which these connections become operative.”


6 Here I am building on a set of connections that works concretely and extensively in Kant’s writings but which he nonetheless leaves largely unspecified, sometimes vague, and at times even confusing: namely that his idea of the unendlichen Progressus of representations (5:83) in the Critique of Practical Reason or Progressus ohne Ende of representations (5:255) in the Critique of Judgment is not only the same for him as the Fortschritte ins Unendliche of representations (5:250) that he names in his first formal definition of the sublime, but that these terms can already be equated in the Critique of Practical Reason with the endless Nachfolge of examples that provide access to the archetypal or exemplary, that is, already in the Critique of Practical Reason (5:85, coordinated with the unendlichen Progressus of representations at 5:83) and then, more explicitly, with the Nachfolge of examples that discloses the exemplary in the Critique of Judgment (5:309, 318). As part of this clarification, I have elsewhere (see below, n. 6, and my forthcoming book on Kant’s relation to Milton) explored the connections that he makes between this Progressus – and thus with the Nachfolge – and aesthetic ideas (5:259) and therefore, via his detailed association of a Nachfolge of Milton’s sublime poetry with aesthetic ideas (in the anthropology lecture), an association that Kant imbibed from the German Miltonist line flowing from Addison’s association and exemplification of Longinian sublime Nachfolge with Milton’s sublime poetry. It is with this set of connections, which remain to
In the ‘Analytic of the Sublime’, and even in the *Critique of Judgment* as a whole, the mind’s *a priori* ground of the sublime is announced as the ‘point of capital importance’. Kant claims that the freedom experienced in the sublime is entirely independent of any object or any definite concept (5:244, 256). He attaches central significance to the independence of sublime experience because, in his view, it is identified with the freedom of aesthetic judgment and its consequence, ‘moral feeling’ (5:265-6). Yet the immediacy of the provocation required by the sublime casts doubt, from the start, on Kant’s claim.7 In other places I have therefore made detailed proposals of a counterclaim: namely, that in the ‘Analytic of the Sublime’ Kant’s representation of the mind’s *a priori … transcendental* freedom (5:266) is indispensably occasioned by a particular cultural transmission, signaled by a specific work of art.8 In Kant’s experiences of the sublime each such prior representation enables Kant’s freedom; furthermore, the sublime is experienced by him in an infinite progression – or infinite regress – of representations, each of which lets us see its own inadequacy as representation.

Here, in brief, is what Kant says about the half dozen chief elements of his picture of sublime experience, that is, the experience that he claims is of the mind ‘of itself alone’:

1. ‘As is allowable’ says Kant, his presentation of the sublime is drawn exclusively according to experience of the sublime occasioned by ‘objects of nature’, not from experience occasioned by objects of

---

7 Kant’s contradictions regarding the occasion of the sublime have been noticed before. See, for example, P. Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime: From Morality to Art*, Oxford 1989, pp. 108-35. Although my interpretation of Kant’s representation of sublime experience is very different from Crowther’s, I take heart from his attempt to find in Kant an ‘artefactual sublime’ (p. 162), that is, a sense of the scope of human artifice’ (p. 153) that has gone into the production of a given work of art and that therefore can give us ‘species solidarity’ (p. 173).

art or culture (5:245). Thus, for example, he asks us to imagine some vast peak whose top we cannot see, ‘shapeless mountain masses towering one above the other in wild disorder’ (5:256).

2. The experience of the sublime occurs in the mind as the result of a contradiction between two mental capacities. While our imagination attempts to follow a progression that has no end in sight – for example, ‘masses towering one above the other’ – our reason tries to grasp a whole idea of that progression. Oddly, the incapacity created by this contradiction sets in operation the innate capacity to feel the presence of something unknown to the senses, something ‘supersensible’. This supersensible is not necessarily supernatural or divinely mysterious. For Kant the sublime is the mind’s capacity or ‘faculty’ to continue to think about a given representation of an object even though the mind has exhausted its resources for sensory perception (measurement) of that object:

Because there is a striving in our imagination towards progress ad infinitum, while reason demands absolute totality, as a real idea, that same inability … is the awakening of a feeling of a supersensible faculty within us. . . . Consequently it is the state of mind evoked by a particular representation engaging the attention of the reflective judgment, and not the object, that is to be called sublime. (5:250)9

3. The experience of the sublime occurs only when the individual mind initiates it by freely inducing its own incapacity, which is the mind’s subjection to ‘the impossibility of the absolute totality of an endless progression’ (5:255). Thus the mind’s act of freedom is a willed self-deprivation of freedom, which paradoxically creates greater freedom:

The sublime … is a feeling of imagination by its own act depriving itself of its freedom. … In this way it gains an extension and a might greater than that which it sacrifices. But the ground of this is concealed from it, and in its place it feels the sacrifice or

---

9 I have given ‘state of mind’ for Kant’s Geistesstimmung (85), where Meredith has ‘disposition of soul’.
deprivation … a deprivation of something – though in the interests of inner freedom. (5:269-71)

4. Only in ‘a negative presentation’ can the mind present to itself the idea of freedom, because ‘the inscrutability of the idea of freedom precludes all positive presentation’ (128), that is, all presentation in any bounded or defined body: ‘the mind’ which, says Kant, ‘is all life (the life-principle itself)’ experiences in the sublime a moment of dying. We are reassured that this ‘momentary check to the vital forces’ (augenblicklichen Hemmung der Lebenskräfte) is ‘followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful’ (5:245).

