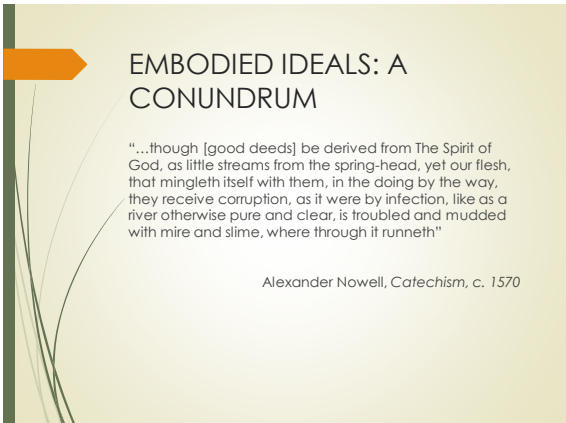


Vision and Moral Action in a Fallen World

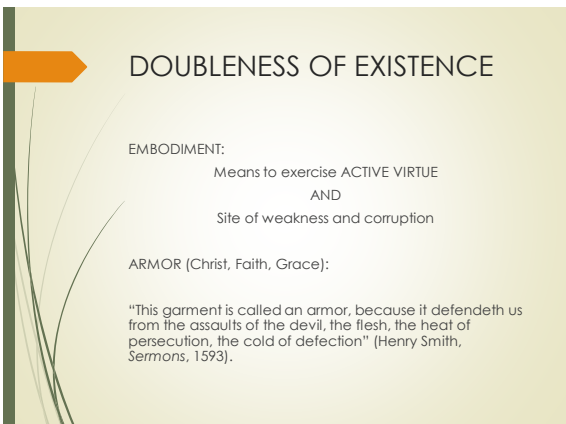
Spenser's Iconoclasm and Critique of Empiricism



EMBODIED IDEALS: A CONUNDRUM

"...though [good deeds] be derived from The Spirit of God, as little streams from the spring-head, yet our flesh, that mingleth itself with them, in the doing by the way, they receive corruption, as it were by infection, like as a river otherwise pure and clear, is troubled and mudded with mire and slime, where through it runneth"

Alexander Nowell, *Catechism*, c. 1570



DOUBLENESS OF EXISTENCE

EMBODIMENT:
Means to exercise ACTIVE VIRTUE
AND
Site of weakness and corruption

ARMOR (Christ, Faith, Grace):

"This garment is called an armor, because it defendeth us from the assaults of the devil, the flesh, the heat of persecution, the cold of defection" (Henry Smith, *Sermons*, 1593).

VISION AND READING:

Q: WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VISION AND VIRTUE?

PATTERN: light/darkness; vision/blindness; confounded senses

- Errorr's cave, blind offspring' Morpheus's city, the Sans Brothers (sons of Aveugle, grandsons of Night), blind Corceca, Duessa's enchanted cloud, the "glooming light" of RC's armor, Una's veil and glorious beauty;
- False Surfaces: False Una, Archimago, Wandering Wood (that offers protection but delivers monsters)

Wandering Wood: "beaten paths"

• Pre Errorr's den: "That path they take, that beaten seemed most bare, / And like to lead the labyrinth about" (1.1.11.3-4)

Vs

• Post Errorr's den: "That path he kept, which beaten was most plaine, / Ne euer would to any by-way bend / ... / The which at last out of the wood them brought" (1.1.28.3-6)

Q: WHAT: What is the significance of the fact that the "beaten path" that first leads only into the Wandering Wood and to Errorr's den now leads out of the wood?

SO WHAT: Why is it that what PROTECTS them also IMPRISONS them?

ILLUSION OF FREEDOM

"Vertue gives her selfe light, through darkness for to wade" (1.1.12.9)

Vs.

"glooming light" of his armor

And

"Halfe furious vnto his foe he came" (1.1.24.3)

And

"Long way he travelled, before he heard of ought./At length they chaunst to meet vpon the way / An aged sire" (1.1.28.9-29.1)

REPETITION: "escapes" only lead INTO prisons b/c of inability to SEE: Archimago's "hermitage"; Lucifera's Castle Pride; Lazy Nymph's bower; Fradubio/Fralissa; Duessa (over and over again)

FALSE SURFACES: Moral decay

- RC is repeatedly infected through the eyes:
- "**The eye of reason was with rage yblent**" (1.2.5.7)

His mistaking of a demon for Una: "And bitter anguish of his guiltie sight. / He could not rest, but did his stout heart eat" (1.2.6.2-3)

Abandonment of Una → the Sons of Aveugle (Blindness): Sansloy (without loyalty), Sansfoy (without faith), Sansjoy (without happiness).

He enters the Tournament of Pride to win the shield of **Faithlessness** and to enslave himself to the dazzling Lucifera.

ACTIVE VIRTUE in a FALLEN WORLD

FALLEN WORLD

- = doubled existence → soul and body
- = "through a glass darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12)
- = inability to use the senses to distinguish true virtue from false

FALSE SURFACES: Dangers of Art

- False Redcrosse (Archimago):

"Full iolly knight he seemed, and well address. / and when he sate vpon his courser free, / *Sainte George* himself ye would have deemed him to be" (1.2.11.9-10)

Q: What is the role of art—including *The Faerie Queene*—in aiding or hindering the reading of the world and the attainment of virtue?

Q: What is the relationship between vision and virtue?

GODLY AND DEMONIC CREATION

Q: In what way is the poet like GOD?

Q: In what way is the poet like ARCHIMAGO?

Q: (How) Does the text recuperate the poet and poetic creation?

STABILIZING FORCES:

"Full illy knight he **seemed**, and well address, / and when he sate vpon his courser free, / *Sainte* George himself **ye would have deemed** him to be" (1.2.11.9-10)

If we were like Una, encountering Archimago on the plain, we would have been fooled. WHY AREN'T WE?

• INTERVENTION OF THE NARRATOR

SPECTACULAR INVISIBILITY OF MONARCHY



And with them eke, O Goddess heauenly bright,

Mirour of grace and Maiestie diuine,

Great Ladie of the greatest Isle, whose light


Like Phoebus lampe throughout the world doth shine,

Shed thy faire beames into my feeble eyne,

And raise my thoughts too humble and too vile,

To think of that true glorious type of thine

(Proem 4.1-7)



What is the relationship between vision and virtue?

- Fallen world CONFOUNDS the senses;
- The senses are ineffective means to comprehend the truth;
- Inability to discern the truth → moral decay;
- The fallen hero must LEARN TO SEE BETTER, but CANNOT DO IT ALONE.

- NECESSITY OF GRACE: Authorial intervention; Arthur; Gloriana
