

3 Blind or Blindfolded? Disability, Religious Difference, and Milton's *Samson Agonistes*

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A man with impaired vision falls to his death because his poorly made glasses distort his view of a narrow bridge. Who is at fault: the government, the engineer, the lens-maker, or the man himself? Our answer to this question can reveal a lot about our attitudes towards disability, liability, and justice, but perhaps it can also reflect our approach to religious difference. The Yorkshire minister Richard Chapman certainly thought so; this is the scenario he formulates, in his 1635 *Hallelu-jah: or, King David's Shrill Trumpet*, as a way of grappling with that most troubling perplexity of Christian salvation: How can it be considered just to damn those who never received grace? As Chapman explains it,

even as a halfe blind man passing over a narrow bridge using spectacles, which make the bridge seeme broader then it is, the blind man being thus deceived falls headlong into the water; So by the spectacles of corrupt naturall reason and presumption which the wicked man looks through, the mercy of God which is the bridge is made too broad & his justice shrunk too narrow, leaning upon the one & forgetting the other till he tumble downe into the brimstone Gulfe of perdition.¹

It may be no *Paradise Lost*, but for Chapman the tale demonstrates that as God “*is mercifull so is he just, and of most exact integrity*” (145). More pointedly, the story illustrates how it can be that Anglicans, Catholics, Muslims, Jews, and Pagans are substantially responsible for their own damnation – even if they are, in an important sense, disabled. But we may have some misgivings concerning this parallel, and perhaps not because we disagree on the extent and operations of salvation; is it really fair to blame a man with impaired vision (with bad glasses, at that) for this fatal error? Can disability really be considered a culpable condition? It may sound like I am bringing an anachronistically modern sensibility to Chapman's crudely ableist analogy, but such questions – posed in the same terms but with different stakes – were at the heart of early modern theological debates. Immersing ourselves in these debates can help unsettle

those “elemental premises” – about autonomy, identity, and difference – that secularization has insensibly naturalized.

The linking of disability and religious difference would have been familiar to seventeenth-century readers, but this pairing is somewhat unusual in modern scholarship. Even as theorizations of tolerance and toleration have extended far beyond matters of religious belief, disability has been surprisingly marginal in such scholarship – just past the imaginable “subjects of tolerance,” and just out of frame of critical confrontations with “differences” that cause discomfort. “Skin colour, religion, language, dietary custom, dress and behaviour” are the signs that Michael Ignatieff recognizes in his expanded conception of tolerance.² Wendy Brown demonstrates how tolerance entails a regulation not only of religious but of ethnic, racial, and even sexual identity;³ it consistently feels like (as Tobin Siebers pithily put it) “disability is the other other that helps make otherness imaginable.”⁴ Though disability studies, for its part, has hardly eschewed the historical significance of religion,⁵ the thick complexities of religious difference often figure negligibly alongside those of disability; religious experience (not to mention specific confessional identities) is regularly treated as context or “background,” far less constitutive of subjecthood than disability.⁶ In the most penetrating accounts from both fields, the latent filiations between the two areas of study are palpable; the sensorial approach to tolerance recently proposed by Lars Tønder, which re-situates pain and embodiment at the centre of political theory, skirts the boundaries of disability without ever engaging the topic,⁷ while the recent collection entitled *Disability and Political Theory* (2016) exposes the shortcomings of liberal ideology but eschews any substantial discussion of religious difference or toleration.⁸ Even the most conscientiously intersectional accounts of disability, such as *The Biopolitics of Disability* (2015), find no place for religious identity alongside the diverse frameworks of “critical race studies, queer studies, political economy, sociology, cultural studies, literary theory, visual anthropology, and social history, among others.”⁹ This methodological disjunction is all the more unpropitious considering how regularly scholarship on disability and toleration converge over the same priorities: probing the limits of liberal autonomy and rational personhood,¹⁰ exposing the deficiency of “neutrality” and privileged indifference,¹¹ and interrogating our definitions of citizenship.¹² If disability has marked the troubled edges of liberalism, in part because our foundational conceptions of freedom and personhood – from John Locke to Amartya Sen – have been defined against disabled bodies,¹³ then attempts to critique, revise, or challenge established modes of liberal tolerance must engage more fully with the reorientations of identity and reconfigurations of knowledge that disability studies has pursued.

This chapter seeks to contribute to such a shift, though I should admit that my motivations are historiographic as much as methodological; it is difficult, perhaps even distortive, to study seventeenth-century ideas of tolerance without attending to disability. Disability studies scholars can ignore the extensive discussions of legal and civil “disability,” just as historians of toleration can

discount the unruly inflections of the term. The “disabilities” of Catholics and Dissenters were, one is required to suppose, purely legal in character and experience, this form of the term bearing no relationship to questions of embodiment or labour. But when we turn to writing from the period, these disciplinary horizons blur, not only because the meaning of “disability” was amorphous and fluid, often conflating the forces of law and physiology, but also because religious identity and difference were so regularly conceived in terms of blindness, deafness, and “lameness.” In many cases, estimations of difference and error, and thus the justice and feasibility of tolerance or “charity” (particularly towards the “blindness” of popery), came to hinge substantially on how an author conceptualized disability. Roger Lund has shown that many seventeenth-century writers represented deformity as an unnatural deviation from universal order,¹⁴ and Corrinne Harol demonstrates, in her piece in this volume, how broader conceptions of “variety” and diversity could undergird attitudes towards religious difference. But the dynamic could operate in the other direction as well; precisely because “metaphors of disability serve to extrapolate the meaning of a bodily flaw into cosmological significance,”¹⁵ responses to bodily impairment could be the foundation for competing conceptions of how religious difference should be treated. If from one perspective Catholic transubstantiation must not be suffered since “error is dangerous to the soul, because it is its blindness,”¹⁶ from another the imperative to integrate weak members into the Christian community was a corollary of corporeal variety – for even a man with palsy, gout, blindness, or deafness was surely “a true man still.”¹⁷ If we cannot dismiss these as dead metaphors, nor read them as legibly secular treatments of the body, we must investigate the historically specific confluence of these fields.

Blindness seems like such a familiar disability that we can easily forget how fraught the condition was before the hegemony of secularization and medical discourse.¹⁸ Perhaps because our own period is so concerned with classification, the relationship between disability and sin during the early modern period has often been oversimplified, historians assuming that disability (particularly visible deformity) served as a readily accepted sign of spiritual abjection.¹⁹ Yet, seventeenth-century readers were primed with a long-standing and nuanced discourse on impairment and illness, one which was arguably more attentive to the ambiguities of disability than exists today. As this chapter aims to demonstrate, the theological uncertainties that surrounded blindness both furnished and problematized distinctive forms of “liberality” and forbearance²⁰ – imperatives that exceeded the pragmatism traditionally associated with early modern modes of toleration.²¹ Though corporeal affliction was regularly understood as a distinctive occasion for longanimity and charity, these stances were always unstable, but not always unproductively so; schemas of atonement, marking out who could be saved and how, frequently turned on what blindness entailed, and thus reframing the nature of blindness – and “disability” more broadly – could

shift the boundaries of salvation and accommodation. The theological and social possibilities of this destabilization were articulated most pointedly in the regular denunciations of what we might call soteriological ableism:²² the tendency to treat disability as a legible mark of spiritual depravity. Recounted in John 9, the story of the man born blind served as one of the most culturally prominent subtexts for these debates, in part because it provocatively pushed the limits of who might be considered blind or sighted. Situating John Milton's writing, particularly *Samson Agonistes* (1671), in the context of this paradigmatic uncertainty, I argue that his most enigmatic poem turns to blindness as a way of exploring the adulteration of choice that attended the Clarendon Code, the set of reactionary laws that recast heterodoxy as Dissent. At a moment when Dissenters were understood as "disabled," *Samson Agonistes* imagines their limitations in material terms in order to probe the political ramifications of imposing belief. What the "literary" offers us here, then, is not exactly a new mode of tolerance but rather a staging of the way that such possibilities are preceded, and potentially precluded, by paradigms of ability and autonomy. The forms of interfaith relations that emerge (both directly and adversely) from these figurations of blindness cannot be readily endorsed, since they obtained before integral elements of liberalism – secular autonomy, individual "rights," physiological "normalcy"²³ – were firmly established. But foregrounding these unsettling encounters does suggest how a productive engagement with the most intractable paradoxes of toleration will demand a shift in our foundational ideas of ability and disability.

The regularity with which sin was conceptualized as a corporeal impairment during the seventeenth century made religious difference amenable to forms of forbearance that offered alternatives to a dubious "toleration" (which, we should remember, was a far more morally suspect principle than it is today). Imagining Catholic idolatry or Jewish ignorance, for example, as an unfortunate "blindness," rather than a purposive stance, made it subject to distinctive modes of pity and charity (in the seventeenth-century sense of the term). Viewed optimistically, this approach to difference mollified the culpability of error and even heresy, allowing Christian writers to assert the primacy of their beliefs without irrevocably condemning others; though in the strictest sense God could distribute punishment as He saw fit, most writers suggested that "he that sinneth out of ignorance, more easily findeth favour, then hee that sinneth against knowledge."²⁴ But viewed more critically, this framing of difference functioned to evacuate these competing beliefs of rational and theological legitimacy, frequently so that they could serve more instrumentally in formulating the rhetorical and political power of the forbearing party. These manoeuvres provide the foundational infrastructure that, as Brown and Tønder point out, theorists of "superior tolerance" have typically effaced,²⁵ and in this sense the essential privilege toleration avails might be considered able-bodiedness, the tolerating

party demonstrating, above all, their capacity for intellectual and corporeal continence. Modern critics have been struck by the exclusionary rhetoric of the Old Testament (particularly Leviticus and Deuteronomy),²⁶ but such proscriptions were most significant to contemporaries for the way they distinguished the duties of charitable treatment. Matthew 15:14 (“Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit”) was cited in the most “negative” forms of tolerance, calling for Protestants to let Catholics damn themselves.²⁷ However, far more sophisticated modes of interpersonal charity could be furnished by biblical injunctions to accommodate and even welcome the halt, blind, and lame. If one form of toleration entails the renunciation of other attitudes and modalities, it is not surprising that, at a moment when anxieties about popery and the Antichrist were uppermost, disabled persons were invoked as a means of regulating religious identities. The seventeenth-century emergence of toleration as a “normative” discourse, as Ingrid Creppell charts it,²⁸ depended quite substantially on the boundary-marking characteristics of disabled persons – both as objects of disavowal and accommodation. Readers were often asked to “consider whether amongst the papistes” injunctions to such charity were best observed; for the papists such inclusiveness was “but a marke to know Heretikes which will not receive the Popes Ceremonies.”²⁹ Protestant writers regularly censured papists for their persecution of the lame and crippled,³⁰ a practice imputed to their facile equation of disability with sin. As a testament to the cruel “spirit of Popery,” for instance, a 1689 tract urging Protestant union against popery alleges that Bishop Bonner persecuted “a poor pitiful blind harper”; “*such blind objects as thou*,” the notorious blackguard proclaimed, “*will be following Heretical Preachers; but when they come once to feel the Fire, will be the first that fly from it.*”³¹ Shaming such uncivilized cruelty need not be so dramatic, of course, and in many situations a subtle flourish of magnanimous (and distinctively Protestant) restraint could serve just as well. Offering some “charitable advice” to the hateful Catholics, who see Protestants as “Reprobates, Hereticks, Schismaticks,” the Scottish physician David Abercromby (himself a Protestant convert) bids his readers to “pardon [him] the freedom” of his analogy: “you are not unlike [...] those that are blind from their birth,” he remarks, “more to be pitied for this gross mistake, than blam’d.”³² The pity that disabled persons evoked (or least were supposed to evoke), then, functioned to delegitimize the religious other, to preclude or neuter recognition – for pagan beliefs, for Catholic doctrines, or for sectarian tenets.