IIB-C. Here, next, is a summary of Kant’s concept of the Nachfolge – as I piece it together – together with a placement of his concept of deficited representation, both of which, I am proposing, are for Kant specifically Miltonic:

1. Empirically or heteronomously the mind follows an effectively endless progression of representations (CJ, 5:318) which is ‘evoked by a particular representation’ (CJ, 5:250).

2. Each representation in the progression that admits of Nachfolge (as opposed to Nachahmung, imitation) represents ‘its own inadequacy’ to represent (CJ, 5:252-53).

3. The act of following a progression of examples of this kind issues in the sublime (CJ, 5:255) and in exemplarity (CJ, 5:309, 318).

4. This heteronomous Nachfolge makes us conscious of an isomorphic, autonomous (‘self-sustaining’) Nachfolge that also issues in the sublime, thence in freedom and moral feeling (CJ, 5:313, 318).10 Parallel to this isomorphism of the heteronomous and the autonomous Nachfolgen, a transfer takes place, in the sublime, (CJ, 5:266-7, 352-53), from the sensible (and the example, the individual) to the supersensible (and exemplarity, the universal). In both Nachfolgen reason ‘transfers’ that which ‘can … be … exhibited by actions in the sensible world in accordance with the formal rule of a law of nature’ into the realm of the ‘supersensible’ (CPrR, 5:71). The transfer that ultimately interests

10 On Kant’s heteronomous and autonomous isomorphisms in relation to aesthetic ideas, compare Allison (above, n. 3), pp. 256-61.
Kant’s Engagement with Milton’s Poetry and the Book of Job

Kant is only the mind’s inward, autonomous transfer between sensible and supersensible standpoints that issues from an inward Nachfolge (this is seen most clearly in the mind’s incremental humiliations of self-conceit that are described in the second Critique). The autonomous transfer is made possible by an isomorphic, heteronomous Nachfolge of representations each of which also effects a transfer between the two standpoints, as in the representations of Samson Agonistes that, I propose, Kant is following in the second Critique.

5. For Kant one principal, recurring heteronomous Nachfolge in the sublime is of the particular representations that he found in Milton’s poetry of the sublime, from which Kant also derives the main principles of the sublime Nachfolge.

III. The Affiliations, in the Sublime, of the Critique of Practical Reason, Samson Agonistes, and the Book of Job

IIIA. In Robert Lowth’s and Edmund Burke’s accounts of the sublime, early available in German translation and both made integral parts of the German conversation on aesthetics by Mendelssohn, Kant found precise ideas for understanding the kind of deficited representation that he was seeking. As far as Kant’s interests were concerned, the heart of Lowth’s theory was the ‘continued negation’ in the ‘action and energy of the mind itself’ that is definitive of the sublime. Here is what Lowth means by ‘understanding’ the sublime topos ‘Let there be light’ – the one biblical topos that had been mentioned in Longinus’s treatise On the Sublime:

The importance of the circumstance and the greatness of the idea (the human mind cannot well conceive a greater) is no less remarkable than the expressive brevity and simplicity of the language: And God said, Let there be light, and there was light. … The understanding … comprehends the Divine power … perhaps most completely, when it is not attempted to be explained;

the perception in that case is the more vivid, inasmuch as it seems to proceed from the proper action and energy of the mind itself.

What may appear to be left merely vague here is soon sharpened to a single cogent point. This point correlative concerns, to be sure, the mind’s failure of comprehension (its continuance in vagueness) with regard to the object that induces the sublime: ‘the human mind is absorbed, overwhelmed as it were in a boundless vortex, and studies in vain for an expedient to extricate itself. … While the imagination labours to comprehend what is beyond its powers, this very labour itself, and these ineffectual endeavours, sufficiently demonstrate the immensity and sublimity of the object’.

Yet the obverse of the same point, which is for Lowth the main point, is that the sublime is the effect created by continued negation within representation. This occurs within the progression ‘carried on … towards infinity’. It is this partially negative phenomenon that for Lowth defines ‘the proper action and energy of the mind itself’ in following the progression:

Nothing of this kind is nobler or more majestic, than when a description is carried on by a kind of continued negation; when a number of great and sublime ideas are collected, which, on a comparison with the object, are found infinitely inferior and inadequate. Thus the boundaries [of the mind] are gradually extended on every side, and at length totally removed; the mind is insensibly [Kant will say supersensibly] led on towards infinity, and is struck with inexpressible admiration, with a pleasing awe, when it first finds itself expatiating in that immense expanse.12

---

12 R. Lowth, Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews, 2 volumes, London 1787; Latin, 1753; German, 1758 (facsimile, V. Freimarck introd., Hildesheim 1969, I. 350-54). S. Monk, The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England, Ann Arbor 1960, p. 82, points to these pages and notes that they influenced Burke and Kant, but Monk slides between ‘the greatness of the subject’ and ‘the sublimity of the object’ in a confusing way that he blames on Lowth’s vagueness. Admittedly, there is vagueness, and some sliding as well, in Lowth, but there are also significant distinctions and rich meanings that Monk passes over, particularly when the latter are taken in conjunction with Lowth’s chapters on Job and especially vis-à-vis Kant’s articulation of principles of a negative poetics in the Critique of Judgment as well as his analysis, in the
Four years after the publication of Lowth’s analysis of the sublime, Burke (1757) applied the principles of a negative poetics, and its relation to light and darkness, specifically to Miltonic light and darkness and what he called Milton’s ‘idea’ that is ‘strictly and philosophically just’:

Darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light. Our great poet [Milton] was convinced of this; and … was entirely possessed with the power of a well managed darkness. … And what is no less remarkable, our author [Milton] had the secret of preserving this idea, even when he seemed to depart the farthest from it, when he describes the light and glory which flows from the divine presence; a light which by its very excess is converted into a species of darkness,

Dark with excessive light thy skirts appear.

