Tolstoy: ... What makes a subject hard to understand — if it’s something significant and important — is not that before you can understand it you need to be specially trained in abstruse matters, but the contrast between understanding the subject and what most people want to see. Because of this the very things which are most obvious may become the hardest of all to understand. What has to be overcome is a difficulty having to do with the will, rather than with the intellect.\footnote{Ludwig Wittgenstein, \textit{Culture and Value}, trans. Peter Winch, Chicago, 1980, 17e.}

\section*{Restoration Milton and \textit{Paradise Regain’d}}

In an effort to dislocate authority from dogmatism, radical thinkers of the late Renaissance and early Restoration sought ways to derive authority from experience. However, before experience could be recognized as a conduit for empirical truth, human perception and cognition required rationalization in order that they might be reliable and lead to truth. So emerged the experimental scientific method, with its dependence on observation, hypothesis, trial, and probable conclusions for the derivation of truth. Unknowingly, perhaps, these early-modern scientists and philosophers inscribed within their methodology one of the oldest literary and biblical tropes in history — the trial or ordeal — in order to establish verifiable truths that might withstand scrutiny and exist independently of the doctrines of established authorities. In John Milton’s \textit{Paradise Regain’d}, the trial of the Son of God by Satan, is an artefact, a representation of the early-modern struggle to ascertain and verify truth through human experience. Within the poem, the literary trope of ordeal, the biblical
temptation of the Son of God, and the scientific pursuit of knowledge and truth through trial are unified.

Paradise Regain’d is concerned with the liberation of truth from obfuscation so that understanding might increase among humanity. This essay will consider the ways John Milton’s *parvum opus* both reflects and problematizes the early-Restoration scientific and politico-philosophical efforts to rationalize experience. I shall delineate the manner in which Satan uses experimentalist logic and methodology to procure absolute confirmation of the Son’s identity and to expose his human vulnerability to perverse thinking and to corrupt action. Further, I shall propose that Milton himself, rather than being critical of the experimental scientific method, in the case of Satan, presents a case study of its potential for misuse. Indeed, Satan’s unwillingness and/or inability to rationalize correctly what he sees indicates the potential misuse of the experimental scientific method.

**Overcoming “the obscurity of things”: early-Restoration experimental science and Paradise Regain’d**

In early-Restoration English science, hypothesis was transformed from a mathematical tool to a constituent of the scientific method and a way to explain the contingent nature of truth. During the early Restoration, English scientists used hypotheses by connecting them to the experimental programme of the Royal Society and to the recent ideas of certainty and probability that were slowly gaining popularity, rather than truth. The pursuit of truth by early-Restoration experimental scientists, like Christopher Wren, Robert Hooke, Robert Boyle, and Thomas Hobbes was inaugurated by the Baconian desire to establish definitive truths that could overcome the limitations of post-lapsarian human fallibility and withstand the challenges of temporality and historical transition. The early-Restoration English pursuit of truth occasioned the development of the scientific method, a process of ratiocination. By the publication of *Paradise Regain’d* in 1671, regardless of their area of enquiry or discourse production, most English thinkers had become concerned about matters of fact and increasingly sensitive to issues related to evidence and proof. As a result, truth in all fields of enquiry began to occupy a continuum from

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