But while tolerating disability could thus serve as a means of performing a legitimating forbearance, such a tactic could not function as reliably when blindness was simultaneously understood as the defining characteristic of post-lapsarian existence. Like a blind man who cannot know colour, humankind was considered “blinde by nature, and ignorant of God and goodnesse, and of our selves incapable of right judgment in matters of faith: for flesh

and bloud cannot attaine unto it.”³³ “Our minds being blind,” John Downe explained, “we cannot our selves see the way” to salvation.³⁴ Christian (especially Protestant) readers were called to reflect daily on their “natural blindness.”³⁵ We should not assume this was derogatory in any unalloyed sense; disability (and specifically blindness) was commonly the starting-point for salvation, and as historians such as Margaret Aston and Stuart Clark have shown, impugning established regimes of visibility was an important mode of repudiating Catholicism.³⁶ Being blind to sinful sights, particularly idolatrous ones, could be a blessing.³⁷ Nor did the prevalence and “naturalness” of disability mean simply that “we are all disabled,” but rather that difference was conceptualized and contested within these parameters – as different degrees, states, and modes of disability or incapacity. Most Christian writers agreed that since the Fall humans were born “blind” to some degree, and many suggested that this blindness could variously be mitigated, prosthetically managed, or cured through Christ, often with reference to Mark 10:46, Matthew 9:27–30, John 9, or Acts 9. Some writers certainly hoped to deploy the trope “without discussing every minute particular Analogy,”³⁸ but disagreements abounded about the accessibility and mechanics of this process, blindness serving as a battleground in debates over the workings of salvation and the implications of religious difference. Conceiving of the Church as a hospital, for instance, John Donne asserted that even “men borne in *Paganisme*, or *Superstition*” could be mended.³⁹ Thomas Draxe, however, marked a physiological difference between the elect and the reprobate as a way of explaining how the latter were biologically responsible for their fatal blindness, “for even as the Owle by the brightness of the Sunne is blinded, albeit all other birds are enlightened by it [...] so by the same holy Scripture and glorious Gospell, whereby the Elect are enlightened and converted, the reprobate are blinded and hardened, and that onely through their owne default and impotency.”⁴⁰ Since they concerned above all the nature and extent of human abilities, epochal controversies on atonement and election often involved elaborate reformulations of blindness – of how blindness occurred, of how substantially it hampered ambulation,⁴¹ of how it could be managed or remedied.⁴² Whereas William Charke, for instance, extended the potential of redemption by blasting the idea that “God hath left some in their blindnesse,”⁴³ others like William Allen and Henry Dodwell marshalled the persistent materiality of the disabled body to dispute the doctrine of justification by faith alone (with reference specifically to Dissenters); the blind and the lame healed by Christ, they insisted, were saved only *after* their corporeal afflictions were materially cured.⁴⁴

This is what the traditionally posited equation of sin and disability oversimplifies: disability (particularly blindness) was inseparable from sin, but the precise character and extent of this alterity was a matter of profound and far-reaching disagreement. How much did human “disability” divide humankind from God,⁴⁵ and how much were men differentiated from each other

(and from women) by different forms and degrees of disability? The intractability of these questions made imputations of blindness, both disparaging and magnanimous, at once needful and precarious. If tolerance “is generally conferred by those who do not require it on those who do,”⁴⁶ then even charitable Christians were in a conflicted position; they were called to tolerate the “blindness” of “Jewes, Turks, Infidels, and Hereticks,”⁴⁷ but in doing so one might as readily be a subject of God’s unparalleled tolerance, which was often conceived as a sufferance of our “naturall blindnesse.”⁴⁸ Shifts in philosophical and soteriological paradigms actuated the possibilities of repairing the damage of the Fall, as Joanna Picciotto has demonstrated,⁴⁹ such that as the century progressed religious writers were impelled to awkwardly qualify this blindness, usually as a means of both asserting the significance of human capacities and regulating the parameters of salvation. Robert Abbot, for instance, argues that sin occurs “*naturally*, by some defect in natural generation. So there being a natural defect now in mans propagation, through sin he brings forth blind Whelps. Though more or lesse,” he explains, “for *natural excellency* man bee not borne blinde ...”⁵⁰ As reason came to play an increasingly substantial role in salvation, contemporaries considering it a “privilege of mankind not to be led blindfold; but to be governed by their Reason,”⁵¹ a panoply of variations – “voluntary blindness,”⁵² “wilful blindness,”⁵³ “Cimmerian blindness”⁵⁴ – provided a means of apportioning agency and guilt, and many writers managed these classifications dexterously as a way to broker tolerance and moral status. Though acknowledging that papists “live in a state of damnation,” for instance, George Downam assigned their culpability primarily to the clergy by representing the laypeople as “blindfolded” by their leaders.⁵⁵ Strategically restrained, the Catholic controversialist Anthony Champney characterized his Protestant opponent Richard Pilkinton as either “blind or blinde fouled” (“verie shorte sighted or rather starke blind”),⁵⁶ inviting Pilkinton to consent to his de-authorization by accepting an exonerating disability. But as these examples suggest, such manoeuvres were always hazardous, built as they were on a theologically volatile, fragile constellation of contested subtexts that reliably “abled” no fallen man. As Lennard Davis demonstrates, before the ascendancy of the “normal” body, human embodiment was measured against an unreachable “ideal.”⁵⁷ Theological discourse was the bedrock of this worldview; not only was there an ever-present danger of relapsing almost imperceptibly into a “natural” state of blindness (even for most Calvinistically inclined writers), but there was an equally terrifying possibility of mistaking one’s capabilities – of thinking one can see while one remains blind.

Surveying these seemingly muddled negotiations of sight, spirit, and salvation, it feels like we are seeing seventeenth-century divines stumble over a shifting lexicographic landscape; the conceptual unruliness of blindness was, in part, an outcropping of the semantic fluidity of the term “disability,” which

was being negotiated across a number of fields. Before the nineteenth century, “disability” and its cognates were most often used to describe a general state of incapacity, applying “to people and things who are unable to perform the tasks such people and things usually perform.”⁵⁸ Critics are divided on whether we can consider disability an “operative category” during the seventeenth century,⁵⁹ though it is certainly true that no “simple binary opposition between able-bodied and disabled” existed in early modern England.⁶⁰ Precisely because its meaning and role had not yet been so codified by medical science, however, the term was a significant confrontation point in contemporary thought. It sparked questions we might recognize: does “disability” refer to the common incapacities of all humankind, or does the term more narrowly refer to the exceptional limitations that could arise by birth or accident? Is “disability” absolute or relative, irrevocable or provisional?

Seventeenth-century writers were asking and answering these questions, in some cases as an attempt to delineate disability as an “operative category” – but not for the same reasons and ends that we might. For us, the political and economic ramifications of such a distinction are foremost, but for seventeenth-century Christians the most pressing stakes were soteriological since the extent and justice of salvation could turn on what “disability” meant. Thus when his perennial opponent Thomas Blake argued that faith was entirely “disabled” from effecting salvation, Richard Baxter retorted that “thats not fitly called disability.”⁶¹ His fine-grained articulation of the term in his response to Blake demonstrates how crucially such definitions might partition culpability and accommodation: “the disability which I speak of,” he explains,

is not such as in a Godly man, to do any good without Christ and the Spirit, as in the second cause to act without the first: or in a partial cause, to act without its compartial: but such as is in an unregenerate man to do the work of the Regenerate; or in any broken instrument, or disabled agent, to do its own part of the work till it be altered, and made another thing, as it were.⁶²

Such skirmishes over who and what could be fitly called “disabled” might be regarded as part of the prehistory of the modern concept, since they impelled many divines to carve out a form of soteriologically exceptional “disability.” This was a process essential to the naturalization of disability under capitalism, which theorists have argued effectively created the category of modern “disability” by devaluing and excluding unprofitably formed bodies.⁶³ David Turner has observed that “how a society defines disability and whom it identifies as deformed or disabled may reveal much about the society’s attitudes and values concerning the body, what stigmatizes it, and what it considers ‘normal’ in physical appearance and competence.”⁶⁴ These debates remind us that even the stakes of “normalcy” and competence are historically contextual. Not just “state

benefits, medical care and supportive technological assistance⁶⁵ – for writers like Blake and Baxter, these debates were most immediately an important site for negotiating the boundaries of salvation and accommodation, since they could exempt and absolve (or condemn) those who could properly be considered “disabled” from certain rites or demands. In other words, definitions of disability inflected opinions on how much diversity a given community (Christian, Protestant, Anglican, Presbyterian, etc.) could tolerate.