Here is an idea not only poetical in an high degree, but strictly and philosophically just. Extreme light, by overcoming the organs of sight, obliterates all objects, so as in its effect exactly to resemble darkness. … Thus are two ideas as opposite as can be imagined reconciled in the extremes of both; and both in spite of their opposite nature brought to concur in producing the sublime.13

Lessing’s defense of Milton in the *Laokoön* is, then, a harmonious counterpart, likely even a derivative, of Lowth’s and Burke’s negative poetics, especially of Burke’s identification of that poetics with Milton’s sublime of light born of eclipse or darkness.

IIIB. In Kant’s ‘On the Miscarriage of All Philosophical Trials in Theodicy’ (1791), he argues, among other things, that an authentic theodicy must be built around the representation of something *Seelenerheben*, soul-uplifting or sublime, which God has created as an

---

eingepflanzter Neigung (an ‘implanted inclination’) in the character of humanity (8:269, 271). Kant’s extensive exemplification of such a theodicy is the Book of Job (8:264-67). In his laudatory comments on Kant’s essay, ‘Ueber Hrn. Kants Aufsatz, in Betref der Theodicee’, Kant’s close friend J. E. Biester, directly addressing Kant, called his analysis erhaben ... göttlichschön and made explicit the hovering relevance of Milton’s theodicy by quoting – in English – *Paradise Lost*, II.557-67 where Milton consigns ‘false philosophy’, i.e., the misconceived theologizing that Kant’s essay comes to defeat, to the fallen angels in hell.14

The linkage of the poetry of Milton with that of Job became commonplace around the time of – and no doubt partly because of – the publication of William Smith’s widely read translation and edition of *Dionysius Longinus on the Sublime*, which both continues Addison’s identification of the modern sublime with Milton and anticipates Lowth’s extensive exposition of the sublime in Job. Smith even gives examples of the sublime of Milton and of Job on facing pages.15 After Addison’s essays on Milton’s sublime, followed by Smith’s *Longinus*, and after Albert Schulten’s great edition of Job, *Liber Jobi ... Commentario Perpetuo*, Leiden 1737 – which frequently emphasized the sublimity of Job’s imagery – the connection between Milton’s sublime and the sublimity of Job became inevitable, that is, even without reference to Milton’s profound, direct emulations of Job in all his major works.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason* the most prominent elements of Kant’s representation of the person who achieves moral personality mark a transfer in the following ways – ways which, especially when taken in the aggregate, resonate deeply with the Samson of *Samson Agonistes*. To be sure, many of these elements can and must apply to other tragic heroes as well (say, Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*), yet we will see that the internal coherence of Kant’s aggregate uniquely follows the specific representation called *Samson Agonistes*:

1. In the greatest distress or tragedy of life, the honest person in

extremis, stripped of every possible sensible incentive to go on living, stands on the verge of death or suicide (CPrR, 5:88).  

2. Though he or she goes on living, this person ‘has given up completely the worth’ of his or her ‘condition’ and has lost the taste for living.

3. This person maintains humanity in its proper dignity, rejecting suicide (sharply distinguished from the person’s ‘magnanimous sacrifice of his life for the preservation of his country’ [CPrR, 5:158]) by regarding duty alone.

4. This person achieves an inner tranquility that is the effect of a transfer of consciousness across the verge of sensible existence or life, which is to say beyond the limit of any sensible incentive or reason to go on living. This respect for the purely intelligible moral obligation that gives meaning to life is thus for something quite different from, for purposes of these comments on the Critique of Practical Reason I am especially, but by no means exclusively, referring to the following passage at 5:88: ‘When an upright man is in the greatest distress, which he could have avoided if he could only have disregarded duty, is he not sustained by the consciousness that he has maintained humanity in its proper dignity in his own person and honored it, that he has no cause to shame himself in his own eyes and to dread the inward view of self-examination? This consolation is not happiness, not even the smallest part of it. For no one would wish the occasion for it on himself, or perhaps even a life in such circumstances. But he lives and cannot bear to be unworthy of life in his own eyes. This inner tranquility is therefore merely negative with respect to everything that can make life pleasant; it is, namely, only warding off the danger of sinking in personal worth, after he has given up completely the worth of his condition. It is the effect of a respect for something quite different from life, something in comparison with which life with all its agreeableness has no worth at all. He still lives only from duty, not because he has the least taste for living’. On first view it must seem strange that Kant assumes not only that we have the wherewithal to respond to his question about his protagonist (‘…. is he not sustained …?’) but that we will surely answer in the affirmative. He presupposes, that is, that we are inwardly well familiar with ‘such circumstances’ and with ‘this inner tranquility’, which the protagonist in Kant’s implicit story gains ‘after he has given up completely the worth of his condition’ and ‘still lives only from duty, not because he has the least taste for living’. Not many of us, and perhaps very few, have empirically experienced, or even witnessed at close range, the condition, much less the outward and inward response (the latter somehow known or intuited by us, in others, as what it is for them), that is described here. Indeed, I suggest that the hypothetical case of Kant’s representing and of our knowing this scene would make no sense were it not for the presupposition that the capacity to suppose or represent the form of life’s greatest distress or tragedy, or at least ‘receptivity’ to representation of that form, is given to us a priori as a ‘property of our minds’ (CPrR, 5:152).
Sanford Budick

and more valuable than, life itself. (Kant may seem to announce the occurrence of this transfer without proof or argument. Yet he carefully adduces it as part of the formal representation of the honest person in extremis. As a part of this representation, he says, reason ‘transfers into the supersensible’ that which ‘can … be … exhibited by actions in the sensible world in accordance with the formal rule of a law of nature’ [CPrR, 5:71].)

