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On Milton’s Proposal for “Communitas Libera” Reconsidered
—from *Defensio Prima*, through *The Readie and Easie Way*
to *Paradise Lost*—

I

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I

In October, 1658,² one month after Cromwell’s death caused extensive political anxiety in the minds of many English people, Milton published a revised edition of *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* (hereafter *Defensio Prima*). He added significant phrases to the 1651 version and republished it, thereby encouraging the English republican minds and reminding them of their cause in the establishment of the ideal government. In the concluding part of the new version, he added the following phrase, which is important in terms of the writing of *PL*, whose oral dictation, it is reported, Milton had also begun in 1658.³

[...]to the cause of Christendom above all—that I am pursuing after yet greater things if my strength suffice (nay, it will if God grant), and for their sake meanwhile am taking thought, and studying to make ready.⁴

Some surmise that while he dictated *PL*, the whole contents of *Defensio Prima* sometimes recurred and resounded in his mind, and greatly influenced the making of *PL*. We encounter relevant parallels between the descriptions in *PL* and *Defensio Prima*.⁵ However, the 1658 edition of *Defensio Prima* seems to have enjoyed much less attention paid from

¹ This paper is the revised version based on my oratorical presentation delivered at the English International Milton Symposium held at Grenoble University on the 9th of June, 2005.

² Robert W. Ayers presents this date: *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, Vol. IV, Yale U.P., p. 295, pp.1140-44; Martin Dzelzainis asserts that “the *Defensio* was ... followed by ... the corrected and enlarged 1658 duodecimo edition,” commenting on one of Milton’s additions in Chapter V of *Defensio Prima* that “this addition may reflect the uncertain state of affairs following the recent death of Cromwell”: *John Milton Political Writings* (Cambridge UP, 1991), p.viii, and p.151.

³ Cf. Christopher Hill says “Aubrey dated Milton’s resumption of work on *Paradise Lost* to two years before the King came in...” and develops his discourse according this line: *Milton and the English Revolution* (Faber & Faber, 1977), p.143.

⁴ *The Works of John Milton*, Vol. VII, eds Frank A. Patterson et al, Columbia UP, p.559, hereafter cited as *CE*.

⁵ Cf. Joan S. Bennett elaborately argues this problem in her “God, Satan, and King Charles: Milton’s Royal Portraits”, *PMLA*(1977), pp.441-457; Yuko Kanakubo Noro, “The Making of Satan, Milton’s Old Enemy—from *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* to *Paradise Lost*”, *Bulletin of College of Humanities & Sciences, Nihon University* No.65.(College of Humanities & Sciences, Nihon University, 2003), pp.43-48. This paper of mine is based on the script delivered by the author at the Seventh International Milton Symposium held at South Carolina University, Beaufort on the 7th of June, 2002.

Milton critics than other tracts of this period critical of English Republicanism. The 1658 edition of *Defensio Prima* plays an important role in relation with *PL*, and simultaneously, with the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*. My aim in this paper is to reassess the 1658 edition of *Defensio Prima* in relation to the second edition of *Readie and Easie Way* and *PL*.

II

The first edition of *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* was published by the last week of February, 1660. In that edition, Milton asserts that each county of England should be reorganized as a small commonwealth governed by "nobility and gentry", and that "[a]Grand or General Council" based on those political units, should be established. Moreover, its members were to be the "Rump members." However, on February 21—just before the publication of the first edition—"the Secluded Members" conspiring with General Monck annulled the resolution of the Rump, and resolved the opening of new parliament on April 25, excluding the Rump members. Thus, Milton hurriedly revised the tract and published it in early April, 1660.⁶ It is noteworthy that at this time Milton continued to dictate *Paradise Lost* as he had declared in the concluding part of the 1658 edition of *Defensio Prima*.

The revised version of *The Readie and Easie Way* preserves his proposal of the establishment of "the Grand or General Council", while differing fundamentally from the first edition in other areas. Those expressions supporting the Rump members are eliminated (the recalled Rump Parliament itself no longer existed), the name of Sulla, the tyrannical Roman dictator, appears on the title page, further clarifying Milton's reproach of General Monck.