We are now in a position to understand how blindness, conceived before “disability” was a stable operative category, could signify at once alterity and identity with others, and thus how blindness might have been an important threshold in conceptualizations of religious difference. Writers turned to impairment as a naturalized “similitude” for spiritual brokenness and impotence,⁶⁶ but the disability it entailed could never be confidently disavowed. Or rather, disavowing this disability was a theological matter, one in which the position of the “able-bodied” or “normal” viewer was highly suspect – at the margins or beyond the ambit of orthodoxy.⁶⁷ This context makes these moments particularly germane to our attempts to interrogate the hegemony of liberal tolerance, which critics have connected with “the power to define people, cultures, languages, or practices as ‘different.’”⁶⁸ For their part, many seventeenth-century polemicists recognized, albeit within the parameters of their own political and theological concerns, that laying claim to such a privileged position (a posture imputed to Dissenting “fanatics”)⁶⁹ was a strategy of power – a way to “judge, condemn, and sentence” those with different beliefs.⁷⁰ Doubts about corporeal faculties did not mean, of course, that at a practical level contemporaries actively identified or even sympathized with the blind, “lame,” or “crippled,” and indeed we must be careful not to eclipse the real suffering, both bodily and social, attendant to impairment. Injunctions against haughty “scoffing and derision,” in fact, were often presented as a corrective to the “grand excellence of the Age”: tripping up the blind and mocking the lame.⁷¹ But the tropological ubiquity of blindness (and “disability” more broadly) did allow encounters with such impairment, in religious writing at least, to serve more readily and meaningfully as an occasion for a decentering misprision – the kind of “dis-orientation from one’s normative frame” that has been associated with more robust modes of interpersonal tolerance.⁷² Indeed, it is remarkable how frequently the signs of sensory ability and knowledge capsize in homiletic discourse. In his 1622 sermon on John 1:8 (“He was not that light, but was sent to beare witness of that light”), for instance, Donne warns that even the most “wakened man” may be effectively blind, for if he resists both sleeping and “winking,” he might still fall into a negligent seeing; “how often may you surprise and deprehend a man,” he remarks, “whom you thinke directly to look upon such an object, yet if you aske him the quality or colour of it, he will tell you, he saw it not? That man sees as little with *staring*, as the other with *winking*.” Such negligent looking,

Donne warns, “shall but aggravate our condemnation, and it shall be easier at the day of Judgment, for the *deaf* and the *blinde* that never saw *Sacrament*, never heard *Sermon*, then for us.”⁷³

Returning habitually to instances of impairment, contemporary sermons demonstrate how such a disruption of spiritual privilege could turn most sharply on the hermeneutic treachery of the disabled body. An astonishingly wide range of writers argued that outward defects, even of the most obnoxious or debilitating kind, *did not* reliably reflect internal corruption. “The things that defile a man,” divines regularly asserted, “are from within, in himself [...] not [in] any outward deformitie, ill cloathes, natural foulennesse, &c.”⁷⁴ “Bodily deformity,” Thomas Draxe affirmed, “doth nothing prejudice the estate of Gods Saints before God, (as the examples of *Job*, *David*, *Mephibosheth*, *Ezechias*, *Aza*, *Lazarus*, &c. and of innumerable besides demonstrate).”⁷⁵ The case of Job, most frequently invoked, established that corporeal afflictions could equally serve as a trial, and in this sense might be the proofs of an upright Christian. As Calvin had remarked, “god doth punish those that be his for divers causes [...] As wee see that holy Job was oppressed with miserie above all other men, and yet was hee not urged with his sinnes: but God had respect unto another thing: namely, that his godlines may be the better declared even in adversitie.”⁷⁶ Early modern scriptural interpretation was rife with intense disagreement and profound ambiguity, but there were few sites more intractably and disruptively indeterminate than the afflicted body.

Such a discourse was certainly significant at a time when impairment was perhaps more visible than today,⁷⁷ though the primary aim of such admonitions was to repudiate soteriological presumption. “Presumptuous sins” were the bugbear of Christian divines,⁷⁸ who advanced that even if there is a fateful distinction between the saved and the damned, between the elect and the reprobate, “presumption” about our estate “is to be avoided as well as despaire. For as none more complaine that they want this assurance, than they that have it; so none more boast of it then they that have it not. The fond hypocrite takes his owne presumption for this assurance: he lives after the flesh, yet brags of the Spirit.”⁷⁹ “We blind sinners,” Draxe argued, “must not take upon us to judge of the guilt, and to determine the circumstances of mens sinnes, and of their estate before God.”⁸⁰ Though there were many ways in which a presumptuous Christian might be humbled, the encounter with impairment was uniquely efficacious, as it ostensibly compelled even the most circumspect viewer to pass judgment and thus to expose their own deficiency. The most culturally prominent and unsettling scene of such error was the story of the man born blind recounted in John 9. Coming across a blind man as he passes from the temple, Jesus heals the afflicted man by spreading spit-imbued clay on his eyes. The bulk of the narrative concerns the incredulous Pharisees (to whom we will return momentarily), but the encounter is framed by the misguided question of

the apostles: “who did sin,” they ask, “this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus explains that “neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”⁸¹ The exchange was often read as a warning against assuming too much about the spiritual capacities of others: “by which example,” Calvin averred, “we are taught to take good heed, leaſt that if we enquire after the judgements of God beyond the meane of ſobrietie, the wandering error of the minde doe carry vs away, and throwe us headlong into moſt horrible dungeons.”⁸² Yet, as Jesus himself suggests, this transgression seems unavoidable, since the blind man is a sign (of Christ’s status), one that all are called to read for spiritual meaning. Disability studies scholars have noted how impairment generates an “interpretive occasion.”⁸³ David T. Mitchell argues that disability invariably “inaugurates the need to interpret human differences both biological and imagined.”⁸⁴ In response to John 9, seventeenth-century commentators described a similar dynamic, the sight of impairment producing an inexorable impulse to (mis)read the body. In his own interpretation of the passage, Calvin reckons that this impulse is built into our cognitive makeup:

First of all, ſeeing the ſcripture doth teſtifie that all afflictions whereunto mankinde is ſubiect doe proceede from ſinne: ſo often as we ſee any man in miſerie, it cannot be, but that this cogitation muſt needes come into our minde, that the diſcommodities wherewith he is oppreſſed, are puniſhments laid upon him by the hand of God. But here we are wont to erre.⁸⁵

The difficulty, as Calvin demonstrates, is that this discomfiting misapprehension emerges from a theologically sound foundation; suffering *does* come from sin (i.e., the Fall), so one naturally (though wrongly) concludes that the cripple must be a punished sinner (which they are, albeit in the same sense that all are). Thus the encounter with a visibly impaired body elicits a kind of heuristic stumble, a reprisal of the Fall that reminds the viewer of their fatal short-sightedness.

Milton’s Sonnet XIX (“When I consider how my light is spent”) might be said to dramatize such a disorienting blunder, the speaker misinterpreting earthly disability as a legible form of spiritual disability:

When I conſider how my light is ſpent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide,
Lodged with me uſeleſſ, though my ſoul more bent
To ſerve therewith my maker, and preſent
My true account, leſt he returning chide,
Doth God exact day-labour, light denied,

I fondly ask; but Patience to prevent
 That murmur, soon replies, God doth not need
 Either man's work or His own gifts, who best
 Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best, his state
 Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
 They also serve who only stand and wait.⁸⁶

Whether we treat the poem as a “personal” engagement with his own blindness,⁸⁷ or whether we approach it as a reflection on “disability” in the more abstract sense we have been exploring, Sonnet XIX is clearly situated in this discursive context; the foundational error of the speaker is to treat a disabled body (disabled most patently to productive labour) as an intelligible index of the (disabled) spirit, and the reference to “day-labour” invokes John 9:4: “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day,” Jesus explains, for “the night cometh, when no man can work.” This subtext, in fact, helps explain the turn away from the parable of the talents, and from financial metaphors altogether, in the sestet; only Jesus may be considered sufficiently “abled” to do productive work for God, while man must be contented with a monarchical system in which the dynamics of salvation are less perceptibly codified. Indeed, though the elevation of “waiting” has sometimes been seen as a reassuring turn (not only for the speaker but for the disabled Milton),⁸⁸ it closes the poem on a somewhat indeterminate note.⁸⁹ Like much of the sermonic discourse on disability, which neither disavowed nor certified the spiritual state of disabled persons, the poem distinguishes a form of salvific waiting without confirming that the waiting of the speaker is so efficacious. In other words, the aim here is not to comfort the speaker but to stabilize the theological frame at the expense of epistemological stability, leaving us rather less certain about the spiritual status of the speaker, or even ourselves. All we know, in fact, is that bodily motion – at least that visible to us – is no reliable measure of spiritual aptitude. In this sense, the poem might be seen as employing disability in a recognizably instrumental sense as a way of decentring the presumptuous Christian from their ableist perspective.

Seeing the sonnet as a dramatization of this paradigmatic moment aligns it productively with a number of other such sites of mistaken disability throughout Milton's writing – ranging from Satan to Samson. The very origins of sin are rooted in such a misperception, Satan becoming first “fraught / With envy” because he “thought himself impaired.”⁹⁰ His fatal malice emerges “*through pride*” (emphasis added), but its immediate cause is the faculty of vision itself, for he cannot “bear ... that sight” of the Son's honour (664–5). If we conceive of toleration in terms of bearing pain,⁹¹ an approach consistent with Milton's monist leanings,⁹² then the filiation with the speaker of Sonnet XIX appears as a matter of different capacities for and strategies of tolerance; whereas the

speaker is able to save himself by refiguring the crushing weight of the talents as “waiting,” Satan is crippled by this sight. We might object (quite fairly) that the sonnet speaker is only empowered to effect such a transformation thanks to an accommodating intervention (the interceding voice of “Patience”), but contemporary conceptions of salvation often imagined the power of the Holy Spirit (or Christ) as an assistive prosthetic (a staff, a set of spectacles, a guide for the blind). To interrogate the uneven distribution of such prosthetics is to ask those theological questions that so troubled seventeenth-century writers.