5. The person acknowledges reason’s cumulative ‘humiliation’ of ‘self-conceit’ (CPrR, 5:73-77). This leads toward total negation of self-worth as we usually conceive such worth.17

6. Intertwined with the cumulative humiliation of self-conceit, the person’s tragic representation shows and effects the progressive ‘rejection’ of all of life’s ‘sensible’ ‘incentives’ or ‘inclinations’ (CPrR, 5:71-3). This process has the ‘merely negative’ effect of removing ‘the hindrance to pure practical reason’ as well as the ‘positive’ effect ‘called respect for the law’ (CPrR, 5:74-5). In the latter, reason ‘stripped’ of all sensible incentives issues in ‘a representation of the law only as to its form’ (CPrR, 5:79-80), which is to say that it ‘actually produces’ the form of this respect which ‘also contains something elevating’ (enthält es auch Erhebung) (5:80-1).

7. The person engages in an ‘endless progress’ (CPrR, 5:83 and 5:123n) or sequential Nachfolge (‘following,’ CPrR, 5:85) of representations, a typology that Kant calls a Typik (CPrR, 5:67-71) and which gives the person access to the ‘archetype’ (5:83) and to the ‘sublime’ or ‘sublimity’ (Erhabenheit) (CPrR, 5:71, 86, 87, 88). Thus the representation of moral form is the a priori representation of a virtual repetition in a line of representations that, according to Kant’s theory of the sublime (set out in detail a few years later in the third Critique), issues in sublime feeling. Representation of the Typik or Nachfolge can also be heteronomous; Kant goes through various stages of thinking about the a priori status of sublime feeling.

17 It is clear that this element of Kant’s representation in particular has a significant relation to the first example of the categorical imperative in the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: ‘Someone feels sick of life because of a series of troubles that has grown to the point of despair’ (GMM, 4:421-2). But now Kant makes clear that the external manifestation of this scenario and condition corresponds to an a priori scenario and condition.
8. The person’s tragic representation is the ‘singular’ representation of ‘respect’ (5:79) which is indistinguishable from moral feeling or the ‘feeling’ of respect, ‘the only [feeling] that we can cognize completely a priori’ (*CPrR*, 5:73). ‘This feeling of respect … depends on the representation of a law only as to its form’ (*CPrR*, 5:80). Kant says that this is ‘a feeling that can be called pain’, yet he seems in doubt in the second *Critique* as to whether it is ‘the feeling of a pleasure or displeasure’ (*CPrR*, 5:73). In the third *Critique* he will say that, ‘the sublime’ involves ‘respect, i.e., merits the name of a negative pleasure’ (*CJ*, 5:245). (Of course, this is at least suggestive of Aristotle’s term tragic pleasure).

9. Tragic representations of ‘disinterested respect’ show the person, at least in part, how ‘not to behold them,’ so that ‘a view into the realm of the supersensible’ is as much an experience of what has been ‘denied’ as what has been ‘granted’ in such representation (*CPrR*, 5:147-8). Affirming the effect of this occlusion, the person freely chooses to reject the ‘incentives’ of sensible ‘inclinations’ (*CPrR*, 5:72-6) that are themselves sensibly ‘blind and servile’ (*blind und knechtisch*, *CPrR*, 5:118; emphases added). Representation of this kind anticipates Kant’s saying in the third *Critique* that a sublime representation ‘lets us see its own inadequacy’ to represent ‘and consequently its subjective want of finality for our judgment’ even if it is ‘itself a presentation of the subjective finality of our mind’ (*CJ*, 5:252, 268). This intelligible seeing is achieved by (among other necessary things) representing the sensible inadequacy of sensible representation or, in other words, by representing sensible blindness.

10. In these ways the person achieves personality, which for Kant can be only sublime, therefore free, personality, in other words, the person who has the feeling of respect. We see this affirmed in the way Kant speaks of ‘this idea of personality, awakening respect by setting before our eyes the sublimity of our nature (in its vocation’ (*CPrR*, 5:87). Responding to the sublime vocation of personality means willing or representing sublime maxims and sublime deeds, such as the person’s ‘magnanimous sacrifice of his life for the preservation of his country’ (*CPrR*, 5:158).

11. By employing the foregoing *a priori* resources the person achieves
the pure freedom that is an ‘unexpected’ (CPrR, 5:47, 152) ‘grand disclosure’ (CPrR, 5:94) of moral form. This disclosed form is unaccountable in our usual terms for choosing life. It is the one moral incentive.

12. This a priori representation of the form of the tragic sublime constitutes the maxim of moral form and the test of its universalizability – its ‘test as to the form of a law of nature in general’ (CPrR, 5:69-70).

The maxim is the duty that the protagonist wills; the test of this, in the form of the categorical imperative, is ‘the inward view of self-examination’ which can show the person that he or she has ‘maintained humanity in its proper dignity in his own person’ (CPrR, 5:88).