As for the idiosyncratic features found in the second edition, Thomas N. Corns proves that "[t]he first edition contains rather more imagery than other late Miltonic pamphlets and the distinction is sharpened in the second edition, in which Milton introduces new material supercharged with imagery."⁷ Keith W. Staveland discusses Milton's "coordinate, linear style" and "his more structured style...alternate throughout the tract and create a pattern of futile but heroic political struggle."⁸ Kevin Gilmartin analyses, in minute detail, Milton's fundamental political conceptions particularly in the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way*. (He compares them to earlier writings such as *Areopagitica* and *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*.⁹) Reuben Sanchez elucidates the similarity (and difference)

⁶ As for the publication dates of both editions, I follow the opinion of Robert W. Ayers in *C. P. W.* Vol. VII, pp.343-344, and pp. 398-400.

⁷ *The Development of Milton's Prose Style* (Clarendon Press Oxford, 1982), pp.44-45.

⁸ "The Style and Structure of Milton's *Readie and Easie Way*", *Milton Studies* Vol.5, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968), pp.269-287.

⁹ "History and Reform in Milton's *Readie and Easie Way*", *Milton Studies* Vol.24, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), pp.17-41.

between *The Reason of Church Government* and *The Readie and Easie Way* based on the way Milton utilized Jeremiah.¹⁰

Most other critical attention seems to concentrate on Milton's prose works prior to *The Readie and Easie Way* (except *Defensio Prima*). According to Corns, "*The Readie and Easie Way* deserves comparison with Milton's more successful early political writings." It is noteworthy that Stanley Stewart compares, in minute detail, the first and the second edition, and points out a link between the second edition and *PL*. He further affirms that it is important, in understanding *PL*, to remind us of the distinction between the "ordained" and "permissive will" of God.¹¹ Stewart's refers to the links between the additional parts in pages, 449-450, and *PL* III, 665, 685; 183-84, and XII, 112-12, where Milton's concept that "God ordained the commonwealth for his 'peculiar people'" is presented.¹²

III

When the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way* appeared, almost all of Milton's political expectations were overturned. Therefore, the whole atmosphere of the second edition is completely different from the first edition. While its content is said to be the more pessimistic and tragic, Milton's idealistic conceptions which have run through his political tracts are brought into clear relief. They will subsequently converge into the ideal form of government in *PL*. Five years before the publication of Stewart's paper, Akira Arai, one of the Japanese prominent Miltonists, focused his attention on this point, and closely compared the first and the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way*. Arai demonstrates the important link between the second edition and *PL*. In his paper, he points out the three main sweeping additions in the revised edition. The first part is on the law of nature (*C.P.W.*, VII, 409, l. 14 to 420), the second on the society of ants (427, ll.24-29), and the last on "the Grand Council constituted to perpetuities" (437, l. 14 to 444). Arai asserts that all of changes merge into the ideal republican government presented in *PL*.¹³

The first added part shows Milton's assertion that "the Parliament of England...justly and magnanimously abolished" monarchy, "turning regal bondage into a free commonwealth....", based on "the law of nature only, which is the only law of laws truly and properly to all mankind fundamental," which are "beginning and the end of all

¹⁰ "From Polemic to Prophecy: Milton's Uses of Jeremiah in *The Reason of Church Government* and *The Readie and Easie Way*", *Milton Studies* Vol.30, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), pp.27-44.

¹¹ "Milton Revises *The Readie and Easie Way*", *Milton Studies* Vol.20, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984), p.217.

¹² It is noteworthy that the paragraph Stewart quotes from the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way* resounds the paragraph from *Defensio Prima*; "Upon this argument verse 18 is in point: 'And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day.' Yea, that punishment awaited them for obstinately persisting to desire a king against God refusal." (*The Works of John Milton*, Vol. VII, p.101)

¹³ "Milton to Ouseihukko—Milton & the Restoration", *Milton Ronkou—Studies on Milton*, (Tokyo, Chukyo Publishing Company, 1979), pp.53-66.

Government." The councillors abolished "mere positive laws, neither natural nor moral". As is clear from the quotation above, "nature" and "moral" is closely interwoven in Milton's philosophy of politics. The second part is added to the place where Milton criticizes the Royalists, citing Proverbs 6:6-8 as follows;

Go to the Ant, thou sluggard, saith Solomon; consider her waies, and be wise; which having no prince, ruler, or lord, provides her meat in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. which evidently shews us, that they who think the nation undon without a king, though they look grave or haughtie, have not so much true spirit and understanding in them as a pismire;

Milton continues in the second edition, saying;

[...]these diligent creatures [ants]...are set the example to impudent and ungoverned men, of a *frugal and self-governing democratie or Commonwealth*; safer and more thriving in the joint providence and counsel of many industrious equals, then under the single domination of one imperious Lord. [My emphasis.]