Our modern sensibilities might incline us to imagine such fateful slips as a failure to see the inward character of disabled persons, but within the monist framework that Milton generally privileges this error might be said to arise from our tendency to delimit corporeal ability to distinct organs. As John Rogers has shown, Milton was drawn to the idea of an uncompounded body, one in which sense and vitality are distributed to every part.⁹³ While this does not mean that Milton endorses an entirely de-organized human body, *Paradise Lost* suggests how our inclination to conceptualize disability so clumsily emerges from a fallen organ-centric ocularity. Roused with dangerous arrogance by the news of the redemption, Adam is warned by Michael not to assume that Satan is “disabled” in any legibly material way – an assumption that would leave him vulnerable to his deceptions. “Now clear I understand,” Adam gushes, “needs must the Serpent now his capital bruise / Expect with mortal paine: say where and when / thir fight, what Stroke shall bruise the Victors heel” (376, 383–5). Against his impulse to envision this spectacular combat, Michael advises Adam not to dream “of thir fight, / As of a Duel, or the local wounds / Of head or heel”:

Not therefore joins the Son
 Manhood to Godhead, with more strength to foil
 Thy enemy; nor so is overcome
 Satan, whose fall from Heaven, a deadlier bruise,
 Disabled, not to give thee thy death's wound: (386–92)

Adam is partly right that Christ will disable Satan, but his focus on “local wounds” – a heel injury, a crippling concussion – leads to a gross misunderstanding of how this process will work. This is not, to be sure, a purely metaphorical battle, nor is it one in which disability is moored to specific organs. Michael explains that the fall will result in a “deadlier bruise,” but it seems like any accommodation to Adam’s organ-centric vision is difficult and imperfect; Michael condescends to describe Satan in terms of “armes,” “head[s],” and “heel[s],” but tries to explain that this “God-like act” will disable Satan in a “far deeper” manner than these idioms express (432).

Though contemporary mistrust of ocularity sometimes implied an endorsement of blindness, John 9 was often invoked as a repudiation of such a simple

inversion. The story is one in which performances, signs, and embodiments of blindness (not to mention deafness) circle dizzily. Since congenital blindness is known to be incurable, the Pharisees refuse to believe that the man had been born blind (an attitude that would have strangely appealed to readers chronically suspicious about fraudulent performances of disability).⁹⁴ Indeed, the economic forces that undergirded such anxieties are a factor in the misgivings of the man's neighbours, those who "before had seen him that he was blind" wondering if this is "he that sat and begged?" Some say it is he, while others say he only resembles the former indigent – a confusion the man resolves (and thus complicates) by affirming his identity. When Jesus articulates the implication of this miraculous transformation, explaining that he is come "for judgment ... that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind," the Pharisees take up his discourse facetiously: "are we blind also?" they scoff. Jesus rebukes these counterfeit cripples, admonishing them that if they were actually blind, they would have no sin "but now ye say, we see; therefore your sin remaineth."

It was easy to repudiate the contemptuous ableism of the Pharisees ("we see" was a byword for sinful presumptuousness),⁹⁵ but Christ's concluding remarks troubled seventeenth-century commentators; does this mean that the blind are without sin? Was the blind man the one who could see all along? Are the blind, after all, tolerating our infirmities? Contemporary commentators generally rejected such facile readings, explaining that "though all punishment be for sin, and this man had such a common cause, yet no sin was the reason why he was singled out for this suffering."⁹⁶ But the account of the man born blind, besides – or rather by – putting pressure on broader conceptions of disability and defect, presented one of the most challenging scenes of interfaith encounter. The miraculous regeneration of the blind man, effected seemingly without personal impulse and *before* spiritual regeneration, represented a persistent exception to the "ordinary" workings of faith, one that many schemas had to carefully downplay.⁹⁷ Such a precedent not only authorized the most antinomian claims to privilege within the Christian community, but it also underscored the possibility that even the most extreme boundaries of salvation – the alterity of Jews, Muslims, pagans – were provisional.⁹⁸ Equally complicated was the behaviour of the blind man, which served simultaneously as a model for Christian comportment and a challenge to Christian identity. Because he had been blind since birth, he was often imagined as an embodiment of cultural decontextualization, a framing amplified by the rise of the "Molyneux Question": if cured, would a man blind his entire life be able to distinguish and name by sight the objects that he had previously known through the sense of touch?⁹⁹ In interpretations of the biblical story, this detachment from visual phenomena begets a hermeneutic austerity that was widely considered exemplary; when the Pharisees declare that Jesus is a known sinner, and thus disabled to such miracles, the man

responds that “whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.”¹⁰⁰ Against the presumptuousness of the apostles, the arrogance of the Pharisees, and even the strategic recalcitrance of his parents, the blind man’s response was distinctively poised between precarious scepticism and fatal “self-conceitedness”¹⁰¹ – a means of asserting a secure faith while repudiating divisive certainty about its dynamics.¹⁰²

Yet, this hermeneutic restraint – this refusal to assign soteriological meaning to disability or able-bodiedness – was also the occasion for a more controversial response, one that pushed at the limits of contemporary attitudes towards tolerance and religious difference. Exasperated by the relentless prodding of the Pharisees, the once-blind man strikes back with a (surprisingly ableist) rebuke. When they ask *again* how Jesus “opened [his] eyes,” he answers “roundly”:¹⁰³ “I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? Will ye also be his disciples?” For many readers, the response marked the radical boundaries of Christian salvation, abjuring those who could never be cured of their deafness to God. The “blun[t]” response demarcated the alterity of Satan (and Bishop Bonner!), who could not be saved by even the most compelling signs.¹⁰⁴ Henry Hammond paraphrased the questions (as did many commentators) as a plain admonition, the failure to hear as a culpable refusal: “I have told you, and you did not heed it; or else, I have told you plainly and distinctly enough already.”¹⁰⁵ “Since they had no purpose to become scholars of Christ,” George Hutcheson explained, “there was no reason that his glorious works should be so much revealed to them.”¹⁰⁶ As many saw it, the query of the cured man demonstrated that sufficient effort had been made to save these deaf sinners.

But are these questions, perhaps, in earnest? Is it possible that the once-blind man is genuinely inviting these inveterate sinners to Christian fellowship? Some readers thought so, affirming that the man “heartily wished they would” become disciples. John Lightfoot argued that the man “speaketh it seriously and from a good heart.”¹⁰⁷ Such a response seems almost implausibly charitable, but the phrase could intrude a moment of charity into otherwise severe denunciations of “wicked men”: against his revilers, David “might have asked them one question, Will ye also be his disciples? Had they intended to have taken his yoke upon them, David would willingly have instructed them in the way, yea hee would have beene their guide.”¹⁰⁸ The tension surrounding this passage was apparently so common that in his influential *Annotations* (1685), Matthew Poole acknowledged that “some think the form of speech, implieth a hearty wishing and desiring that they would be so; but others think, he speaks Ironically.”¹⁰⁹ If irony is integral to liberal modes of tolerance (including that pursued by Pierre Bayle, as Elena Russo demonstrates elsewhere in this volume),¹¹⁰ then this unusually tone-deaf response might be considered an eccentric alternative to both disavowal and tolerance, both of which depend on initially identifying “wrong” beliefs. In other words, this misrecognition of the religious

other enables a distinctive form of recognition, one that exhibits some of the characteristics that theorists have sought in substitutes for the reigning liberal model. This is far from a facile scepticism, the man firmly asserting an epistemological judgment (that he has irrefutably gone from blindness to sight) in the face of social and legal intimidation. Hermeneutic misconstruction cannot be called “mutual respect”¹¹¹ or “recognition”¹¹² in any straightforward sense, to be sure, because it forestalls or sidesteps conflict. But this response nonetheless presents a stimulating moment of solicitation, presenting the basic rudiments of toleration – at least a “disposition or outlook that encourages” peaceful co-existence,¹¹³ a “will to relationship” that seeks continued engagement.¹¹⁴ After all, in failing (or refusing?) to properly contextualize their speech, the man sees the Pharisees as spiritually “abled” in provocative ways; this *felix culpa* imputes to them the volition and the capacity to be saved in a manner that ruffled many Christians. Interpreting their behaviour in this way seems admittedly imperial, situating the Pharisees within Christian models of salvation, but the man himself, we should remember, is outside such imperatives, for he learns that Jesus is the Lord only subsequently; he is not inviting them into his own system of beliefs, but asking how they position themselves in relation to this new community. This response came from a distinctively exceptional situation, yet divines regularly enjoined their readers to adopt such detachment, and the cured vision of the once-blind man was often represented as the ideal of regenerate sight. Even as theorists of toleration have demonstrated that the practice of tolerance need not be undergirded by a uniform virtue or principle, they have typically considered “misrecognition” as fundamentally disabling. Charles Taylor, for instance, observes that “nonrecognition of misrecognition [...] can inflict a grievous wound,” while Axel Honneth conceives of misrecognition as “injurious” and “impair[ing].”¹¹⁵ Within a framework that grants or even privileges such wounds as needfully mortifying, indeed the foundation of well-being, such a charitable misrecognition presented an appealing alternative to a dangerously knowing forbearance.

The story of the man born blind provides a productive counterpoint to *Samson Agonistes* in that it illuminates the potential proximity between the fatal errors of the Philistines and the blindness of Samson himself. The poem turns dramatically on this paradigmatic misreading of the lamed body, the Philistines bereft of (or “deaf” to) the prosthetic interventions that save the sonnet speaker and Adam. Responding to the boasting Harapha, who assumes that his affliction is a stable manifestation of personal transgression, Samson explains that his disability is an element in a larger schema beyond their view: “I was to do my part from Heav’n assign’d, / And had perform’d it if my known offence / Had not disabl’d me, not all your force.”¹¹⁶ Yet, in opening up this vista (the prerogative of Christ in John 9), Samson refuses to diminish his own exemplary role, repeatedly situating himself at the centre of the various texts he

imagines. “Tell me Friends,” he asks the Chorus anxiously, “Am I not sung and proverbd for a Fool / In every street, do they not say, how well / Are come upon him his deserts?” (202–5). As we have seen, Samson’s view of his blindness as a coherent mark of special abjection would have struck seventeenth-century readers as misguided, and many of Samson’s descriptions of his disability (particularly “half dead”¹¹⁷ and “living death”¹¹⁸) underscore the continuity of his condition with the “natural blindness” of all humankind (79, 100). Manoa invokes the curing of the blind man, in fact, to remind Samson that even in the most apparently exceptional case, the possibility of further exceptions is neither foreclosed nor assured: “But God who caus’d a fountain at thy prayer / From the dry ground to spring, thy thirst to allay / After the brunt of battle, can as easie / Cause light again within thy eies to spring, / Wherewith to serve him better than thou hast” (581–5). Manoa narrowly turns this possibility to Samson’s benefit, but it is also part of the drama’s larger tendency, examined by critics such as Elizabeth Sauer and Susannah Mintz, to present potentialities of interfaith recognition between Israelite and Philistine;¹¹⁹ the curing of the blind Philistines is never a foregone conclusion, a fact emphasized by the troubles of sight that attend virtually every character in the play. If, as Tønder has recently proposed, suffering might serve as a foundation for more robust modes of interpersonal tolerance,¹²⁰ we might ask why Samson cannot experience his blindness as a source of potential connectedness, or at least of charity towards the “blind” Philistines. Such an attitude was certainly available to contemporary readers, and its presence is signalled most sharply in the play by Dalila, who begs Samson to “let weakness then with weakness come to parl / So near related, or the same of kind” (785–6).¹²¹