III.C. Among the prima facie resemblances between the above account in the Critique of Practical Reason and Milton’s presentation of Samson in Samson Agonistes, we should especially take note of the way both Kant’s honest person in extremis and the Samson of the tragedy, exactly like Job, achieve moral personality in a Progressus of humiliations of self-conceit. Indeed, with regard to Job, Kant explicitly recorded his deep interest in what he called ‘the difficulty associated with a purification of the dispositions in human beings even when they want to act according to duty’. My proposal concerning Kant’s following of the purifying Progressus of humiliations of self-conceit in Samson Agonistes therefore carries with it the idea that Kant, with his intense interest in both Milton’s poetry and the Book of Job, could not have easily missed the parallelism of Samson and Job in Milton’s tragedy. Kant, I propose, was here also following the continuity of the representation of the humiliations of self-conceit, in its Nachfolge, from Samson Agonistes to Job. In the Book of Job Kant found what he called the ‘authentic interpretation’ of an ‘efficacious practical reason … expressed allegorically’. In Kant’s theory of the sublime this kind of Progressus of humiliations is explicitly tied, in a circle, to the Nachfolge of examples that leads to the exemplarity of archetypes who themselves strive, using this method, to achieve the purification of moral disposition according to the propositions that we have seen: ‘humiliation … comes upon us through such an example. [It] imposes on us the following [die Befolgung] of such an example’ (CPrR, 5:
Kant’s Engagement with Milton’s Poetry and the Book of Job

This is ‘the archetype … we should strive to approach and resemble in an uninterrupted but endless progress [unendlichen Progressus]’ (CPrR, 5:83). The intensity with which Kant drives home the necessity for this series of humiliations of self-conceit could not be more evident, not to say (as he doubtless means it to be) striking:

The moral law, as the determining ground of the will, must by thwarting all our inclinations produce a feeling that can be called pain; and here we have the first and perhaps the only case in which we can determine a priori from concepts the relation of a cognition (here the cognition of a pure practical reason) to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure. … Pure practical reason … strikes down self-conceit [Eigendünkelt]… the moral law strikes down self-conceit … in opposition to its subjective antagonist [Widerspiel] strikes down, namely the inclinations in us … strikes down self-conceit, that is, humiliates it. (CPrR, 5:73)

It cannot be emphasized enough that Samson Agonistes is a tragedy that takes place in the mind of the hero. The play is without doubt one of the most purely mental tragedies ever written, taking as its models (for this rare class of tragedy that Aristotle calls oikeon) Aeschylus’s Prometheus Bound and Sophocles’s Oedipus at Colonus.18 During the entire time that Samson is before us (that is, until he exits and the catastrophe is reported by the messenger), the focus on Samson’s mind is intense and exclusive. The Chorus accurately observes, to Samson, more than it understands:

---

18 Quite possibly, that is, this economy of intellectual effort was once recognized as the defining feature of a distinct genre of Greek tragedy. Aristotle, whose Poetics Milton echoes both in his preface and in the concept of catharsis expressed in the last lines of the play, mentions a class of tragedies called oikeon or the tragedy of ‘Appropriate Expression,’ of which Prometheus Bound appears to be the only complete example that has survived. F. J. H. Letters suggests that with regard to such a classification there seems to be an important similarity between Prometheus bound to his rock and Oedipus confined to the rock ledge at Colonus: ‘Only superhuman, semi-divine personages could direct the movement of classic tragedy from beginning to end while themselves thus physically impotent and immobilized’. See F. J. H. Letters, The Life and Work of Sophocles, London 1953, pp. 110, 294. Samson, merely conducting his interviews, would thus be in parallel with these Greek heroes. What comes after the interviews, I am arguing, is as far as Samson is concerned God’s will, not Samson’s.
This Idols day hath bin to thee no day of rest,
Labouring thy mind
More then the day thy hands (1297-9)

What the Chorus calls Samson’s ‘plain Heroic magnitude of mind’ (1279) becomes more and more freestanding as the play progresses. Many readers – but not Kant, I am proposing – have been at a loss to see that anything actually happens in this restrictively mental activity. To take one famous instance, Dr. Johnson offered the deeply wrongheaded criticism (superficially appealing to Aristotle’s rules for the action of a tragedy) that Samson Agonistes ‘has a beginning and an end … but it must be allowed to want a middle, since nothing passes between the first act and the last that either hastens or delays the death of Samson’ (Rambler, p. 139). Indeed, the more radical and more appropriate form of Dr. Johnson’s remark, put as a question, is this: In this tragedy what is it that causes the turn or upturn – the inner peripeteia and anagnorisis – in Samson’s mind? The answer to this question, I suggest, is to be found in the process of sublime experience that gives Samson his new, deeper secret within his moral reason. This – the freedom and the moral feeling earned in the sublime Progressus – now constitutes the secret of his life, as well as of Samson Agonistes as a work of tragedy. No one, I propose, has understood and explained this secret better than Kant in the Critique of Practical Reason.

The first condition of this Miltonic and Kantian secret is the honest person in extremis who, in Kant’s covert storytelling, is ripe for discovering ‘something quite different from life, something in comparison with which life with all its agreeableness has no worth at all. He still lives only from duty, not because he has the least taste for living’ (CPrR, 5:88). In the overt storytelling of the ‘Methode’ section of the Critique of Practical Reason this is told as ‘… the story of an honest man … at a moment when he wishes that he had never lived to see the day that exposed him to such unutterable pain and yet remains firm in his resolution’ (CPrR, 5:155-6). In Samson Agonistes the hero’s recountings of his condition of being in extremis are among the most powerful in all of world literature:

Scarce half I seem to live, dead more than half.
O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
Irrecoverably dark, total Eclipse
Without all hope of day! (79-82)

Nor am I in the list of them that hope;
Hopeless are all my evils, all remediless;
This one prayer yet remains, might I be heard,
No long petition, speedy death,
The close of all my miseries, and the balm. (647-51)

The Nachfolge of the effectively endless progression depends upon its being a Nachfolge of a Nachfolge. And, indeed, Kant’s Nachfolge follows on Milton’s as well as Samson’s – and Job’s and Christ’s – Nachfolgen. In Milton’s telling, Samson’s awareness of his own participation in a Progressus of examples is a remarkable aspect of his self-consciousness. Samson knows, that is, that he will be, and already is, part of a typology of examples. He only does not know which typology. Deprecating his disastrous capitulation to his inclinations, he says, ‘Of such examples add mee to the roll’ (290); he will be, he laments, ‘to Ages an example’ (765).