It is clear that the society of ants symbolizes Milton's ideal republican government, and the moral features recommended in the quotation—industry, frugality, self-governing, equality, and preparation for future—are repeatedly demonstrated with variations in his republican theories.¹⁴

Concerning the phrase, "*democratie or Commonwealth*", we must keep in mind that Milton adopts the word, "commonalty" in addition to the "freedom" of the community members, juxtaposing the word in question with key terms like "Commonaltie or Commonwealth," "commonalties or [...]more general assemblies," and "other counties or commonalties."¹⁵ Moreover, Milton declares "nobilitie and chief gentry" to be the constituents of the community. In the same paragraph, Milton clarifies his idea about the construction of "the Grand Council", which was rather ambiguous in the first edition. Considering this in light of the other addition on page, 444, we grasp the three-layered governmental system proposed by Milton: First, "ordinary assemblies" constitute the main cities of each county. Secondly the representatives elected from the assemblies organize the "general assembly," and the representatives elected from this "general assembly"

¹⁴ Also, in the closing part of *Defensio Prima*, we remember, Milton admonishes his "countrymen," maintaining their moral features and maintaining their liberty: "[...]so ye shall prove that unarmed and in the midst of peace ye of all mankind have the highest courage to subdue[...]faction, avarice, the temptations of riches, and the corruptions[...]and in maintaining your liberty shall show as great justice, temperance, and moderation as you have shown courage in freeing yourselves from slavery." (*The Works of John Milton*, Vol. VII, p.553) It is apparent that in Milton, the moral features represented by virtues such as "industry, frugality, self-governing, equality, and preparation for future" are indispensable for the constituents in constructing and maintaining an ideal, free commonwealth.

¹⁵ *CPW*. 7:458-9.

constitute the "Grand or General Council". Here we recall the three-layered system of church government proposed by Milton in *The Reason of Church Government*. In this work "a general assembly" is based on the gathering of "little synod[s]" consisting of all "parochial consistor[ies]".¹⁶ Arai asserts that origin of the three-layered governmental system in the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way* is rooted in *The Reason of Church Government*.

The third, significant addition in the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way* is the paragraph proposing the "perpetual senate", which designates the "Grand or General Council."¹⁷ The distinctive feature of Milton's idea is situated in the notion that this governmental system is supported only by "nobility and chief gentry" with "magnanimitie," which "govern[s] without a maister."(*CPW*. 7:448)

IV

There is a significant link between the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way* and *PL*. We encounter lines 24-32 of Book XII, where Nimrod, the first tyrant of "proud ambitious heart", "dispossess / Concord and *law of Nature*" being "not content / With fair equality, fraternal state" (Emphasis mine). Secondly, we notice lines 484-9 of Book VII, describing the "*Parsimonious emmet, provident / Of future, in small room large heart* (=magnanimity) enclosed, / Pattern of just equality perhaps / Hereafter, join'd in her popular Tribes / Of *Commonalty*" (Emphasis mine). It is significant that the distinctive features of ant society depicted in the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way* — magnanimity, frugality, equality, and preparation for future – are represented in these lines. Moreover, "commonalty," one of the most significant key words in Milton's republicanism, appears here only once in the epic. It is manifest that Milton depicts an emmet as the symbol of the representative member of his free commonwealth of three-layered governmental system. Furthermore, the Creation of Adam belongs immediately after this scene, where our ancestral father is "endu'd / With Sanctity of Reason[...] *Govern the rest, self-knowing [...]* *Magnanimous* to correspond with Heav'n..." (ll.505-11; Emphasis mine). Adam in this scene represents the ideal governor as one of "nobility and chief gentry" advocated in *The Readie and Easie Way*.¹⁸ For the third link between the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way* and *PL*, Arai introduces lines 224-6 of Book XII, "there they

¹⁶ *CPW*. 1:789. None of the critics cited in my paper refers to the link between the three-layered governmental systems in *The Reason of Church Government* and *The Readie and Easie Way* except Akira Arai.

¹⁷ The similar proposals are offered by Sir Henry Vane and Henry Stubbe (*CPW*. 7:181). Laura L Knoppers refers to Milton's idea of establishing the Senate, which will produce an ideal community. "*The Readie and Easie Way* and the English Jeremiad," eds David Loewenstein and James G. Turner, *Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton's Prose* (Cambridge UP, 1990), p.220.