Samson’s hostile response suggests why he must characterize this gesture as a calculated show – and perhaps more fundamentally why the potentially conciliatory continuities of disability are inhibited under the regulatory frameworks of liberalism. “How cunningly,” he announces, “the sorceress displays / Her own transgressions, to upbraid mine?” (819–20). Samson hears Dalila’s harangue as a performance denatured by concerns with law and punishment – and with good reason. When she sees that Samson will broach no substantial propinquity, Dalila admits what Samson never can: that her choice was inexorably mediated by state compulsion. “It was not gold, as to my charge thou lay’st, / That wrought with me: thou know’st the magistrates,” she explains,

And Princes of my country came in person,
 Solicited, commanded, threatn’d, urg’d,
 Adjur’d by all the bonds of civil Duty
 And of Religion, press’d how just it was,
 How honourable, how glorious to entrap
 A common enemy, who had destroy’d

Such numbers of our Nation: and the Priest
 Was not behind, but ever at my ear
 Preaching how meritorious with the gods
 It would be to ensnare an irreligious
 Dishonourer of *Dagon*: what had I
 To oppose against such powerful arguments? (849–62)

Soliciting, commanding, threatening, urging, adjuring, pressing, preaching: Dalila exposes the manifold arsenal of state power, as well as the manner in which violence is housed between outwardly pacific civil and religious discourses. The initial enjambment – “thou know’st the Magistrates” – underscores how substantially this view of agency inflects Samson’s later encounter with the magistrate, and thus why he must reject it. Dalila argues that even the “constantest” men could have “yielded without blame” to such versatile compulsion, but Samson forcefully rejects a model that figures agency as an accommodation to the law (848). He sets her betrayal in the context of “*Philistian* gold,” narrowing the struggle as an internal one of will against greed, and he promptly elevates the discussion away from the civil law to the “law of nature” (890). From the outset of the poem, however, Samson has been described as “yielding,” and his subsequent compliance with the civil magistrate is all the more dubious after he has condemned it as “vile, contemptable, ridiculous ... execrably unclean, prophane” (“Argument,” 407, 593, 1361–2). Everyone is allowed to change their mind, of course, but for those interested in legitimizing these fateful “motions” (as a mark of spiritual regeneration and divine sanction), Samson’s timing could not be worse; the manifestation of his volition coincides so closely with the sharp edge of coercion that it is nearly impossible to tell which is efficacious. These “motions” may indeed be beyond human law and rationality, but in their junction with the regulation of human choice they are dramatically adulterated.

As Sharon Achinstein has demonstrated, *Samson Agonistes* grapples with the questions of consent, conscience, and “public proof” that were raised by the Clarendon Code, and her account of the contextual resonances of the play is judicious.¹²² Yet she passes over perhaps too nimbly the difficulties presented by Samson’s blindness, underestimating how the poem might be staging a struggle with how contemporary political theory (particularly that of Hobbes) positioned disability as “the limiting condition of freedom.”¹²³ In couching his contests with state coercion within the more restrictive parameters of his blindness, Samson calls attention to the bind in which the penal laws placed the “disabled” subject, whose power of choice was occluded by an “artificial” choice between conformity and nonconformity. We should remember that the spiritual welfare of Dissenters depended on properly parsing the nature and effect of their “disability” – on deciding what demands it exempted them from.

As Baxter put it, for instance, Dissenters were called to serve “till bonds or disability constrain us to forbear it.”¹²⁴ In the ways that it puts pressure on this threshold, Samson’s blindness serves less to express the despair or disillusionment of Restoration Dissent than to materialize the delusive adumbration of independent choice that the Clarendon Code entailed. When the Public Officer arrives to compel the blind Samson to attend the idolatrous festival, a scene which would have struck Restoration Dissenters as quite familiar, he concludes that he “cannot come,” but eventually reverses his decision: “I with this Messenger will go along, / Nothing to do, be sure, that may dishonor / Our Law, or stain my vow of *Nazarite*” (1385–6). Considering how fundamentally liberal modes of agency are premised on paradigms of able-bodiedness,¹²⁵ I am inclined to take his initial assertion seriously – as a (however ironically charged and perhaps erroneous) conception of freedom as “the absence of ... externall Impediments to motion,” as described by Hobbes.¹²⁶ Indeed, the officer’s warning that they will come drag Samson “though [he] wert firmlier fastn’d then a rock” (1398) echoes the most sharply ableist element of Hobbes’s schema of autonomy: “when the impediment of motion,” Hobbes explains, “is in the constitution of the thing it selfe, we use not to say, it wants the Liberty; but the Power to move; as when a stone lyeth still, or a man is fastned to his bed by sickness.”¹²⁷ By dragging Samson like a stone, the Philistines will publicly expose his powerlessness – not by binding him, but rather by showing that walking to the temple independently is beyond his capacity. Seeing Samson’s initial refusal to come as a recognition of this “powerlessness” entails reading his later justifications as dissimulations that serve to submerge the troubling implications of this realization: ability and consent are grounded not on independence but on dependence¹²⁸ – and perhaps, for a “disabled” subject, more insidiously on the support of state-controlled prosthetics (a submersion integral to liberal personhood).¹²⁹ As the opening scene of the play demonstrates, Samson can only ambulate with the assistance of his guide, a decisive dependence considering that Christ was often imagined as the guide for the blind. And while his trepidation about approaching interlocutors reminds us how disabled persons are subject to increased levels and distinctive forms of violence (“fraud, contempt, abuse and wrong,” as Samson describes it [76]),¹³⁰ it is his pretensions to strength that ironically underscore how much his agency is determined by the structure of the environment itself. When Harapha boasts that he would have thwarted Samson on the battlefield, for instance, Samson challenges him to single combat – as long as they fight in a narrow chamber (1116–18). Samson amplifies the imaginative resonances of the duel by juxtaposing the giant’s dazzling armaments with his singular oaken staff, but this appeal to generic signals serves to obfuscate the stakes of this request; Samson is asking for a reconfiguration of space, one that alters how “safety” and precarity are distributed not only for disabled persons, but equally for the able-bodied. Before any

other ramifications – political, historical, theomachic – of such an encounter can be determined, its parameters must be imposed (a process Samson imagines passively as “let[ting] be assignd” [1116]). Harapha’s shift to the “safety” of glorious arms, then, might be considered not just a refusal of this reconfiguration, but an attempt to efface the way that power inheres in the ability to organize space – to determine where one might be safely “aloof” (135) and where one may be “at one spears length” (348).

With the systemic infrastructure of his disability in mind, we can appreciate how the most seemingly pointed manifestations of state violence that Samson can defy conceal a more puissant form of compulsion – a threat to deny the prosthetics that make agency possible. The opening line of the poem marks Samson’s dependence upon the assistance of a prosthetic, but it remains briefly possible that this dependence is not enervating but auspicious. As we have seen, Christians regularly imagined themselves as blind men led by God, and the absence of the Guide from not only the “Argument” and the “Persons,” but from the dialogue of the drama as well, animates the prospect that Samson is being led directly by the Holy Spirit: “a little onwards lend thy guiding hand / To these dark steps, a little further on” (1–2). Samson choosing to be guided to the temple by the Public Officer, then, might be seen as a concession to a form of autonomy that, even as it permits him to smash their idols, represents a shameful perversion of this most godly relationship (underscored perhaps by the Chorus’s hope that “Holy One / Of *Israel*” will be his “guide” [1426–7]). Indeed, when Samson agrees to go to the temple so that “they shall not trail [him] through thir streets” like a beast, his abiding strength and his attraction to their “advantages” and “art” suggest he consents not because he fears their “engines,” but because he relies on them (1402, 1401, 1399). It is notable, then, that he describes the Public Officer so artfully as a “messenger” (to conflate him, perhaps, with the less problematically *Hebrew* “Messenger” who appears later in the play) when he is in fact the drama’s most material agent of coercion. The type of agency Samson does achieve, then, is conditioned on his acceptance of what Lucas Pinheiro describes as the “ableist contract”;¹³¹ Samson consents to the effacement of his most fundamental dependence so that he can pretend to those forms of autonomy recognized by the reigning regime. The sense that Samson becomes a “free moral agent” or a “fit” adult man as the play progresses, in other words, is a ruse that he is compelled to devise.¹³² His various claims to “Sole Author[ship]” formulate a false dichotomy – between “constraint” and unfettered choice – that equips him to adopt a spiritually and politically denaturing form of personal autonomy (an “internalized ableism”) (376).¹³³ If we see Samson as a representation of Restoration Nonconformists, his blindness marks the insidious effect of their “disabilities,” for he is forced into a discursively obfuscated position in which the only way he can articulate his faith, even those “inward” motions that Milton had sometimes imagined

insulated from compulsion, is through a reductive secularization of dependence. This might be why (especially alongside the reams dedicated to the complexities of conscientious action in contemporary writing) his assertion of a hermetic autonomy, one that may freely reject conformity even after strategically “passing,” is at once self-assured and hollow. “Masters commands come with a power resistless,” he decides:

To such as owe them absolute subjection;
 And for a life who will not change his purpose?
 (So mutable are all the ways of men)
 Yet this be sure, in nothing to comply
 Scandalous or forbidden in our Law. (1404–9)

As critics have observed, the passage is drenched in ambiguity and equivocation, and for present purposes we might consider the concession to the “mutability” of man not as a recognition of earthly contingency, but as an ownership of our capacity to live prosthetically (here a recognition Samson perverts). Martin Dzelzainis is partly right that this moment is presented as an exchange of earthly slavery for divine slavery,¹³⁴ but it seems rather to stage the profanation of this process, Samson laying claim to an unattainable continence. The knowing eye roll of the Public Officer – “I praise thy resolution, doff these links” – might be more ironic than we think, then, marking the way that Samson’s production of autonomy is an acceptance of external impediments that conceal his fundamental powerlessness (1410). Indeed, when the “guide” returns briefly later on to help Samson to the pillars, it seems more certain that Samson is now assisted by Philistines: “At length for intermission sake they led him / Between the pillars; he his guide requested / (For so from such as nearer stood we heard) / As over-tir’d to let him lean a while / With both his arms on those two massive Pillars” (1629–33).¹³⁵ To be sure, relying on Philistine assistance does not necessarily abolish his political or spiritual authority, and it is hard to criticize Samson for failing to develop a social model of disability that indicts the Philistine built environment. But it is hard to deny that his oddly effaced dependence on Philistine guidance complicates his claims to autonomy: is Samson really obeying the motions of the Lord, or merely complying with the “normal background conditions” such as they are arranged by the Philistines?¹³⁶