In Samson Agonistes no less than in the Critique of Practical Reason the force of change is the Nachfolge and the Progressus, specifically, in fact, the Nachfolge of the Progressus of humiliations of self-conceit. We may at first think that the many little things of this kind that in the Critique of Practical Reason seem to recall the Samson story are coincidental, as when Kant writes,

[1] For example, some one can make it his maxim to let no insult pass unavenged and yet see that this is no practical law but only his maxim – that, on the contrary, as being in one and the same maxim a rule for the will of every rational being it could not harmonize with itself. (CPrR, 5:20)

or

[2] Suppose someone asserts of his lustful inclinations that when the desired object and the opportunity are present, it is quite irresistible to him. (CPrR, 5:30)

or

But in Samson Agonistes these items are principal parts of the Progressus of humiliations of self-conceit that Samson (in exemplification of the Kantian formula) follows – both within the play and in allusive following of other texts – in achieving personality. Now Kant follows them. This is to say that the series of humiliations of self-conceit in Samson Agonistes – which take the form of responses to successive encounters with the criticisms or verbal attacks on Samson by the chorus, by Manoa, by Dalila, and by Harapha – itself stands in clear apposition with the series of humiliations that Job (himself a type of the archetype and antitype Christ) suffers at the hands of his so-called comforters. In Samson Agonistes the series of humiliations of self-conceit provides the entire structure of the hero’s dramatic development, agonistes. In lines 30-62 Samson even anticipates and details, without understanding its character or purpose, the unfolding line of these humiliations of self-conceit; and he will even unwittingly hint there that his humiliations will issue in sublime ‘ends above my reach to know’ (62). In each scene of humiliation he will duly acknowledge his ‘shame’ (457) and ‘hopeless … remediless’ state, even granting to Dalia the ‘bitter reproach, but true, / I to myself was false ere thou to me’ (823-4), as well as the moral propriety of Harapha’s insults:

All these indignities, for such they are
From thine, these evils I deserve and more,
Acknowledge them from God inflicted on me
Justly. (1168-71)

Clearly the prison house and the encounters that take place there are the main arena of his agonizing or wrestling – with himself – not the Philistine temple where the catastrophe, reported by the messenger, takes place, and where we learn nothing further of Samson’s inner development. In Milton’s presentation the catastrophe is purely the expression of God’s will.

Thus even for the apparently offhand examples that Kant gives (i.e., [1], [2], and [3] above) for that which will occasion the progression of humiliations, we recall the following moments of Samson’s acute
pain or ‘displeasure’ when he embarks on the process of striking down
his self-conceit. In terms of Kant’s theory of the moral sublime, Samson’s
own Nachfolge of this series of self-humiliations is what will deliver
him into freedom and moral feeling. The facts that Samson is here also
following, implicitly but also indispensably, the stories of the
achievement of exemplarity of Job and Christ, and that Milton is
following Samson etc., just as Kant is following Milton etc., are all
parts of the Kantian story that we are following. Corresponding to
Kant’s examples [1], [2], and [3] above I quote Samson Agonistes first
from the 1781 Mannheim translation; then directly from Milton:

(1) Gleich einem kleinen Gott umhergieng, bewundert von Allen
und gefürchtet im Lande der Feinde, und keiner es wagte mich
to beleidigen. (p. 138)
   Like a petty God
   I walk’d about admir’d of all and dreaded
   On hostile ground, none daring my affront. (529-31)

(2) Von dem was ich itzt leide, war sie [Dalila] nicht die
Hauptursach, sondern ich selbt (p. 122)
of what now I suffer
   She was not the prime cause, but I my self. (223-4)

(3) So laßt sie gehen. Gott sandte sie mich zu bemüthigen, und
meine Thorheit tiefer fühlen zu lassen, daß ich sein anvertrautes
Geheimniß, meine Sicherheit und mein Leben, einer solchen
Natter dahingeben können! (pp. 163-4)
   So let her go, God sent her to debase me,
   And aggravate my folly who committed
   To such a viper his most sacred trust
   Of secreries, my safety, and my life. (999-1002)

20 This translation of Samson Agonistes is to be found in Das wiedereroberte
Paradies des Johann Milton, nebst seiner Lebensbeschreibung, einigen
dramatischen und verschieden kleinen Gedichten, Mannheim 1781. In Kant’s
time there was already an alternative available in S. Grynaeus’s translation of
Samson Agonistes in his Johann Miltons wieder-erobertes Paradies, nebst Samson,
und einigen andern Gedichten, wie auch einer Lebens-Beschreibung Des
Verfassers. Aus dem Englischen übersetzt, Basel 1752, though this is much less
faithful to Milton’s language.