¹⁸ Arai also refers to the line 557 of Book VIII, where Adam's eye catches "Greatness of mind and nobleness" in Eve. Therefore, it is safe to state that Milton admits woman to be the governor of her community as well as man at least before the Fall.

shall found / Their *government*, and their *great Senate* choose / Through the twelve Tribes,
to rule by Laws ordain'd". (Emphasis mine). On top of it, the word, "Senate", appears only
once in the epic.¹⁹ Milton here uses "Senate" instead of "Elders", because he casts a stern
glance towards Presbyters (meaning "elders") since they connived with Royalists,
promoting the Restoration.

V

My first aim in this section is to show that Milton's fundamental republican ideas
clarified in the significant links between the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way*
and *PL* existed in *Defensio Prima* to some extent. I then affirm that the revision of
Defensio Prima has meaningful influence on the second edition of *The Readie and Easie*
Way. These fundamental republican ideas are produced, elaborated and weave their way
from *Defensio Prima*, through *The Readie and Easie Way* to *PL*.

In the first place, Milton tempers and elaborates the law of nature in his controversy
with Salmasius. Quite a few arguments on the law of nature develop (with variations) in
Defensio Prima. In *Defensio Regia*, Salmasius insists that the "law of kings arises
from[...]the law of nature". (*CE*, VII,73) while Milton asserts that "[w]hen people are
bound by such an oath, a king turned tyrant or rotted with cowardice releases them by
breaking his oath; justice herself releases them; the very law of nature releases them" (*CE*,
VII, 267, emphasis mine). Here we are reminded of the phrase, "mere positive laws,
neither natural nor moral" (*CPW* 7:413) because "nature" and "moral" are regarded as a set
phrase equivalent in meaning here. Milton then declares that "the law of God does exactly
agree with the law of nature," and assures us that the "law of nature is a principle implanted
in all men's minds, to regard the good of mankind in so far as men are united together in
societies," The law of nature for Milton is the law of the people. It defends their welfare
and punishes those (even kings) who encroach the rights of the people. This assertion
agrees with the description of the natural law in the second edition of *The Readie and Easie*
Way and the depiction of Nimrod in *PL*.

Secondly, the metaphor of ants in the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way* and
PL is a kind of convergence of Aristotle's and Virgil's descriptions, biblical depictions
(*Proverb*. vi, 6; xxx, 25) and the information of the common encyclopaedists of Milton's
day. Milton adds one more features, "magnanimity," to the ant imagery, and makes it the
model of the ideal member of his free commonwealth.

On the other hand, the bee imagery recalls the metaphor of bees in *Defensio Regia*
presented by Salmasius as the symbol of "commonwealth" with harmless kings. Milton
exposes his adversary's incoherence, citing *Apparatus ad Primatum Papae*, where
Salmasius mentions some divines of the Council of Trent who utilize the bees' image as the
symbol of the Popish Supremacy (*CE*, VII, 87). According to the notes of John Carey and
Alastair Fowler, the bee exemplifies civil merits as well as ants.²⁰ In Milton's case,

¹⁹ Eleven years after Arai, David Loewenstein also elucidates this link between the second edition of
The Readie and Easie Way and *PL*. *Milton and the Drama of History* (Cambridge UP, 1990), p.123.

²⁰ *The Poems of John Milton* (Longman, 1968) , p.804.

however, the commonalty of ants presents a striking contrast to the ill-governed gathering of bees, where the "swarming" female bees feed their husbands, and drone them (PL, 7:484-490). Their system of governing is a reversed form of tyranny, where female and male bees are unequal, confronting head-on the ideal community advocated by Milton, where male and female support each other on equal terms. Significantly, Delilah in *Samson Agonistes* proposes this satanic wife-and-husband relation and tempts Samson. The bee imagery in *PL* closely links the image of "Satan and his peers" and the word, "swarm" (1:767, 776) with its sibilant sound, "the hiss of rustling wings" (1:768). In the middle of Book X, Satan, after succeeding in the temptation of our first ancestors, triumphantly gives a victory speech (though illusory) over God in front of his fellow fiends in Hell. Finishing his hyperbolic speech, Satan awaits "Universal applause." Instead, he is forced to exit from the stage of *PL* forever by "A dismal universal *hiss*, the sound of public scorn" (Emphasis mine). Simultaneously, he is metamorphosed into "A monstrous Serpents." Hissing re-echoes hissing. The whole of Hell resounds with the hissing sounds uttered by all kinds of fiendish serpents.²¹ We understand "hiss" in line 573 in two ways: first as the harsh noise of serpents and as in hissing an actor off the stage. Oddly, Le Comte makes no mention of this second meaning in his *A Dictionary of Puns in Milton's English*.(1981)