Without sanctioning either explanatory framework, we can appreciate how such difficulties are substantially a consequence of religious compulsion itself, which by privileging particular “displays” of faith positions able-bodied performance as the foremost locus of soteriological meaning. As Paul Yachnin argues in this volume, the policies of forced conversion that prevailed throughout the early modern period fostered a realm of inwardness that challenged coercion, and many contemporary proponents of toleration condemned religious

compulsion as an attempt to influence “inward” belief through “outward” means. For Milton, “the care of souls cannot belong to the civil magistrate, because his power consists only in outward force; but true saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind, without which nothing can be acceptable to God.”¹³⁷ But the problem with such a policy was not only that it was (ostensibly) irrational. Privileging outward performance – making public display the index of virtue – would confuse, perhaps entirely obscure, the workings of authentic belief. As Milton puts it in *The Reason of Church-Government* (1642), “if the form of the ministry be grounded in the worldly degrees of authority, honour, temporal jurisdiction, we see with our eyes it will turn the inward power and purity of the gospel into the outward carnality of the law; evaporating and exhaling the internal worship into empty conformities, and gay shews.”¹³⁸ To the extent that such a policy constrained the motions of faith, it could be considered more fundamentally a conditioning of “ableistnormativity” – an internalized compulsion to pass based on those codes of behaviour that are publically recognized.¹³⁹ In the face of the epistemological treachery of the body, penal laws reified and enforced our transgressive ocularity. Fears that such a policy (so focused on visual performance) would contribute to papist idolatry were common, but in *Areopagitica* (1644) Milton suggests that codifying such performances might even alter our perception and experience of corporeality itself; an Adam without free will, like a subject under “prescription, and compulsion,” he contends, would be “a meer artificiall *Adam*, such an *Adam* as he is in the motions.”¹⁴⁰ “The motions” here refers to puppet shows, the term occasioning a telling slip that demonstrates how under such impositions spiritual “motion” is reduced to a set of culturally measurable forms of bodily performances, ones that we can distinguish only by their framing (because this is presented as “the” motions, not “his” motions). This is why, at its most profound level, regulating belief entails “licencing dancers, that no gesture, motion, or deportment be taught our youth but what by their [the state’s] allowance shall be thought honest.”¹⁴¹ If such a trope presents a critique of theatricality,¹⁴² it also exposes the paradigms of able-bodiedness that subtend such a regulatory regime, marking how the law defines what forms of expression, activity, and labour are assigned value (considered “honest” or “profitable”). For a poet who posits a substantial continuity between inward and outward motions,¹⁴³ this is more than a mere metaphor; controlling the actions of the body will modify the way we express and perceive faith.

In *Areopagitica* the reader is positioned such (“outside the box,” so to speak) that they can distinguish “artificial” shows from the true exertions of a vigorous spirit, but in *Samson Agonistes* this same convergence of forces is embedded so thoroughly in legal proscription that it becomes impossible to judge the “rouzing motions” upon which so much depends.¹⁴⁴ The entire action of the play, of course, takes place as part of the festival day for Dagon, a mandatory holy

day that culminates with Samson's spectacular show. From the outset, Samson marks how his most intimate motions – ambulation, respiration, inspiration (the “breath of Heav'n”) – are a consequence of this occasion, and from the perspective of the Philistines as much as the viewer there is no question about his coming to the temple (10). Taking place at the theatre, alongside “Gymnic Artists, Wrestlers, Riders, Runners, / Juglers and Dancers, Antics, Mummings, Mimics” (1323–5), Samson's fatal performance is hard to distinguish from these “gay shews,” especially when he prefaces it with such a crowd-pleasing advertisement:

Hitherto, Lords, what your commands impos'd
 I have perform'd, as reason was, obeying,
 Not without wonder or delight beheld.
 Now of my own accord such other trial
 I mean to shew you of my strength, yet greater;
 As with amaze shall strike all who behold. (1640–5)

Is Samson manifesting motions, or putting on the very puppet show (suitable for an intermission) that he has been called to the theatre to put on? In some sense, Samson ironically inverts the theatricality of the regime, taking the invitation to sacrifice to its most violently submissive extreme. But such a shift nonetheless dramatically reduces the parameters of choice. As Wittreich demonstrates, the phrase “of my own accord” was traditionally presented as the antithesis to divine inspiration,¹⁴⁵ so while it might mark Samson's persistent reprobation, it is also significant here for the way it maps out the diminished stakes of this encounter; the staging is now between personal agency and state compulsion (rather than divine impulsion). To the extent that such a reading seems like a crude reduction of the epistemological and theological possibilities raised by this heroic event, it is not inconsistent with the legal environment of post-Restoration Dissent; to equate *this* Samson with his other (more pellucidly antinomian) manifestations, whether in Milton's earlier writings or in the preceding tradition, is to neglect how expressions of faith were mediated by the imposition of uniformity under the Restoration regime. In other words, we might see the play as maintaining the theoretical possibility of antinomian action while staging its epistemological adulteration by state regulation; this is a play about the coerced concessions by which motions become “motions.” Though this reduction might be relegated to the setting of Hebraic law, it extends significantly beyond the setting of the play. The preface, promising to “temper and reduce” deviant impulses “to a just measure” using medical techniques, participates in this regulation, the poet positioning himself (like Samson) legibly in relation to established prescriptions for the body; by prescribing sour for sour, salt for salt, the speaker aims to generate uniformity

at the most elemental level. Preceding the title page, the unusually conspicuous invocation of licensing noted by Wittreich signals the continuity between Samson's situation and that of the play itself; for both "author[s]" the precondition of their appearance is that they perform those "gesture[s], motion[s], [and] deportment[s]" that are intelligible in the eyes of the law (376).¹⁴⁶

While this approach to the poem may not decisively resolve the most pressing questions surrounding the poem (Is Samson's brutality just? Is he a terrorist?),¹⁴⁷ it does suggest that these questions might depend on conceptions of disability and impairment before they do on ideas of belief and ethics. As we have seen, the depth and significance of religious difference was partly a function of the agency and constraints disability entailed. When the semi-chorus stumbles over the possible capacities of the Philistines in their final moments – "insensate left, or to sense reprobate, / And with blindness internal struck" – we are reminded of how much the justice (and painfulness) of this final act depends on the nature and culpability of their disabilities (1685–6). And we also notice, more disconcertingly, how these modes of disability are consolidated retroactively, perhaps not only to sanction punishment but to palliate it; as modern readers, we probably hope that the Philistines were senseless when they were crushed by the temple stones. If such a reading of the poem seems a capitulation to modern concerns about ableist ideology, we should remember that seventeenth-century religious writing was hostile to ableism in its own way – for reasons partly antithetical to those driving current struggles for disability rights. And religious compulsion was indeed contested in these terms, its opponents arguing not only that it made specious claims to a mode of divine sight, but also that so demanding a legible performance of belief from the body might engender illegible fissures in the body political. In his animadversions on the Clarendon Code, for instance, John Corbet disavowed active resistance (as did most Dissenters), but in doing so he noted that a body apparently "free from violent or convulsive motions ... may fall into a Paralytick, or Hectick Distemper, or an Atrophy. There be sullen Mutinies," he warned, "that make no noise, but may loosen all the Joynts and Ligaments of Policy."¹⁴⁸ At the site of Samson's awful finale it must certainly have been loud, but from our position – acquainted with the disaster third-hand (from a printed messenger) – this is indeed a muted mutiny, taking place at precisely that distance that Samson is enabled to walk. It is a distance we might consider a measure of how much spiritual expression was reconstituted by the regulation of belief under the Restoration regime.

One of the abiding priorities of disability studies has been to foreground the voices of disabled persons themselves,¹⁴⁹ but *Samson Agonistes* suggests how problematically such voices might be mediated by the law even as they appear. What possibilities inhere, then, for a form of expression that effectively transcends or foils regulated conventions of gesture, motion, and deportment – that

furnishes a contentious agency for the disabled subject? Here political theory is markedly deficient, as Barbara Arneil has recently argued,¹⁵⁰ but for guidance seventeenth-century writers might have turned to John 9, a text concerned with how to frustrate state coercion. Vexed by the unsatisfactory responses of the cured man, the Pharisees turn on his parents, asking them if their son (if he really *is* their son) was indeed blind from birth. Recognizing that any answer to this “captious”¹⁵¹ interrogation will be subject to legal reconstruction, the parents yield up their son – but not before they publicly accentuate the precondition for his autonomy:

But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not; he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself. These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him.¹⁵²

Though not always considered a model of Christian fortitude, this strategically “prudential” evasion could be used as a means of qualifying or compromising statements made under duress (particularly from ecclesiastical authorities).¹⁵³ At his execution in 1662, for instance, the regicide John Okey, caught between the proscription against justifying his crimes and the imperative to obey his conscience, decided to answer as “the Parents of him that was born blind, being asked by the *Pharisees* how he came to sight?... *He is of Age, let him speak for himself*: and so the Cause is sufficiently able to speak for it self.”¹⁵⁴ In *Samson Agonistes*, Milton allows his hero to speak for himself, but not without marking the conditions that make Samson of age.

In exploring the limitations of liberal tolerance, then, we might weigh who is considered “of age” – designated as an autonomous subject – in contemporary models of personhood. Even as more recent scholarship on toleration has sought to challenge Enlightenment models of rational subjectivity, it has been difficult to conceive of tolerance outside the context of “choice,” “belief,” or “practice.” These categories are decidedly problematized, however, by the persistent and widespread existence of disability. What level of cognitive capacity does “choice” require? What degrees and forms of motion are treated as meaningful? What levels of dependence preclude autonomous action? If secular forms of sovereignty and personhood are subtended by a theological infrastructure as postsecular theory has suggested, then seventeenth-century debates about justification, punishment, and conformity might contribute to more robust inquiries about how justice is distributed, how exceptions are defined, and where suffering takes place. At their best, theorizations of tolerance endeavour to admit these difficulties, refusing to say “we see.” But when even the apostles stumble, we should take care.