To have reveal’d
Secrets of men, the secrets of a friend,
How heinous had the fact been, how deserving
Contempt, and scorn of all, to be excluded
All friendship, and avoided as a blab,
The mark of fool set on his front?
But I Gods counsel have not kept, his holy secret
Presumptuously have publish’d, impiously,
Weakly at least, and shamefully. (491-9)

From the series of humiliations of self-conceit in which these three moments are distinct points, the principal phenomenon and (ultimately) the sublime noumenon that issue are equally significant, I am proposing, for Kant as well as Milton. The intensity of Kant’s scrutiny of the Miltonic series may be glimpsed in this passage from the Critique of Practical Reason:

wenn der Mensch nichts stärker scheuet, als sich in der inneren Selbstprüfung in seinen eigenen Augen geringschätzig und verwerflich zu finden, kann nun jede gute sittliche Gesinnung gepfropft werden: weil dieses der beste, ja der einzige Wächter ist, das Eindringen unedler und verderbender Antriebe vom Gemüthe abzuhalten.

when a human being dreads nothing more than to find, on self-examination [in der inneren Selbstprüfung], that he is worthless and contemptible in his own eyes [in seinen eigenen Augen], then every good moral disposition can be grafted onto it, because this is the best, and indeed the sole, guard to prevent ignoble and corrupting impulses from breaking into the mind. (CPrR, 5:161; bold added)
Kant’s ‘wenn der Mensch nichts stärker scheuet, als sich in der inneren Selbstprüfung in seinen eigenen Augen geringschätzig und verwerflich zu finden’ follows closely Milton’s language in the 1781 Mannheim translation of Samson Agonistes: ‘er, obgleich äusserlich blind, obgleich geringgeschätzt und für nichts geachtet, entzündete, durch innere Augen erleuchtet’. In fact this passage in Samson Agonistes is the commencement of the tragedy’s resounding rhetorical climax, that is, it is coextensive with the moment of transfer after the Nachfolge and Progressus. Nothing else in the play so completely represents blind Samson’s achievement of insight into what – eluding the mechanism of all of nature and the conditioning of any empirical causality – gives him moral personality. This unconditioned noumenon can give meaning to his life precisely because it is not under the control of any of the forces and inclinations which define the individual’s mere desire for life. This noumenon is ‘something quite different from life, something in comparison with which life with all its agreeableness has no worth at all’ (CPrR, 5:88).

IIID. If we linger within the moment of the tragedy’s rhetorical climax we can make further Kantian discoveries regarding Milton’s sublime. The Joban character of Samson Agonistes is immeasurably deepened by Milton’s choice of the phoenix of Job 29:18 to mark that rhetorical climax. This is to say that Milton’s Joban phoenix simile both reenforces and derives strength from the Joban patterns and Joban ideals that Mary Ann Radzinowicz has highlighted in the Christian-Hebraic-Greek fabric of Samson Agonistes. I have recently explained in some detail how Milton derived the Joban phoenix from contemporary Joban commentary. Here I will offer only a compressed account of that derivation, but I will now try to explain the importance of the Joban phoenix for Milton’s moral sublime. Let me say at the outset of this concluding section of my essay, that if the idea of a Joban phoenix seems too esoteric to be relevant to Kant, we should take note of

comments of Herder, Kant’s life-long intellectual antagonist, most particularly with regard to everything Miltonic.\textsuperscript{22} In \textit{Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie}, the work which first made Herder famous, he presents an extensive analysis (following Lowth) of the sublimity of Job and its theology, in addition to offering direct praise of \textit{Samson Agonistes}, as well as specifically mentioning, and even elaborating upon, the Joban phoenix.\textsuperscript{23} Yet whether or not Kant was explicitly aware of the place of the Joban phoenix in \textit{Samson Agonistes}, Milton’s phoenix simile is a spectacular illustration of the Miltonic sublime understood in Kantian terms.

Here is Milton’s extended phoenix simile in \textit{Samson Agonistes}:

\textit{Semichorus.} But he though blind of sight,  
Despis’d and thought extinguish’t quite,  
With inward eyes illuminated  
His fiery virtue rous’d  
From under ashes into sudden flame,  
And as an ev’n’ning Dragon came,  
Assailant on the perched roosts,  
And nests in order rang’d  
Of tame villatic Fowl; but as an Eagle  
His cloudless thunder bolted on thir heads.  
So virtue giv’n for lost,  
Deprest, and overthrown, as seem’d,  
Like that self-begott’n bird  
In the Arabian woods embost,  
That no second knows nor third,  
And lay erewhile a Holocaust,  
From out her ashy womb now teem’d,

\textsuperscript{22} Herder’s accusations that Kant misunderstood and/or abused the Miltonic sublime can be seen in the various versions of \textit{Vom Erkennen und Empfinden} as well as the retrospects offered in \textit{the Kalligone}. See, for examples, B. Suphan ed., \textit{Herders Sämtliche Werke}, 33 vols., Berlin 1877-1899, VIII.311-12, XXII.274-5.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Herders Sämtliche Werke}, XI.277, 312, 319; XI.181. On Job 29:18 Herder writes, ‘Offenbar wird hier der Phönix gemeint’ (I.307n.); in this and the following cases I quote from the first edition of \textit{Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie} (Dessau 1782-3). Earlier, anticipating this gloss, Herder apostrophizes Job as this phoenix: ‘Aus deiner Asche ist auch mit diesem Buch ein Phönix, ein verjüngster Palmbaum hervorgegangen, dessen Wurzeln das Wasser saugen’ (I.148-9).
Revives, refLOURishes, then vigorous most
When most unactive deem’d,
And though her body die, her fame survives,
A secular bird ages of lives. (ll. 1687-1707)

For the meanings of Milton’s simile and its relation to the sublime in the tragedy as a whole, it is vital to recall the flourishing of Christian Hebraist interpretations of Job 29:18 that had brought the Joban phoenix to life for Christian readers of the seventeenth century. At the heart of these interpretations is the proliferation of richly complementary meanings that turn upon three translations of the word ḥōl – as phoenix, palm tree, or sand – in Job 29:18, rendered in the AV as, ‘Then I said, I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand [ḥōl]’. By reviving Rashi’s interpretation of ḥōl as phoenix and, correlatively, by recalling the option (which Jerome had neglected) of reading the Septuagint phoenix (translating ḥōl) as the phoenix bird rather than as palm tree, the Christian Hebraists generated the possibilities of a multiple and interactive interpretation of the verse. The high points of Christian Hebraist interpretation are characterized precisely by the avoidance of insistence on any one interpretation and the compounding, instead, of different interpretive traditions, thereby opening up multiplex significations. As an exemplary instance of such hermeneutics, the multi-layered and deeply multi-cultural interpretation of the Joban phoenix is itself a manifold emblem of the rebirth that Milton represents in the Christian-Hebraic-Greek Samson Agonistes as a whole.