In the third place, the word "senate" appears a number of times in *Defensio Prima*. However, I will cite only one example to demonstrate the relation between the senate and the magistrates — including kings, because the king is only a nomination when one magistrate governs the community, Milton asserts;

What is certain [...]is that the Consul both, and all other magistrates, were bound to obey the Senate, whenever the Senate and the people decided that the interest of the commonwealth so required.

Milton inserted the following passage, after revising the 1651 folio ²²:

For this point I have abundant authority in Marcus Tullius's oration for Sestius[...] "Our ancestors, when *they had thrown off the power of kings*, created offices to last one year, but in such wise that *over the commonwealth they set the deliberative assembly of the Senate to last forever, that the members were to be elected into this assembly by the people as a whole; and that entrance into that exalted body should stand open to the industry and virtue* [my translation from the Latin, 'virtuti'] of all the citizens. They stationed the Senate as the guardian, protector, and champion of the State. This body's authority it was that they would have the magistrates employ, and would have them be, as it were, servants of *his most weighty assembly* [*gravissimi consilii*] (*CE*, VII, 371-3; emphasis mine.)

²¹ Yuko K. Noro, "The Making of Satan, Milton's Old Enemy," p.44. In this paper, I discuss the link of imageries between Satan & Milton's political adversaries, Salmasius, Alexander More, and Charles I.

²² Dzelzainis, p.187.

Cicero is always Milton's chief mentor in *Defensio Prima*, always encouraging him and showing "the ready and easy way to establish a free commonwealth." The situation where Milton and his countrymen found themselves is strikingly similar to the time when Cicero wrote *Pro Sestio*. The idea of the perpetual senate, elected by the community members, clearly appears here. The elected should be of "industry and virtue," and the assembly is called "the grandest council" [*gravissimi consilii*].

As for the three-layered governmental system, no mention or hint is made in the quotation above. In other place of *Defensio Prima* Milton develops his idea of political society in verbal retort with Salmasius, utilizing three Latin words, "civitas" (county), "communitas" (city), and "municipium" (town), as *The Manner of Parliament* advocates (*CE*, VII, 446-7). They are not used merely as the scales of certain administrative division of regions, but reveal Miltonic concepts of community. All of the concepts connote the idea of a "self-governing" body politic regardless of their size. The most important point for Milton is not the visible grandeur of the communities, but the spirit which creates them.

Salmasius says that one of a king's offices is to develop villages into towns, and towns into cities. (*Regis est, de vico municipium, de eo civitatem facere, ergo illos creat qui constituunt domum inferiorent.*) In response to this, Milton declares, "*etiam agris populus est populus*" (*CE*, VII, 428), meaning that people are people even in the wilderness. Here Milton awakens his audiences obsessed by the outward shaping of communities, reminding them of the original spirit of communities.

It was not yet time for Milton to combine the two different governmental systems—Ciceronian "grandest council" standing perpetual, and the system advocated in *The Manner of Parliament* with the Presbyterian three-layered systems of church government outlined in *The Reason of Church Government*. It took two more years, and more serious situations for Milton to establish the concept of the "Grand Council or the Senate" firmly founded on the multi-layered system.

It is clear that the 1658 revision of *Defensio Prima* directly influenced the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way*, and the creation of *Paradise Lost*, and indirectly did so through the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way*. When there was some probability for Milton to change reality, he was preoccupied with how discourse adapted itself to the political process of real world. However, after he realized all of his expectations for reality had disintegrated, his ideal moved him to revise *The Readie and Easie Way*. He employed all the knowledge and wisdom he acquired through diligent industry to express himself in Latin, his second language. Milton advocates establishing a free commonwealth, "communitas libera" toward his audience repeatedly in various styles and structures of arguments: twice in 1651, in 1658, February and April in 1660, and 1667, in Latin and in English, in oratorical style, in prose, and in epic. His voice has reached us beyond the "Fire Walls" of space and time. Thank you for listening.