NOTES

- 1 Richard Chapman, *Hallelu-jah: or, King David's Shrill Trumpet* (London, 1635), 144–5.
- 2 Michael Ignatieff, “Nationalism and Toleration,” in Susan Mendus, ed., *The Politics of Toleration in Modern Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 85.
- 3 Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
- 4 Tobin Siebers, “Tender Organs, Narcissism, and Identity Politics,” in Sharon L. Snyder, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, eds., *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities* (New York: Modern Language Association, 2002), 51.
- 5 See, for instance, Brian Brock and John Swinton, eds., *Disability and the Christian Tradition: A Reader* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012); C.F. Goodey, *A History of Intelligence and “Intellectual Disability”: The Shaping of Psychology in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Irina Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment in the High Middle Ages, c. 1100–1400* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper, eds., *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).
- 6 Notable exceptions to this tendency are Amos Young, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007); Andrew Picard and Myk Habets, eds., *Theology and the Experience of Disability: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Voices Down Under* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Darla Yvonne Schumm and Michael Stoltzfus, eds., *Disability and World Religions: An Introduction* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016); Johann-Christian Pöder, “Theology, Disability, and Human Rights: Difficult Past, Promising Futures,” in John-Stewart Gordon, Johann-Christian Pöder, and Holger Burckhart, eds., *Human Rights and Disability: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Jason Reimer Greig, *Reconsidering Intellectual Disability: L’Arche, Medical Ethics, and Christian Friendship* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015); Wayne Morris, *Theology without Words: Theology in the Deaf Community* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Nick J. Watson and Andrew Parker, eds., *Sports, Religion and Disability* (New York: Routledge, 2015).
- 7 Lars Tønder, *Tolerance: A Sensorial Orientation to Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- 8 Barbara Arneil and Nancy J. Hirschmann, eds., *Disability and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
- 9 David T. Michell and Sharon Snyder, eds., *The Biopolitics of Disability: Neoliberalism, Ablenationalism, and Peripheral Embodiment* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 20.
- 10 See, for instance, Susan Mendus, *Toleration and the Limits of Liberalism* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1989); Bernard Williams, “Toleration:

An Impossible Virtue?" in David Heyd, ed., *Toleration: An Elusive Virtue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Will Kymlicka, "Two Models of Pluralism and Tolerance," *Analyse & Kritik* 13 (1992): 33–56; Moshe Halbertal, "Autonomy, Toleration, and Group Rights: A Response to Will Kymlicka," in Heyd, *Elusive*; Matthew Festenstein, "Toleration and Deliberative Politics," in John Horton and Susan Mendus, eds., *Toleration, Identity and Difference* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); Elizabeth Purcell, "Disability, Narrative, and Moral Status," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2016); Lawrence Becker, "Reciprocity, Justice, Disability," *Ethics* 116, no. 1 (2005): 9–39; Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 176–86.

- 11 See Barbara Herman, "Pluralism and the Community of Moral Judgment," in Heyd, *Elusive*; George Carey, "Tolerating Religion," in Mendus, *Modern*; I.M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Karl-Otto Apel, "Plurality of the Good? The Problem of Affirmative Tolerance in a Multicultural Society from an Ethical Point of View," *Ratio Juris* 10, no. 2 (1997): 199–212; Anna Galeotti, "The Range of Toleration: From Toleration as Recognition Back to Disrespectful Tolerance," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 41, no. 2 (2015): 93–110; Melissa S. Williams and Jeremy Waldron, eds., *Toleration and Its Limits* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Amy Gutmann, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Alasdair MacIntyre, "Toleration and the Goods of Conflict," in Mendus, *Modern*; Dario Castiglione and Catriona McKinnon, eds., *Toleration, Neutrality and Democracy* (Dordrecht: Springer Science + Business Media, 2003).
- 12 See Rayna Rapp and Faye Ginsberg, "Enabling Disability: Rewriting Kinship, Reimagining Citizenship," *Public Culture* 13, no. 3 (2001): 533–56; Andrea T. Baumeister, "Multicultural Citizenship, Identity and Conflict," in Horton and Mendus, *Difference*; Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 1–25; Douglas C. Baynton, *Defectives in the Land: Disability and Immigration in the Age of Eugenics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Nancy J. Hirschmann and Beth Linker, eds., *Civil Disabilities: Citizenship, Membership, and Belonging* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, "Rethinking Membership and Participation in an Inclusive Democracy: Cognitive Disability, Children, Animals," in Barbara Arneil and Nancy J. Hirschmann, eds., *Disability and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
- 13 In conceptualizing the "learning processes" requisite to the constitutional state, for instance, the most disquieting consequence that Jürgen Habermas encounters is the possibility that the "collision of fundamentalist and secularist camps" can be traced back to "learning deficits" – a difficulty that demands a "self-limitation of political theory" (18–19). On the problems disability poses for political theory,

- see Eva Feder Kittay, "At the Margins of Moral Personhood," *Ethics* 116, no. 1 (2005): 100–31; Barbara Arneil and Nancy J. Hirschmann, eds., *Disability and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Barbara Arneil, "Disability, Self Image, and Modern Political Theory," *Political Theory* 37, no. 2 (2009): 218–42; Carol A. Breckenridge and Candace Vogler, "The Critical Limits of Embodiment: Disability's Criticism," *Public Culture* 13, no. 3 (2001): 349–57; Eva Feder Kittay, "When Caring Is Just and Justice Is Caring: Justice and Mental Retardation," *Public Culture* 13, no. 3 (2001): 557–79; Lennard J. Davis, "Bodies of Difference: Politics, Disability, and Representation," in Snyder, Brueggemann, and Garland-Thomson, *Enabling*; Nancy J. Hirschmann, "Disability Rights, Social Rights, and Freedom," *Journal of International Political Theory* 12, no. 1 (2016): 42–57; Stacy Clifford, "Making Disability Public in Deliberative Democracy," *Contemporary Political Theory* 11, no. 2 (2012): 211–28.
- 14 Roger Lund, "Laughing at Cripples: Ridicule, Deformity, and the Argument from Design," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no. 1 (2005): 91–114.
 - 15 David T. Mitchell, "Narrative Prosthesis and the Materiality of Metaphor," in Snyder, Brueggemann, and Garland-Thomson, *Enabling*, 25.
 - 16 *A Disuasive from Popery* (Dublin, 1681), 19.
 - 17 Robert Abbot, *A Triall of Our Church-Forsakers* (1639), 98.
 - 18 On the history of blindness as a concept, see Moshe Barasch, *Blindness: The History of a Mental Image in Western Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Nicholas Wade, *Natural History of Vision* (Boston: MIT Press, 1998); Susannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).
 - 19 Contemporary writers often conflated blindness with other defects and deformities, but the fact that the condition was not as visually conspicuous certainly altered its meaning and effects. Though we should also recognize (as Milton perhaps marks in his "Sonnet: To Cyriack Skinner") that the lower visibility of such a disability could present its own challenges, among them the demand for "proof." On the complexities of invisible disability, see N. Ann Davis, "Invisible Disability," *Ethics* 116, no. 1 (2005): 153–213.
 - 20 Richard Allestree, *The Gentleman's Calling* (London, 1660), 101.
 - 21 This view is largely associated with John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), though it can be found in numerous accounts of the topic. For studies that problematize or dispute this view, see Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Ingrid Creppell, "Toleration, Politics, and the Role of Mutuality," in M. Williams and Waldron, *Limits*; Noah Feldman, "Morality, Self-Interest, and the Politics of Toleration," in M. Williams and Waldron, *Limits*; Ingrid Creppell, *Toleration and Identity: Foundations in Early Modern Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

- 22 For accounts of ableism, generally conceived as a systemic presumption of able-bodiedness that denigrates disability, see Fiona Campbell, *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Aabledness* (New York: Palgrave, 2009); Gregor Wolbring, "The Politics of Ableism," *Development* 51 (2008): 252–58; Thomas Hehir, "Confronting Ableism," *Educational Leadership* 64, no. 5 (2007): 8–14; Carli Friedman, "Defining Disability: Understanding of and Attitudes towards Ableism and Disability," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2017).
- 23 On the construction of the category of "normalcy," see Lennard Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (New York: Verso, 1995).
- 24 John Hayward, *The Strong Helper* (London, 1614), 196.
- 25 Tønder, *Tolerance*, 32–3; W. Brown, *Aversion*, 176–205.
- 26 Proscriptions against blind and lame sacrifices were invoked during the period, but usually metaphorically. See Henry Anderson, *A Loyal Tear Dropt on the Vault of the High and Mighty Prince, Charles II* (London, 1685), 5; William Harrison, *A Plaine and Profitable Exposition, of the Parable of the Sower* (London, 1625), 27; John Hayward, *Hell's Everlasting Flames Avoided* (London, 1696), 44.
- 27 George Downame, *The Christians Freedome* (Oxford, [1635]), 48–9; Edward Chaloner, *Credo ecclesiam sanctam Catholicam* (London, 1623), 52; Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenant, of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience* (London, 1644), 53–4.
- 28 Creppell, *Identity*, 2.
- 29 *An Answer in Action to a Portingale Pearle* (London, [1570]), B^v.
- 30 See, for instance, Francis Hastings, *An Apologie or Defence of the Watch-Word* (London, 1600), 21.
- 31 *The Absolute Necessity of Standing by the Present Government* (London, 1689), 10.
- 32 David Abercromby, *Protestancy to be Embrac'd* (London, 1682), 145–7.
- 33 John Golburne, "The Translator to the Reader," in *Acts of the Dispute and Conference Holden at Paris* (London, 1602), *4^r.
- 34 John Downe, *Certaine Treatises of the Late Reverend and Learned Divine, Mr John Downe* (Oxford, 1633), 26. See also Adam Harsnett, *A Cordiall for the Afflicted* (London, 1638), 522–3; Richard Alison, *The Psalmes of David in Meter* (London, 1599), Aii^r.
- 35 William Attersoll, *The Badges of Christianity* ([London], 1606), 345. See also Thomas Morton of Berwick, *Two Treatises Concerning Regeneration* (London, 1597), 5–6; Thomas Adams, *The Happines of the Church* (London, 1619), 285; Roger Williams, *George Fox Digg'd Out of his Burrowes* (Boston, 1676), 198; Matthew Poole, *A Seasonable Apology for Religion* (London, [1673]), 58; John Owen, *The Reason of Faith* (London, 1677), 89.
- 36 Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts: Laws Against Images*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 37 See, for instance, Thomas Draxe, *The Christian Armorie* (London, 1611), 143–50.