Perspective on the prominence of the Joban phoenix in Milton’s as well as Kant’s eras is conveniently provided by the most respected Job commentary of the early eighteenth century, Schultens’s Liber Jobi (Leiden, 1737), used also by Herder. As authority for finding the phoenix in the word ḥōl of Job 29:18, Schultens draws upon a large number of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Christian Hebraists – including Drusius, Grotius, Pineda, and Vatablus – who, as Schultens notes, directly or indirectly revived the commentary of ‘Salomon’ (=Rashi): ‘This is a bird whose name is ḥōl, upon which the punishment of death was not decreed because it did not taste of the Tree of Knowledge. At the end of a thousand years it renews itself and returns to its youth’. In addition Schultens spectacularly foregrounds the centrality of this topos by presenting an identical illustration of it on
Sanford Budick

the title pages of both volumes of his commentary. Here is the title page of volume two [figure 1], together with an enlargement of the illustration which contains, in its inscription, the references to the biblical verses upon which the Joban phoenix revives, and dies and is reborn: ‘Job. 29:18:19. / goali hai [גאלי חי] = my redeemer livest, Job 19:25] / Job. 19:25.’ [figure 2].

Figure 1
reproduced by courtesy of The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary, New York

258
In this interpretation the phoenix is necessarily contiguous with, or the counterpart of, the diuturnal palm tree because of Job 29:19, a verse which Schultens’s inscription also specifies. Both the phoenix and the palm tree have years as innumerable as the sand. The phoenix and palm represented here are Job’s hope for personal redemption. Like the living Redeemer, who is reborn and brings the promise of redemption, the phoenix dies but is eternally reborn.

For us it is of particular interest that the Joban phoenix emerged brilliantly in Milton’s own time. With Schultens’s magisterial perspective on the interpretations of two centuries of his predecessors he was certainly not proposing something eccentric in placing the Joban phoenix on his title pages. He could count on knowledgeable readers to recognize that he was only repeating the foregrounding of the Joban phoenix in the extraordinarily vivid crystallization of this interpretation, with its illustration, in what was after all one of the best known Job commentaries of the early seventeenth century, Pineda’s *Commentariorum in Iob*. Schultens directly reproduces the emphasis on personal redemption that characterizes Pineda’s approach. In expressing that emphasis, Pineda’s *Commentariorum* includes a full
Sanford Budick

In this illustration, which concludes Pineda’s entire Commentariorum, we see how his interpretation of Job 29:18 leaps up, exactly and exactingly, as a hybridization of different traditions: the Hebraic phoenix (‘post R. Salomonem … quod sequuntur Tygurina et Caietanus … de quo diximus supra cap. 19. vers. 25’) rises from the nest of the Vulgate Latin ‘in nidulo meo’ while facing the palm tree in its Septuagint Greek: ωσπερ στελεχος φοινικος.

These things are obvious to those who do what the monument itself directs: ‘HOSPES ASTA, ET PELLEGE’ – ‘FRIEND STAND NEAR, AND READ CAREFULLY’. The phoinix as bird and as palm tree are thus represented as complementary elements of the same diurnal spirit which is as much that of Christ the redeemer as of the Job who
Kant’s Engagement with Milton’s Poetry and the Book of Job

Figure 4
reproduced by permission of the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel.

261
(in the language of the monument) is both ‘patient’ and ‘triumphant.’ In fact Pineda’s account of this illustration, placed as the conclusion of his entire commentary, is his ultimate identification of the Joban phoenix specifically as a symbol of Christian, personal redemption. This was the redemption that he, and his tradition of interpretation, saw coming back to life within the compound figurations of Job 29:18. Placed within its line of interpretation, Pineda’s intellectually rich, visually spectacular, and widely available representation of the Joban phoenix suggests that Milton would have expected his readers to understand the placement of the phoenix simile as the climax of Samson’s personal redemption in *Samson Agonistes*. This is to say that Milton’s Joban phoenix is his logical continuation and crowning of the parallelism between Job and Samson, as well as between Christ and Samson.

The Joban phoenix is a marvel of sublime decorum. Defined in the terms for the sublime that Kant derives from following Milton and Job, the Joban *Progressus* of humiliations of self-conceit can be seen to issue in the moment of momentary death which is then replaced by a rebirth or discharge of energy all the more powerful. In that moment the protagonist attains the freedom for moral choice. This is to say that (seen from the Kantian-Miltonic perspective) the Joban phoenix stands for that moment already in the Book of Job itself. There the phoenix represents the sublime in its embodied as well as disembodied phases, passing directly from solid to fiery fumes, from flesh to spirit. Milton closely follows this representation, and its placement, in his phoenix simile placed at the climax of *Samson Agonistes*. Yet Milton’s Joban phoenix is charged with more elements of *Progressus* than even the Book of Job. In order to represent and to recognize the Joban phoenix that had just then been made accessible by the Christian Hebraic scholarship upon which Milton was relying, the poet and his reader must fly from Latin to Greek to Hebrew, from sand to palm to phoenix. Here the *Progressus* and the sublime effect that are always potential in the human mind are renewed in the structure of sublime language itself.