- 38 Richard Allestree, *Forty Sermons* (London, 1684), 261.
- 39 John Donne, *Fifty Sermons* (London, [1649]), 37. See also Thomas Morton of Berwick, *A Treatise of the Nature of God* (London, 1599), 25.
- 40 Thomas Draxe, *The Worldes Resurrection* (London, 1608), 25. See also John Yates, *God's Arraignment of Hypocrites* (Cambridge, 1615), 163–4.
- 41 See Disney Gervase, *Some Remarkable Passages in the Holy Life and Death of Gervase Disney* (London, [1692]), 244.
- 42 Walter Charleton, *The Darkness of Atheism Dispelled* (London, 1652), 263; Henry Harrison, *The Weary Traveller* (London, 1681), 134.
- 43 William Charke, *An Answer for This Time* (London, 1583), 84.
- 44 William Allen, *A Discourse of the Nature, Ends, and Difference of the Two Covenants* (London, 1673), 201–2; Henry Dodwell, *Separation of Churches From Episcopal Government* (London, 1679), 85, 186. See also George Downname, *A Treatise of Justification* (London, 1633), 427.
- 45 As Barbara Arneil puts it, before the nineteenth century human beings are seen as “lacking in different degrees in relation to God,” rather than as “bifurcated into two categories of humanity: normal and abnormal.” Arneil, “Disability, Self Image,” 219–20.
- 46 W. Brown, *Aversion*, 186.
- 47 Richard Allestree, *The Practice of Christian Graces* (London, 1658), 623.
- 48 John Chapman, *A Most True Report of the Myraculous Moving and Sinking of a Plot of Ground* ([London], [1596]), A3v.
- 49 Joanna Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).
- 50 Robert Abbot, *The Young-Mans Warning-Peece* (1639), 30. See also John Williams, *The Characters of Divine Revelation* (London, 1695), 8–9; Jacques Abbadie, *The Art of Knowing One-Self* (1695), 99.
- 51 John Williams, *Scripture the Rule of Faith* (London, [1696]), 17. See also John Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter Asserted* (London, 1678), 1–21.
- 52 Giovanni Diodati, *Pious Annotations, Upon the Holy Bible* (London, [1643]), 26; John Howe, *A Discourse of an Unconverted Man's Enmity* (London, 1700), 12–13; William Sherlock, *A Discourse Concerning the Divine Providence* (London, 1694), 198.
- 53 See Joseph Alleine, *Christian Letters* (London, 1673), 101; William Allen, *An Admonition to the Nobility and People of England and Ireland* ([Antwerp, 1588]), xxxv; Attersoll, *Badges*, 17; Samuel Doolittle, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Late Earthquake* (London, 1692); Thomas Hayne, *The Equall Wayes of God* (London, 1632), 13; William Thomas, *Scriptures Opened and Sundry Cases of Conscience Resolved* (London, 1675), 367; Edward Stillingfleet, *Twelve Sermons Preached on Several Occasions* (London, 1696), 309; William Sherlock, *A Discourse Concerning the Divine Providence* (London, 1694), 198–9.
- 54 Chapman, *Hallelu-Jah*, 111; Jack Dawd, *Vox Graculi* (London, 1622), 42.

- 55 Downname, *Justification*, 326. See also Sir Francis Hastings, *A Watch-Word to all Religious, and True Hearted English-Men* (London, 1598), 12; Berwick, *Nature*, 21. Alternatively, see Simon Harward, *The Solace for the Souldier and Saylor* (London, 1592), F3^v.
- 56 Anthony Champney, *Mr. Pilkinton his Parallela Disparalled* (Saint-Omer, 1620), 142.
- 57 Davis, *Normalcy*, 105.
- 58 Jeffrey Wilson, “The Trouble with Disability in Shakespeare Studies,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (2017).
- 59 On this debate, see “Disabled Shakespeares.” Special Issue, *Disability Studies Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2009); Wilson, “Trouble.”
- 60 Nicholas Mirzoeff, “Blindness and Art,” in Lennard J. Davis, ed., *The Disability Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 384.
- 61 Richard Baxter, *Richard Baxters Apology Against the Modest Exceptions of Mr. T. Blake and the Digressions of Mr. G. Kendall* (1654), 29.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 103.
- 63 On “disability” as a consequence of industrial capitalism, see Marta Russell and Ravi Malhorta, “Capitalism and Disability,” *Socialist Register* 38 (2002): 211–28; Marta Russell, “Disablement, Oppression, and the Political Economy,” *Journal of Disability Policy Studies* 12, no. 2 (2001): 87–95; Nirmana Erevelles, “Disability and the Dialectics of Difference,” *Disability & Society* 11, no. 4 (1996): 519–38; Nirmana Erevelles, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling a Transformative Body Politic* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).
- 64 David M. Turner, “Introduction: Approaching Anomalous Bodies,” in David M. Turner and Kevin Stagg, eds., *Social Histories of Disability and Deformity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2.
- 65 *Ibid.*
- 66 John Bunyan, *The Acceptable Sacrifice* (1689), 47.
- 67 See, for instance, Draxe, *Resurrection*, 30–1. Such a view was also supported by early modern medical discourse, in which the body was imagined as naturally porous and volatile. On this, see Hobgood and Wood, “Introduction: Ethical Staring,” in *Recovering*, 11–13.
- 68 Anna Galeotti, *Toleration as Recognition* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 8.
- 69 Thus the possibility of absolutely disavowing blindness was not impossible, but rather theologically radical. See, for instance, Edward Haughton, *The Rise, Growth, and Fall of Antichrist* (London, 1652), 31. For a typically jocular contemporary treatment, see *The Quakers Art of Courtship* (London, 1689), 70–1, in which a crafty Quaker pawns off a blind horse on an unsuspecting citizen because he “imagined a blind Horse to be suitable for one that was without Light.”
- 70 Richard Alison, *A Plaine Confutation of a Treatise of Brownisme* (London, 1590), 2.
- 71 Richard Allestree captures this cultural tension in his animadversions on “scoffing and derision”; “alas,” he laments, “many of us would rather put a stumbling block in the way of the Blind, pull away the Crutch from the Lame, that we may

sport our selves to see them tumble: such a sensuality we have in observing and improving the imperfections of others, that it is become the grand excellence of the Age to be Dextrous at it": *The Government of the Tongue* (Oxford, 1677), 119. On the abiding (albeit complex) cruelty to disabled persons, see David M. Turner, "Disability Humor and the Meanings of Impairment in Early Modern England," in Hobgood and Wood, *Recovering*; Simon Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Lund, "Laughing."

- 72 Kathryn Abrams, "Forbearant and Engaged Toleration: A Comment on David Heyd," in M. Williams and Waldron, *Limits*, 212.
- 73 Donne, *Sermons*, 344–5.
- 74 Nicholas Byfield, *The Paterne of Wholsome Words* (London, 1618), 104–5.
- 75 Draxe, *Armorie*, 144.
- 76 John Calvin, *A Harmonie Upon the Three Evangelists* (London, 1584), 220.
- 77 There is some debate about how prevalent disabilities were during the early modern period; while the deficiencies of medical treatment may have left more individuals with visible signs of impairment (such as smallpox), they would also have ensured a higher mortality rate for others (such as military injuries).
- 78 John Dod, *Foure Godlie and Fruitful Sermons* (London, 1611), 7–8.
- 79 Adams, *Happines*, 330–1.
- 80 Draxe, *Armorie*, 79.
- 81 John 9:2–3.
- 82 Calvin, *Harmonie*, 220. See also William Burkitt, *Expository Notes with Practical Observations on the Four Holy Evangelists* (London, 1700), Kkkk2^r; George Hutcheston, *An Exposition of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, according to John* (London, 1657), 177; Augustin Marlorat, *A Catholike and Ecclesiasticall Exposition Of the Holy Gospell After S. Iohn* (London, 1575), 334; John Williams, *A Sermons Preach'd Before the King at Whitehall, on January 30, 1696* (London, 1697), 27.
- 83 Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1. Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell conceive of disability as "that which exceeds a culture's predictive capacities or effective interventions." *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 3.
- 84 Mitchell, "Narrative" in *Enabling*, 17.
- 85 Calvin, *Harmonie*, 219.
- 86 John Milton, "Sonnet XVI," in John Carey and Alastair Fowler, eds., *The Poems of John Milton* (London: Longmans, 1968).
- 87 For biographical readings, see Eleanor Gertrude Brown, *Milton's Blindness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 51–6; David Urban, "Milton's Identification with the Unworthy Servant in Sonnet 19: A Response to Margaret Thickstun," *Connotations* 22, no. 2 (2012): 260–3; Carol Barton, "'They Also Perform the Duties of a Servant Who Only Remain Erect on Their Feet in a Specified Place

in Readiness to Receive Orders': The Dynamics of Stasis in Sonnet XIX ("When I Consider How My Light Is Spent"); *Milton Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1998): 109–22. The most influential challenge to the tendency to read the poem as a reflection on Milton's own blindness is Dayton Haskin, *Milton's Burden of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); but see also Margaret Thickstun, "Resisting Patience in Milton's Sonnet 19," *Milton Quarterly* 44 (2010): 168–80; Joseph Pequigney, "Milton's Sonnet XIX Reconsidered," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 8, no. 4 (1967): 485–98.

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- 137 John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (London, 1689), 7.
- 138 John Milton, “The Reason of church-Government Urg’d Against Prelaty,” in Don Wolfe, ed., *Complete Prose Works of John Milton, Volume 1: 1624–1642* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 766.
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- 140 John Milton, *Areopagitica*, in Ernest Sirluck, ed., *Complete Prose Works of John Milton, Volume II: 1643–1948* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 527.
- 141 Milton, “Areopagitica,” 523. If we see Milton as endorsing a theatrical or even *theatrum mundi* view of earthly existence, then this might be considered instead an arrogation of God’s role as spectator or puppet-master. See David Loewenstein, *Milton and the Drama of History: Historical Vision, Iconoclasm, and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Knoppers, *Historicizing*; Vanita Neelakanta, “‘Theatrum Mundi’ and Milton’s Theater of the Blind in ‘Samson Agonistes,’” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 11, no. 1 (2011): 30–58.
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